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Louisiana Sugar Plantations During the Civil War.

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LOUISIANA SUGAR PLANTATIONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In

The Department of History

by

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ABSTRACT

On the eve of the Civil War the cane country was a prosperous land of 1,291 plantations, large and small. The great proprietors formed a community cemented by like interests and necessities. The Mississippi River and allied watercourses made neighbors of cane producers, and New Orleans was the economic and social focus of the region.

Negroes were the base of the social structure, and masters believed that the area's great wealth rested upon slavery. "Without the peculiar institution, the largest sugar plantation in Louisiana would be worthless," said landowners.

The presence of 139,000 blacks in the bayou land exerted a solidifying influence on white society. This bound all levels of the master race in their determination to maintain superiority, doubtless allaying resentment of less-favored whites toward more fortunate brethren.

The Civil War smashed the sugar industry. Less than 200 places operated throughout the conflict, and they at great decrease in output. Emancipation of the slaves resulted in an initial period of inefficient labor. This, coupled with lack of capital, brought a staggering depreciation in post-war land value. Northern speculators

and Southern banks and corporations displaced many of the original owners of the plantations.

Gradually vitality returned to the industry. Negroes became acclimated to the limitations of freedom, and producers adjusted to the new order in labor. Advanced machinery replaced outmoded apparatus. And in 1893 sugar production exceeded that of 1862.

Though the plantation agricultural pattern survived the Civil War, the old planter civilization did not. The wholesale penetration of the industry by outsiders disrupted the community that existed before the struggle. Absentee ownership grew popular, with establishments governed by managers. Emancipation of the slaves cut the sense of patriarchal omnipotence that had characterized ante-bellum masters. Many of the larger places fell into the hands of soulless corporations. And in the years after the conflict the planter ideal waned and gave way to that of the industrial magnate and business entrepreneur. Today three characteristics of the pre-war sugar estates remain: occasional sugarhouses; great, flat canefields; and deteriorating mansions-- ghosts from an exciting past.

CHAPTER I

THE CANE COUNTRY

As ancient Egypt was the gift of the soil bearing Nile, so the Louisiana sugar country was that of the silt laden Mississippi and allied watercourses.¹ Long before levees curbed their annual swellings, numerous rivers plastered lower Louisiana with thick layers of fertile earth. These generous yearly accretions, piled up through the ages, endowed the area with its extraordinary agricultural potential.² The cane country is a geographic and agricultural break reaching into the cotton domain as far north as Rapides Parish, above which the climate prevents sugar cultivation for commercial purposes.

Beginning with Pointe Coupee on the north, a solid bloc of sugar parishes, including West and East Feliciana, West and East Baton Rouge, Iberville, Ascension, St. James, St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Bernard and Plaquemines, borders the Mississippi to its mouth. Eighty miles above Baton Rouge the Red River joins

¹ DeBow's Review, XXX (1861), 361-362.

² Roger W. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana; a Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840-1875 (University, Louisiana, 1939), 4. Cited hereafter as Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle.

the Mississippi. This muddy tributary, flowing down from the northwestern corner of the state, traverses the cane parishes of Rapides and Avoyelles and bounds Pointe Coupee on the north. South of the Red the land drains away from, rather than into, the Mississippi, and at two important points the trunk stream throws off distributaries-- auxiliary channels bearing water to the Gulf. These are: the Atchafalaya River, which leaves the parent stream by way of Old River, a five mile "bridle" linking the Red with the Mississippi; and Bayou Lafourche, which branches from the Mississippi at Donaldsonville, eighty miles above New Orleans. The Atchafalaya separates Pointe Coupee Parish from Avoyelles and St. Landry, flows through St. Martin and St. Mary parishes and into the Gulf. Bayou Lafourche traverses the southwestern tip of Ascension Parish, runs through Assumption and Lafourche parishes and into the Gulf.

Bayou Teche rises in Rapides Parish, makes its way through St. Landry, St. Martin, Iberia and St. Mary parishes and enters the Atchafalaya a short distance above its mouth. Three parishes on the southwestern margin of the sugar land lie entirely without the Mississippi system. Terrebonne is drained into the Gulf by a series of bayous, the chief of which is Bayou Terrebonne; Vermillion and Lafayette are cut by Bayou Vermillion on its way to

the Gulf. True it is that rivers were the chief architects of lower Louisiana.³

In the sugar bowl man was forced to live in harmony with nature. Two factors, arable land and accessible location, dictated a riparian existence. In most places the river beds were actually higher than surrounding territory. Soil of incredible fertility and depth stretched back from the streams for distances varying from a few hundred yards to several miles. Beyond the arable land, swamps filled with jungle-dense canebrake and cypress served as catch basins to carry overflow waters and rainfall into the bayous that drained the countryside.⁴ Settlers quite naturally were drawn into the elongated bands of rich soil between the rivers and the swamps. Location was vital to transportation; rivers carried the commerce of the day. To have one's holdings shut off from the waterfront spelled ruin. Steamboats plied the major rivers and bayous, bringing every plantation within reach of New Orleans, and on the smaller bayous barges bore out produce and brought in supplies.

³ Ibid. See also William H. Harris, Louisiana Products, Resources and Attractions (New Orleans, 1881), II. Cited hereafter as Harris, Louisiana Products.

⁴ Works Project Administration, Louisiana; a Guide to the State (New York, 1941), 9. Cited hereafter as Louisiana Guide.

With the outside world the sugar land enjoyed fortunate communication. Long before the railroad linked the Mississippi Valley directly with eastern markets, ocean steamers traveling by way of the Gulf and the Mississippi or Bayou Teche made Atlantic coastal cities near neighbors of Louisiana sugar estates. New Orleans, situated on the main artery of trade slightly over 100 miles above the Gulf, emerged as the great portal city. There the river steamboats dropped their cargoes for transshipping to ocean vessels. There, on the levee, mushroomed great cotton and sugar markets. There flourished banking houses and commission merchants that pumped life-giving financial plasma into the plantation economy of the lower Mississippi Valley. There planters flocked to purchase Yankee-produced machinery and supplies and to bid for Virginia and Carolina Negroes at Maspero's Slave Exchange or other auction blocks.

Travelers of the mid-nineteenth century were amazed to hear the cane carpeted strips of soil that flanked the Mississippi referred to as the "coast," but in the parlance of the day that was the accepted name of the area. From the mouth of the Red south the great river was lined on either side with sugar plantations in varying degrees of size, magnificence and prosperity. As far south as Baton Rouge occasional cotton plantations defied the sugar

monopoly of the banks, but below the capital city the triumph of cane was complete. Thomas P. May, in his novel, The Earl of Mayfield, described the coast as "an almost continuous succession of sugarhouses, with their tall chimneys, surrounded by fields of green sugar cane, undulating in the blazing sun, like the miniature waves of an emerald sea."⁵ Another observer burst into Walt Whitmanlike verse in attempting to capture an impression of the cane territory as a country of:

Snapping turtles, sugar, sugar-houses, water-snakes,
Molasses, flour, whiskey, tobacco, corn and johnny-cakes.⁶

William Howard Russell, famed English war correspondent, was struck with the dead uniformity of the plantation country, "level as a billiard table," along the Mississippi.⁷ A similar sight greeted the eye of the traveler on the other rivers or bayous of the region.⁸

When in the 1750's French Jesuits sent sugar cane from Santo Domingo to Louisiana, their brethren on the North American mainland failed in their efforts to extract

⁵ Thomas P. May, The Earl of Mayfield (Philadelphia, 1880), 65.

⁶ James R. Creecy in Ulrich B. Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston, 1929), 151.

⁷ William Howard Russell, My Diary North and South (Boston, 1863), 255. Cited hereafter as Russell, Diary.

⁸ Charles C. Nott, Sketches of the War (New York, 1865), 27.

sugar; the juice refused to granulate. Undaunted by initial reverses, other Creoles experimented with the uncooperative juice, but throughout the 1760's results were equally disappointing.⁹ Ultimately most Louisiana citizens became convinced that sugar could not be produced north of the West Indies. By 1790 the only cane grown in the colony was used for making rum of dubious quality which the Creoles called "tafia." But Jean Etienne de Bore, though unsuccessful as an indigo planter, had faith in sugar. Procuring seed cane from two tafia-making Spaniards, and employing a skilled sugar maker imported from the West Indies, this Creole in 1795 undertook once again to granulate the hitherto elusive product. He succeeded.¹⁰

The citizens of Louisiana did not follow de Bore's example with alacrity. The cost of apparatus for turning out the finished article was almost prohibitive and the quantity of seed cane necessary for large scale planting required years of propagation.¹¹ But within a decade Louisiana became part of the United States; the sugar horizon brightened perceptibly. The area lay within the limits of a swift-growing nation that provided an extensive home

⁹ V. Alton Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations (New Orleans, 1924), 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹ Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South, 120.

market for the staple. Undoubtedly Creole planters would have gesticulated in delight had they realized that they had become a part of a people about to be the world's greatest sugar eaters. Time passed. Demand increased with population. And two barriers arose to ward off enemies of the Louisiana sugar planters-- levees against the Mississippi River and tariffs against West Indian competition. In 1817 ribbon cane, a hardier variety that ripened a month earlier than types previously in cultivation, made its appearance. Applications of guano and the plowing under of cane tops enriched the already lavishly fertile soil. Four-mule teams replaced the stolid oxen of earlier days and heavier plows bit deeper into the earth.¹² The sugar culture thrived and there was plenty in the land.

Sugar cane was a tropical plant introduced to the United States by Creole medium. Therefore, people of the sugar area formed an ethnic salient within the Anglo-American population mass. This salient coincided neatly with the agricultural break created by the sugar culture itself within the cotton kingdom. The rich bottom lands of Louisiana beckoned to restless American planters and within a few years after the purchase of the area, cotton was challenging sugar for supremacy in the cane bailiwick.

¹² Ibid., 123. See also Lewis C. Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933), II, 740.

Cotton planters who pushed south of the Red River soon realized that climate was not in favor of the fleecy staple. The typical story of the American planter in lower Louisiana from the 1820's to the 1840's was that of shift from cotton to sugar.¹³ By 1850 in all but the border parishes the transition was complete. The outbreak of the Civil War found 1,291 sugar plantations in twenty-three producing parishes of lower Louisiana. The vast preponderance of the alluvial soil was cultivated in cane. The harvest of the 1861-1862 season was 459,410 hogsheads. Sugar definitely was a going industry.¹⁴

The constitutive cell of the sugar civilization was the plantation. It was a farm where cane grew, a factory where sugar was produced and a home to the proprietor and his family and retinue of employees and slaves. The nature of the sugar making process, to be described in the next chapter, prohibited the use of centrally located custom mills.¹⁵ Every sugar growing land unit possessed a sugar-

¹³ Barnes F. Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 1860-1865; a Study of Life in Lower Louisiana (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Texas, Austin, 1945), 25. Cited hereafter as Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations.

¹⁴ P.A. Champomier, Statement of the Sugar Crop Made in Louisiana in 1861-1862 (New Orleans, 1862), 39. Cited hereafter as Champomier, Statement, 1861-1862. These statements were issued annually and will be cited by date.

¹⁵ Planters feared to depend upon someone else to grind their cane, for if not processed at precisely the right time, the crop ruined.

house. Writers applied the term "plantation" to all such units, regardless of size. The little farm of Gosserand and Samson on False River and the gigantic Houmas Plantation of John Burnside in Ascension Parish represented the extremes. On the eve of the Civil War their respective annual production figures were thirteen and 5,150 hogsheads.¹⁶

The sugar industry was primarily one of large estates. This is quickly apparent to one who scans the yearly output of the plantations. During the opening year of the war, before the conflict had affected Louisiana agriculture, nearly one-fourth of the sugar establishments turned out over 500 hogsheads each. That same season only about one-seventh of them produced less than 100 hogsheads each.¹⁷ Ample reason for the predominance of the great plantation lay in the prohibitive cost of processing machinery, an expense far in advance of that required for other great Southern staples. The average value of 1,000 sugarhouses was \$50,000; many cost over \$100,000.¹⁸ The machinery alone in the plant of Valcour Aime of St. James Parish was worth \$60,000.¹⁹ Sugar was not well suited to

¹⁶ Champonier, Statement, 1861-1862, 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1-38.

¹⁸ Walter Prichard, "The Effects of the Civil War on the Louisiana Sugar Industry," Journal of Southern History, V (1939), 317.

¹⁹ Ulrich B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery; a Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime (New York, 1918), 243. Cited hereafter as Phillips, American Negro Slavery.

small enterprisers.

As one approached by steamboat a typical sugar plantation his eye first fell upon "the house." It was an institution of the Southern scene glorified in literature and lore, and even today venerated despite its dilapidation. Set at discreet distance from the levee, with severity of cracker box line softened by its facade, the great white structure dominated its surroundings and lent an air of elegance to the countryside that travelers unfailingly noted. Within its high-ceilinged rooms and shaded verandas flowed the domestic and social life of the plantation community. Like the manor house of yore it was, and yet remains, the most palpable symbol of the grandeur of the ante-bellum sugar civilization.²⁰ Between levee and house the "billiard table" lawn stretched under live oaks and magnolias, and not infrequently beside the mansion a flower garden luxuriated in splendid color.

The sugarhouse stood at a point calculated to give it greatest convenience for the transport of cane from the fields and hogsheads of sugar to the pier that jutted into the river at the front. Numerous subsidiary buildings--barn, stables, gristmill, icehouse, laundry, dairy, tannery, hospital, and blacksmith shop--cluttered the premises to

²⁰ A journey down the River Road from Baton Rouge to New Orleans gives ample demonstration of this point.

complete the plant. Back of the dwelling house lay the "quarter," that much described phalanx of whitewashed cabins in which the Negroes were housed. And back of the quarter spread the great, flat, rich fields that bore the succulent cane and constituted the real basis for the wealth of the country. Intersected by an elaborate grid of ditches and canals, the land drained surplus water away from the river and into the swamp at the rear, where often a second levee held backwaters at bay.²¹ A steam driven bucket-wheel dipped the water from the plantation and poured it into the swamp.

Because of the Creole background and subsequent American penetration of the sugar culture, a quantitative analysis of sugar planters is here appropriate. Though travel literature abounds in references to "Creole planters" and "American planters," no statement or estimate of their numbers is available. A tabulation of the names of lower Louisiana sugar producers reveals that by the outbreak of the Civil War over half of them were Anglo-American; slightly less than half were Creole; and most of the remainder Irish, Spanish and German.²² Near Opelousas a few

²¹ John M. Mackie, From Cape Cod to Dixie and the Tropics (New York, 1864), 181.

²² Champomier, Statement, 1861-1862, 1-38.

estates belonged to free Negroes and mulattoes.²³

Differences between the two dominant groups, Anglo-American and Creole, were not marked except in religion. Their attitudes and practices in matters of agricultural technique, plantation arrangement, social life, prejudices, conceits and slave management were strikingly similar. For purposes of this investigation they may be treated as a unit.

That the plantation ideal was dominant in lower Louisiana is a thesis that defies statistical and scientific demonstration, but is fortified by impressionistic observations of every traveler and writer who visited the state in pre-war days.²⁴ The newspapers of New Orleans dedicated much of their space and attention to planter activities, thoughts and needs. Sugar growers were the area's chief contact with the outer world in travel literature, fiction, at popular springs and resorts and frequently in politics.²⁵ Often men successful in other

Union Captain's Record of the Civil War (New Haven, 1946), 157. Cited hereafter as De Forest, A Volunteer's Adventures.
Union Captain's Record of the Civil War (New Haven, 1946), 157. Cited hereafter as De Forest, A Volunteer's Adventures.
 See also Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854, with Remarks on Their Economy (New York, 1856), 639. Cited hereafter as Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States.

²⁴ The sugar coast was a favorite objective of all travelers in the state, after they had seen New Orleans.

²⁵ Francis P. Gaines, The Southern Plantation; a Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition (New York, 1924), 145. Cited hereafter as Gaines, The Southern Plantation. ✓

walks of life turned to sugar as their crowning social achievement; the example of Judah P. Benjamin, eminent lawyer and politician, is significant in this respect. Urban communities of the region were ancillary to the rural community. Great New Orleans commission merchants, sometimes wealthier even than the planters whom they accommodated, were nevertheless their agents, and no one questioned who stood higher in the social scale.²⁶ Plantation architecture successfully infiltrated the cities, just as for great social events planter families invaded the homes of their urban friends and relatives.

Life on sugar domains was characterized by variations that caused descriptions and metaphors of observers to differ according to the particular facet presented to each at the moment. Critics of the plantation tradition relegate it to the limbo of myth without pausing to consider that myth may be, and often is, stronger than reality itself. For the myth was not merely a figment of the nostalgic imagination of later generations of Southerners--it germinated in the minds of men contemporary with the civilization that it purported to describe. Novelists of pre-war Louisiana fed on the myth, frequently embellishing

²⁶ Louise Butler, "The Louisiana Planter and His Home," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, X (1927), 362. ✓

it, true enough, for popular consumption.²⁷ But of greater significance is the fact that planters themselves both participated in and believed in the tradition. William Howard Russell's perspicacious observation, "The more one sees of a planter's life the greater is the conviction that its charms come from a particular turn of mind,"²⁸ succinctly stated the point.

That "turn of mind"-- call it the creative myth-- lent to the plantation community a sense of self-sufficiency and power for which no amount of sheer material wealth could have compensated. The suggestion of the feudal or manorial atmosphere of the great estates is irresistible to him who communes with the long dead planters through their diaries and through the travel literature of the period. "One might imagine a lord of the seventeenth century in his hall, but for the black faces of the servants and the strange dishes of tropical origin," recorded Russell of the scene presented at breakfast in the home of ex-Governor Andre Roman.²⁹ And the medieval concept is perfectly delineated by one bred in the plantation tradition

²⁷ The sugar area was the setting for such novels as: Eliza A. Dupuy, The Planter's Daughter (Philadelphia, 1858); and James S. Peacocke, The Creole Orphans (New York, 1856).

²⁸ Russell, Diary, 285.

²⁹ Ibid., 263.

who gives the following composite picture of a wealthy proprietor:

So the Louisiana Planter, physicked, even scarrified by his own physician, his soul saved by his own pastor, near his own dead in his own cemetery (let us hope they were not sent there by the first mentioned), drawn to the door by his own mettled steeds; gazing between naps through the window at his liberal pastures where grazed his blooded stock and beyond that, ten to one with the odds in his favor at the perfect oval of his private race track, and the miles of . . . cane in his vast fields, was indeed "Monarch of all he surveyed."³⁰

Yet another fitting metaphor sprang from Russell's fertile mind. The sugar planter was a "denomadized Arab" who had fixed himself with horses and slaves in a fertile spot; who guarded his women with oriental vigilance and exercised patriarchal domination over his retinue. Russell felt that the inner life of the household was exceptionally charming because it was accentuated by contrast; the visitor was astonished to discover "the graces and accomplishments of womanhood displayed in a scene which had a certain sort of savage rudeness about it . . . and where all kinds of incongruous accidents were visible in the service of the table, in the furniture of the house, . . . and surrounding scenery."³¹

³⁰ Butler, "The Louisiana Planter and His Home," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, X (1927), 357.

³¹ Russell, Diary, 285.

Though linking rivers and bayous lent to the plantation community as a whole a climate of interest perhaps stronger than in other sections of the South, the individual estate was by virtue of rural location isolated. The number of proprietors who owned homes in New Orleans was not sufficient to create an urbanized, absentee planter class. The role of the Mississippi in making it possible for Creoles to reside on the plantations and at the same time enjoy much of the social life of New Orleans was undoubtedly important in keeping the City from becoming another Versailles.³² Isolation beget intensity on the part of the planters, for it forced them to cultivate themselves and their homes rather than looking to the outside for interests and diversions. Consequently, men of a unique pattern emerged, men who were unlike their townbred countrymen.

The plantation was a place where opulence, social cultivation, learning and political savoir-faire blended with the Arcadian attributes of a physical sense of bigness, hospitality, prodigality and love of robust outdoor life. Slavery added further modifications. It infused the planter with a patriarchal sense of responsibility and endowed him with a natural poise in command. The sugar planter lived in an area unusually blessed in its fertility of soil and

³² This was true of Anglo-Americans as well as Creoles, though perhaps not to the same degree.

facility of transport and communication. Therefore, he developed the traits of plantation society to an unexcelled degree. His ease and grace of manner marked him as one on whom "courtesy sat . . . like a well-fitting garment."³³

Home life was in many respects the plantation's most enviable possession. Boasting comforts, often luxuries, that no small, independent farm could hope to achieve, and that only the great merchant princes of New Orleans might rival, the planter's home rolled theater, club, music salon and race course into one and cast over the composite the drapery of domestic sanctity. Plantation women, personified in the mistress, held the key position in home activities. The stereotype of the Southern girl as a languorous creature, fainting at negligible provocation, and sighing away her time strumming a mandolin while Prissy brushed at the flies, was not suited to the spirited temperament of the plantation daughter.

The planter's wife was a busy woman. No attempt will be made to catalog the mistress's responsibilities in governing her extensive atelier. Suffice it to indicate that her duties as wife, mother, hostess, commander and tutor of the legion of household slaves, keeper of accounts and sometimes community nurse marked her as a woman of keen

³³ Gaines, The Southern Plantation, 186.

intelligence and resolute character. Observers might quarrel with every other aspect of the Southern scene, but they were one in substantiating the assertion of Frederick Law Olmsted, a famed Northern traveler of the 1850's, that Southern womanhood was "unexcelled for every quality which commanded respect, admiration, and love."³⁴ The electric shock of the mistress's personality, touching not only the other members of her family but coursing through the Negroes as well, charged the home with its boasted vitality and graciousness.

Sugar planters were the men of affairs of their section. In matters of local government and administration they were reminiscent of the justices of the peace of Tudor England. Wealth and extensive property would have gone far in making these proprietors leaders of men, but to ascribe their leadership to affluence alone is to beg the question. An appraisal of their activities must comprehend the fact that in the South of that day the plantation myth predominated. Personality and the rare genius of common sense were salient in placing the sugar planter ahead of his fellowmen. If class consciousness existed, if the less favored economic groups resented planter leadership, these emotions were concealed from literate observers.

³⁴ Ibid., 178.

Perhaps the identification of interest of the "haves" with the "have nots," the prevalent American optimism that in time all who wished could attain proprietorship of broad acres, allayed that class resentment that disciples of modern schools of history are so wont to read into the story of the past.

Certainly a powerful cementing element in white society was the horde of Negro slaves in the "black belt" parishes of sugar cultivation. Planter, small farmer and townsman shared a common interest in standing superior to the lowly human chattel. And who but the great planter, sometime owner of hundreds of slaves, would be the logical one to command such a situation? Sugar cultivators served as judges, overseers for the poor, district road commissioners, school commissioners, police jurymen, grand jurymen, church vestrymen in Protestant areas and in scores of other positions of local responsibility.³⁵ At a higher level they sat in Congress and in the Governor's chair at Baton Rouge.³⁶ The sugar grower's life was not monopolized in riding over his estate and sipping mint juleps.

The great landowner usually was highly literate and

³⁵ Edwin Adams Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846, as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow (New York, 1943), 65. Cited hereafter as Davis, Plantation Life.

³⁶ Louisiana Governors Alexander Mouton, Andre Roman and Thomas O. Moore were sugar planters, to mention a few high officials who cultivated cane.

articulate. Wealth enabled him to enjoy an education either in some reputable Northern school or at the feet of a capable tutor. Polish was enhanced by music instructors who made rounds of plantation homes, teaching piano, guitar, flute and violin. Frequently dancing masters held weekly sessions at which the youth of the neighborhood assembled.³⁷ Many planters put the finishing touch to their education by making the "grand tour" of Europe.³⁸

Despite apparently excellent opportunity for the creation of a great plantation literature, none emerged. Instead of scholars, the refinements of the liberal arts created gentlemen when blended with other elements of the plantation environment. Erudition never became the goal of the sugar proprietor. Planting remained his objective; learning was merely the catalyst that converted him from a wealthy owner of slaves and land into an accomplished leader of his associates in society, politics and finally battle. The following prescient remark concerning the planters' use of education is applicable to the cane region:

Most of these men manifested extraordinary felicity in the social utilization of such culture as they possessed. The effect of education on the Southern temperament was not to produce the "Dryasdust" but

³⁷ Davis, Plantation Life, 65. See also Gaines, The Southern Plantation, 156.

³⁸ Butler, "The Louisiana Planter and His Home," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, X (1927), 357.

the cultivated gentleman. . . . Society in the more conspicuous expressions of forum, pulpit, or printed page, yes, even conversation in certain circles, was remarkable for a mastery of parts of classical literature; no people could make larger use of such a resource. Much of the power of personality which marked Southern leadership was based on the confidence that comes from wide, if not profound, knowledge and the readiness with which that knowledge could be made available.³⁹

Emphasis on education for the upper stratum of society only was a natural outgrowth of plantation predominance in affairs of the day. Public schools received little sympathy from planter barons who educated their own children and eschewed contributing heavily in taxes for the support of schools for less favored people. The odium of so-called "pauper schools" repelled any proprietors who might otherwise have been content to send their own offspring. Reports of the various parishes to the state superintendent of education in 1859 revealed deterioration in the public schools. It was lamented that many of the citizens most capable of shoring them up had abandoned them to their destruction.⁴⁰ The state superintendent, summarizing the several parish reports, denounced vehemently the "slaveholding aristocracy" who provided out of their bounty for their own, but planted the tree that bore "apples of

³⁹ Gaines, The Southern Plantation, 156.

⁴⁰ Legislative Documents of the State of Louisiana, 1864-1865 (New Orleans, 1865), 160.

Sodom" to the remaining youth of the state. Slavery, according to this official, was the "destroying Upas tree" that blighted Louisiana's public school system.⁴¹

Religion was not a compelling force in the lives of the sugar planters. Perhaps they were able to achieve more nearly their "heaven on earth" than were the commonalty of mankind. The large Creole element of the sugar plantation society was unanimously Catholic. Anglo-Americans were split among the leading orthodox Protestant faiths, with the elder plantation stock from Virginia and the Carolinas tending toward Episcopalianism. At least one sugar grower placed on record sentiments pointedly agnostic. Bennet H. Barrow, owner of both sugar and cotton estates in West Feliciana Parish, sneered that some people thought that a man could not ". . . be honest unless a professor of Religion-- in other words a church goer, Bah!" The death of Barrow's wife in 1848 elicited from him this sorrowful diary entry: "Dreary is my lot, the world is cold and selfish, if I could only Believe we were to meet hereafter would give me great relive [sic]."⁴² Planters attended services at their convenience, made routine contributions to the cause, occasionally played host to the

⁴¹ Ibid., 165-166.

⁴² Davis, Plantation Life, 66.

minister, and withal enjoyed the Church as an excellent form of social expression.

The difficulty of appraising the cane cultivator's true attitude on slavery and the Negro is complicated by the paradox of his talking one way and acting another. Many owners of scores of slaves condemned slavery in the abstract while they outbid their neighbors at the New Orleans slave marts to increase their forces of the sable creatures. Olmsted found both Creole and Anglo-American sugar nabobs who deprecated the institution as uneconomical and morally debasing, but who felt that they were not responsible for it, could do nothing about it and must make the best of it.⁴³ Others followed the traditional Southern line in hailing "the peculiar institution" a boon to white and black alike. To Russell, sugar planters were "anthropo-proprietors" who consigned the Negro to the realm of chattel "because his skull would not hold as many ounces of shot as the white man's."⁴⁴ In fine, the sugar region's attitude on the Negro was characterized by inconsistencies because it superimposed complex ethical problems upon considerations of practical life and economics.

Planters formed a class, but not a sealed social caste. They respected men who were not owners of great

⁴³ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 675-676.

⁴⁴ Russell, Diary, 266.

estates, though the ultimate in society was the plantation life. Professional men and their families of the cities and towns were often guests on rural estates. In turn, they played the role of hosts to plantation families when visits to New Orleans and Baton Rouge were in order; Russell found a Dr. Cettman a frequent visitor at the lavish home of John Burnside.⁴⁵ Plantation diaries are dotted with records of social visits by merchants, doctors and lawyers.

Toward one class of people, however, Olmsted found contempt and resentment in a sugar planter's heart. The traveler's host was harrassed by a small hamlet of "Cajuns" adjacent to his land. Though this landowner employed some as mechanics and masons, his desire was to be rid of the lot and depend entirely upon Negroes for skilled labor. The lackadaisical "Cajuns" worked little, shot, fished and played much, and withal presented a demoralizing spectacle to the impressionable blacks. The Negroes longed to emulate the Frenchmen's life of apparent plenty attended by a minimum of exertion. Further, these small farmers permitted a social intercourse that failed to command deference and respect for whites in general on the part of the slaves. The sugar grower preferred to buy out these communities and be rid of their "lazy vagabond" inhabitants so that the only white men with whom his Negroes would mingle would be

⁴⁵ Ibid.

his own family and the overseer.⁴⁶

Absorbing mid-nineteenth century political issues placed Louisiana sugar proprietors between two fires. As owners of slaves they were impelled to uphold a sectional party that offered greater security to the institution. On the other hand, unlike their slaveholding brethren of South Carolina, great lower Louisiana planters were beholden to the Federal government for a duty of two cents a pound on Cuban sugar-- a duty that was vital to their interests. Whereas cotton sold in a world market in England, sugar fed a local demand only and without protection could not survive. Hope for Federal internal improvements in the form of levee construction was an ally of the tariff issue in swinging sugar planters into the nationalist fold. Consequently, throughout the 1850's the great cane producers were Whig in party and unionist in sentiment. They accepted and approved the finality of the compromise of 1850.⁴⁷

To modern students, certain myths that flourished in the plantation soil are amusing, but one should restrain excessive mirth with the sober appreciation that every civilization and age has its pet theories and fancies. They

⁴⁶ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 674.

⁴⁷ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 158.

make a fascinating chapter in the story of the planter mentality. Mistresses went about their varied arduous chores day by day, yet the tradition of the soft, lethargic woman developed. The same proprietor might in one breath berate the Negro's intelligence as a race, and in the next extol the resourcefulness, integrity and dependability of any number of blacks individually. Belief that the white man could not stand to work in the Louisiana sun persisted in face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary in the form of thousands of Irish laborers who cleared new ground, built levees and cut drainage canals. Ex-Governor Andre Roman informed the incredulous Russell that only a black skin and wool-clad head could survive the vertical rays of the August sun in the canefields.⁴⁸ The attitude of the superiority of rural over urban life was a plantation conceit that has become a subconscious fixture in Southern thought.

Evidence indicates that the ante-bellum sugar planter felt secure and happy, that "God was in his heaven and all was right with the world," subject, of course, to vagaries of the weather and fluctuations of the New Orleans sugar market. Random jottings of a proprietor in 1860 throw light on his exhilarating frame of mind. After

⁴⁸ Russell, Diary, 263.

several days of welcome rain, Judge William T. Palfrey of St. Mary Parish pasted into his plantation diary the following poem:

Millions of tiny drops
Are falling all around;
They're dancing on the house-tops,
They're hiding in the ground.

It seems as if the warbling
Of the birds in all the bowers,
Had gathered into rain drops
And was coming down in showers.⁴⁹

And on November 3, 1860, his sixtieth birthday inspired Palfrey to write:

Alas! those little rogues, the years,
Have fooled me many a day,
Plucked half the locks above my ears,
And turned the rest all grey--
They've left me wrinkles, great and small,
I fear that they have tricked us all.⁵⁰

Any account of sugar plantation life would be incomplete without some of the details of the vigorous social life that lent to this civilization much of its verve and color. Russell has left an account of stimulating and stimulated activities in the course of a day on the Andre Roman domain. Awakened on a sultry June morning by his personal servant, the correspondent found a tub of Mississippi River water, chilled with huge lumps of ice, prepared for a breath-

⁴⁹ William T. Palfrey Plantation Diary, August 6, 1860 (MS. in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

⁵⁰ Ibid., November 3, 1860.

taking bath. An adjunct of the bath was the "ordeal" of a mint julep, "a glassful of brandy, sugar, and peppermint beneath an island of ice-- an obligatory panacea for all the evils of the climate."⁵¹

A repast of black coffee and hot biscuits prepared Russell and his hest for a gallop on splendid horses along the levee and over a few miles of broad canefields. Flushed by two hours of brisk, early morning horsemanship, their appetites whetted to keen edge by a combination of drink and exercise, the riders sat down to a true gourmet's breakfast of "grilled fowl, prawns, eggs and ham, fish from New Orleans, potted salmon from England, preserved meats from France, claret, iced water, coffee and tea, varieties of hominy, mush, and African vegetable preparations."⁵² After the meal came a period of relaxation, newspaper reading and conversation. Not a bad way to commence the day!

The cane cultivator loved good horseflesh. Many of the larger establishments boasted racecourses. Duncan Kenner of St. James Parish possessed a fine stable of racehorses and brood mares under the care of an English horseman. Kenner was a well-known figure at the tracks of New

⁵¹ Russell, Diary, 276.

⁵² Ibid.

Orleans and Charlesten. William and Bennet H. Barrow at one time owned some of the best animals in the country. And William J. Minor of Natchez, Mississippi, and Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana, maintained a herd of blooded racers. Intensely interested in this thrilling sport, these planters subscribed to the American Turf Register and Spirit of the Times and kept trained jockeys in their retinues.⁵³

Plantation social life reached its pinnacle in the magnificent balls that occasionally lit the mansions. All night dancing to the music of orchestras either brought from New Orleans or trained on the place was not out of order. The most distinguished public figures of the state-- authors, artists and politicians-- often made their appearance. Great vases of flowers and stairways garlanded with roses added to the flamboyancy of the occasion. Plantation women from leagues around displayed their finest in lace, silk, jewels and plumes, eliciting superlatives in praise from visitors from other parts. The gentlemen, glowing with the contents of bottles of Scotch or other potables liberally sampled, strove to outshine each other in keen wit and eloquent repartee.⁵⁴ Bennet H. Barrow

⁵³ Ibid., 286. See also New Orleans States, January 25, 1925.

⁵⁴ Butler, "The Louisiana Planter and His Home," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, X (1927), 359.

recorded the abandon and excitement of one of these saturnalia in the following words:

. . . Got a violin player from "Town" . . .
 Let them rest & knap during the day sometimes.
 Playing smut-- at dark began to dance, at 12
 Oclock their consciences made them refuse to
 dance any longer, it being Saturday night, to
 punish them fastened the doors 'till near two
 ok some blew the Lights out others tried to get
 out the windows, any thing, but dance they would'-
 ent retired at 2 ok all nearly broke down, never
 have seen a collection so sudden and so perfectly
 free easy & happy for two days & nights, All re-
 straint thrown aside never enjoyed myself as
 much.⁵⁵

Customarily at midnight the hostess led the way to the dining room for an elaborate "supper." After the meal, music and dancing were resumed until dawn, when a plate of hot gumbo and cup of black coffee fortified the exhausted but happy guests for the long coach ride to their home plantations. On one occasion, it is recorded, a black coachman had enjoyed the evening so thoroughly from the vantage point of the kitchen that he refused to go home, but drove the carriage full tilt around the entertainer's premises, occasionally emitting an inebriated whoop of ecstasy, until eight o'clock in the morning.⁵⁶

An outstanding feature of the social life of the

⁵⁵ Davis, Plantation Life, 53.

⁵⁶ Butler, "The Louisiana Planter and His Home," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, X (1927), 357.

sugar making period was the sugarhouse parties. These were frolics of young people wandering over the big refinery, playing games, dancing, singing, gulping pralines and eating pecans dipped in molasses on the spot.⁵⁷

To the region's major events an impressive list of lesser amusements might be added. Riding to the hounds was popular. Some people favored hunting bear and deer at night in the swamps by the light of pine torches. Fishing parties, followed by fish fries and sometimes invigorated by whiskey, shared with other diversions the planters' playtime.⁵⁸ Plantation folk were not above entering into the spirit of a barbecue.⁵⁹ Christmas was a universal day of feasting and eggnog parties. Weddings offered excellent opportunities for riotous festivities. The "dignified pilgrimages" of planter families to Church on Sundays often entailed social, not spiritual, significance. Even funerals occasionally were attended by invitation only. These notes were written on paper decorated with heavy black bars and perhaps a minute scene of setting sun, leaning tombstone and weeping willows.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid., 361.

⁵⁸ Davis, Plantation Life, 57. Thomas B. Thorpe, Mysteries of the Backwoods; or Sketches of the Southwest (Philadelphia, 1846), 155, gives a vivid account of a Louisiana deer hunt.

⁵⁹ Louisiana Guide, 108.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 109. See also Gaines, The Southern Plantation, 163.

Though the plantations were the stage for most of the planters' social performances, they did not monopolize their activities. New Orleans was ever the entertainment Mecca of lower Louisiana. Many sugar planters kept town houses in the City for the season of opera and balls. Resorts on the Gulf, also, were frequented seasonally by plantation folk for boating, eating sea food and frolicking.⁶¹ Even the journey down the Mississippi from plantation to the City was fraught with pleasure. Gaudy steamboats with glamorous names-- Eclipse, Diana, Sultana and Natchez-- catered to the planter class with bars, ballrooms and sumptuous dinners.⁶² Such a sugar community developed along the Mississippi River coast that a planter family boarding a vessel usually encountered numerous friends with the same destination. Dancing, dining, flirting, tippling, cigar smoking, card playing and gossiping filled their day. Ostentatious proprietors were said to have thrown silver dollars at floating targets with wagers placed on their aim. Legend has it that one particularly flashy enterpriser lit his cigars with ten dollar bills.⁶³

⁶¹ Louisiana Guide, 109.

⁶² New Orleans States, February 1, 1925.

⁶³ Butler, "The Louisiana Planter and His Home," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, X (1927), 362. See George H. Devo1, Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi (New York, 1926) for scores of cases of planters gambling at poker, keno, roulette and faro aboard the Sultana, Natchez, General Quitman and other steamers.

And some planters went north for vacation and relaxation at Virginia springs or in Tennessee mountains.

Cane growers lived full lives. They strove diligently to convert sugar into gold. But they were aware of responsibilities to their slaves and to other citizens of the lower Louisiana community. And the sugar cultivators' labor was tempered with generous portions of play.

CHAPTER II

THE PECULIAR INSTITUTION

Negro slaves formed the laboring force of the plantations and the base of the social pyramid in the black belt parishes. An estimate by Edmund J. Forstall, eminent contemporary student of the sugar industry, placed the number of blacks on sugar plantations before the Civil War at 139,000. Spread evenly over the 1,291 establishments in operation, this would have given to each over 100 slaves.¹ But the Negroes were not thus distributed. The greater places possessed many times that number, while smaller proprietors owned no more than a dozen.

No facet of pre-war Southern life has given rise to more heated controversy than the relation of master to subject race. Evidence is confusing, because each plantation had its own pattern of slavery shaped by the personality and background of the owner. Treatment of workers in the sugar area was probably as humane as elsewhere in the South. But many people believed that blacks on sugar

¹ Henry Latham, Black and White; a Journal of a Three Months' Tour in the United States (London, 1867), 171. Cited hereafter as Latham, Black and White. ✓

estates fared more harshly than on cotton plantations. It was said in the cotton land that the average life of a Negro in the cane country was but seven years. Perhaps owners of slaves in the upper South nurtured the story that "selling down the river" was grim punishment purely as a disciplinary device, just as those of lower Louisiana were wont to threaten their own wards with the menace of shipping to Cuba.

Slavery originated as an economic expedient.

Southern landowners had urgent need for generous supplies of cheap labor to exploit their many acres. Time and human nature converted thralldom into an institution with ties far more binding than mere economic necessity. An elaborate code of white and black interrelationship, often based upon true respect and affection, developed. But bonds between tillers of the soil and the master's family were much more tenuous than those of the household servants. Visitors were impressed with the fact that the slaves who served the master's family at close quarters came to form a part of it. The strongest ties developed between white child and black nurse. A young lady returning to the plantation after a prolonged absence might clasp her old nurse into her arms and kiss her repeatedly. A son of the family bringing home a bride would lead her to the servants' quarter for

introductions.²

Miscegenation between masters and slave women was a frequent practice. Though the true extent of concubinage on sugar plantations is indeterminable, its presence was attested by travelers like Olmsted and Russell, who spotted mulatto children in the slave quarter. And many of the novels dealing with lower Louisiana had an interracial motif.³

The black population of the plantation inhabited a village of cabins, built of brick or wood according to the means and disposition of the owner. They were customarily set at a distance behind the dwelling house. Olmsted's examination of the quarters on Mississippi River estates convinced him that living facilities of the Negroes were quite as good, if not superior, to those of mill operatives in New England.⁴ He felt that clothes and rations were adequate, if not modish or tasty, and was favorably impressed by allowances of tobacco frequently handed out. The sheer economic interest of the owner in his chattels has been pointed up repeatedly as the great factor discouraging ill treatment of the blacks. Undoubtedly to a man who had paid

² T. D. Ozanne, The South As It Is (London, 1863), 76.

³ See, for example, Alice M. Buckner, Towards the Gulf (New York, 1889).

⁴ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 660.

\$1,800 for a Negro that aspect was important. A letter of August 14, 1861, from an overseer to an absentee sugar planter demonstrated clearly the raw financial motive that characterized some masters. This overseer wrote that he feared to put the slaves to work in the rain because if they "got wet or caught cold [they] would be apt to die."⁵ ✓ This statement was charged with about as much compassion as that of a piney woods farmer for the welfare of a good mule. But the stark financial side of planter humaneness has been overstressed. In many cases real concern lay in the owners' hearts for their sable workers.

The plantation was a school where the untrained Negro learned techniques of farming, household routine and other tasks requiring varying degrees of skill and conditioning. There he assimilated elements of the white man's culture, including religion, language, myths, conceits and habits that converted him in the course of two or three generations from an African into an American.

Discipline was by the whip. It is not astonishing that the untutored black should be subjected to corporal punishment for his misdemeanors; at that time all school children sat under the shadow of the master's rod. Sugar planters felt no pangs of conscience in authorizing over-

⁵ P.S. Hamilton to Charles Mathews, August 14, 1861 (MS. in the Charles Mathews and Family Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University). Mathews owned a sugar plantation on Bayou Lafourche.

seers to lay on lashes. But they did hedge these whippings with restrictions designed to prevent wanton brutality. William J. Minor, Terrebonne Parish cane grower, counselled his manager not to break the skin in punishing and never to discipline a slave while in a passion, for fear of overdoing the matter. Further, the action was to be taken in seriousness and "a gentlemanly manner." The culprit should be made to appreciate that he was being chastised for bad conduct; not out of a spirit of revenge, anger nor caprice.⁶ Often overseers were prohibited from using the lash except in the presence of the master in order that these injunctions be carried out. Of course, not all owners were so scrupulous and many cases of barbarity did occur.

Some sugar domains were to the blacks chapels where religion was diffused among them. Proprietors were admonished by friends of the slave system to erect meeting houses for the Negroes. These should be buildings other than the sugarhouses in which they were accustomed to

⁶ William J. Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, rules for overseer written in front of diary (MS. in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University). The Minor diaries from which material has been taken for this work overlap. Therefore, each will be identified by its inclusive dates as follows: Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862; Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865; Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1868; Minor Plantation Diary, 1863; and Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868. All are in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

worship, in order that they might escape a workday atmosphere in offering up to God their praises. Numerous splendid examples were set by planters along the line of providing adequate structures and religious training for the workers.⁷

Some planters felt no need for religious instruction among their chattels. William J. Minor charged his overseer that no preaching of any sort should be permitted on the plantation and that the Negroes not be given passes to go off the premises to attend exhortations.⁸ Olmsted discovered that owners often flouted the state law prohibiting slaves to be worked on Sundays. One conscientious gentleman who refused to put his blacks to labor on the Lord's day, even in the press of the grinding season, influenced his fellow planters to allow the local schoolhouse to be used as a chapel for the slaves of the neighborhood. For a time many proprietors permitted their laborers to rest and attend church on Sunday. But ultimately other planters grew hostile to the arrangement. They voted new trustees for the school and forbade its use as a Negro meeting place.⁹ The prying Russell encountered Negro boys of nine

⁷ DeBow's Review, XXIX (1860), 365. See also Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South, 107.

⁸ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, rules for overseer.

⁹ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 651.

and ten years of age on John Burnside's Ascension Parish estate who had never been in a church nor even heard of Jesus Christ. The overseer explained apologetically that it was not "right to put these things into their heads so young." He asserted that it only disturbed their minds and led them astray. When questioned as to what occurred when slaves died, he pointed to a nearby field where they were buried by their own people, explaining that some of them had "a sort of prayers" as funeral services.¹⁰

An evangelist visiting Plaquemine in 1857 was aghast at the great number of Negroes in the "sugar delta" to whom no church ministered and who never entered a chapel nor heard a sermon. "There," said he, "dense population gathered [In] pursuit of wealth and luxury." The entire area, accused this preacher, fitted the prophet's vision of "dry bones in a valley." The minister found a bright spot in the gloom, however, in the individual blacks who managed to slip off the plantation to hear the gospel. They were converted and plunged back into the canefields to act as the leaven of religion to their fellow laborers.¹¹

On places where the hands were allowed a measure of religious freedom, their rituals ran the gamut of

¹⁰ Russell, Diary, 275.

¹¹ DeBow's Review, XXIX (1860), 367-368.

emotionalism. Slaves of Creole masters were Catholic; those of Anglo-Americans tended to follow the Protestant choice of the individual owner. Episcopal Bishop Leonidas Polk, sugar planter of Lafourche Parish, made his Negroes belong to the Episcopal Church. House servants usually attended services with the family, sitting in a special place in the building. Field hands might be permitted their own exhorter, but more often listened to the sermons of a minister sent among them by the master.¹²

To the blacks, the plantation played a role not far removed from that of the welfare state today. On some great estates Negro infants were born under the care of the plantation doctor and throughout life had access to a hospital located near the quarter. Day nurseries might provide for young children during working hours, while the mother was at her appointed tasks, with specified times set aside for suckling. The usual plan for the slave hospital was that the proprietor engaged a physician on contract to make periodic visits to the plantation. William J. Minor ordered his overseer to give special attention to

¹² Bayside Plantation Journal, September 29, 1861 (Microfilm in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, of original in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library). All subsequent citations of this journal are from the microfilm. Bayside Plantation on Bayou Teche was the property of F. D. Richardson.



sick laborers. He was to see that they had every necessary convenience and to enforce rigidly the doctor's directions "in every particular."¹³ Thus, the individual black was relieved of the responsibility of providing for his offspring. He knew that medical care, as well as food, clothing, shelter and training were gifts of the system; that he might propagate his kind without regard for the consequences.

No feature of slavery has been emphasized by its apologists with more regularity than the old age security of the Negroes. On establishments of conscientious masters, this doubtless was one of its brightest aspects. The old, worn-out Negroes of a place were its "heirleoms." Many owners cherished and pampered them. These ancient workers had laid the foundations of the family's wealth; often their words were heeded as those of chroniclers of the plantation's legends.¹⁴ All large sugar domains possessed a number of these superannuated hangers-on, "dosing into eternity" in the evening of life.¹⁵

Planters acted as judges in settling disputes among the Negroes. Trades, contracts and partnerships appeared

¹³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1868, rules for overseer written in front of diary. See also Russell, Diary, 258; and Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 658.

¹⁴ DeBow's Review, XXIX (1860), 362.

¹⁵ Russell, Diary, 256.

on a simple and informal basis in the slave quarter. Therefore, arbitration and settlement frequently were required. Further, repression of vice necessitated a local police authority. Slave owners frowned upon having valuable "property" placed before courts for disciplinary purposes. For this reason the plantation became "imperium in imperio . . . and the master was armed with Judicial power . . . and was as responsible for its energetic employment, as the mayor of a city or the governor of a State."¹⁶

The planter served as a magistrate, regulating marriage and divorce among his charges. Though friends of slavery besought masters to promote virtuous and fixed attachments between the sexes, to magnify marriage and disallow divorce, owners were prone to overlook promiscuity in the quarter. William J. Minor decreed that one month's notice of intention to marry be given by both parties and he permitted divorce only after a similar warning. His chief deterrent to separation was a requirement that divorced parties might not remarry without agreeing to receive twenty-five lashes "well laid on . . . unless they had agreed to take that number for the privilege of parting."¹⁷

The sugar plantation might be likened to an army in

¹⁶ DeBow's Review, XXIX (1860), 362.

¹⁷ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, rules for overseer.

matters of organization and discipline. The master was the commander; the overseer his subordinate. From the overseer the chain of command descended through first driver and second driver-- the subalterns-- and thence to the common hands who were the lowly privates. Slave routine was fixed. The plantation bell, rung by the first driver, was the quarter's reveille; meals were announced by its tolling; and taps on it at night sent the Negroes to their cabins.

The overseer stood in closest contact with the hands that labored in the canefields. The plantation tradition has subtly transferred responsibility for the more odious phases of slavery from the master's shoulders to those of the so-called "cowhide fraternity" members. That these subordinates were of lower social rank than their employers, and thus less alive to the delicacies of interracial etiquette, is beyond question. But the owners cannot be absolved of accountability for the treatment of their wards. Much of the reviling of these paid assistants in literature is unwarranted.

A specimen contract for the position of overseer on William J. Minor's Southdown Plantation bound the signer to give the whole of his "time, attention & talents to the interest and service of the Said Minor, hereby binding [himself] to obey & be governed by all rules and orders given & laid down by the Said Minor or his agent from time to time." The document further demanded the right of the

owner to discharge the overseer at his pleasure, with the provision that two weeks' salary be paid beyond the date of dismissal. Managers sold their "time, attention and talents" for the sum of fifty dollars a month plus a house for themselves and their families.¹⁸

The position of overseer called for a man of great versatility, patience and common sense. Not only did the second in command discharge discipline and manage the Negroes, but he was held generally responsible for the running of the entire establishment. Two or three times a week he conducted a bed check of the cabins at night after the ringing of the retirement bell. The first driver was required to make a similar inspection every night and deliver a report to the overseer in the field the next morning. To the overseer went blacks asking permission to leave the plantation, and he granted or refused passes at his discretion. Nonresident Negroes coming to visit the plantation applied to him and presented passes from their home managers. In the absence of the owner, the overseer kept the journal, account book and a book of births and deaths of Negroes. Mechanics and other specialists on the place made periodic reports to him regarding the condition

¹⁸ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1868, specimen contract for overseer written in front of diary. Some overseers received considerably more pay than those of Minor. For example, A. Franklin Pugh paid A. B. Sharp of Augustin Plantation on Bayou Lafourche \$2,000 per year. See Lethrop, The Pugh Plantations, 112.

of their machinery and equipment, and he verified these reports by personal investigation.¹⁹

Drivers were Negroes chosen for their intelligence, industry and qualities of leadership. They set the pace in the field, checked the quarters, supervised all types of labor and exercised disciplinary powers over the other slaves. The delegation of such authority to Negroes entailed dangers. This was apparent by the instructions of William J. Minor that his first driver should conduct himself in an exemplary manner so that "there would be no complaints of his being too intimate with the wives and daughters of the other men." If this subaltern should attempt to lord it over the other blacks in an arrogant manner, "burnt brandy should not save him from the most severe punishment."²⁰

Skilled personnel were required to carry on activities subsidiary to growing cane and making sugar. Therefore, every efficient sugar plantation boasted a host of trained specialists. Russell manifested surprise at finding Negro carpenters and masons building a new sugarhouse on the Burnside place.²¹ But a closer investigation would

¹⁹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1868, rules for overseer.

²⁰ Ibid., duties of first driver written in front of diary.

²¹ Russell, Diary, 273.

have revealed that on large estates blacks were carefully instructed in sugar making, cobbling, brickmaking, and wagonmaking. The retinue of skilled laborers was rounded out by blacksmiths, coopers, mechanics, engineers, tanners, millers, ox drivers and mule drivers.²² Though slaves performed all of these services on most establishments, white men were engaged on others. During the 1850's, as sugar making apparatus advanced in complexity, the demand for white sugar makers measurably increased.²³

On the eve of the Civil War slave prices vaulted to \$1,800 each for prime field hands. The anomaly arose of hiring Irish laborers to dig ditches and canals, level forests and clear waste lands. Planters informed puzzled questioners that such chores were too hazardous to be performed by valuable chattels, and that it was less expensive in the long run to bring in paid whites. John Burnside's overseer, though concerned at the high price of free labor, hastened to point out, "It was much better to have Irish to do it, who cost nothing to the planter, if they died, than to use up good field-hands in such severe employment."²⁴

²² Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 55. The Magnolia Plantation Journal, July 14, 1860 (Microfilm borrowed from the University of North Carolina Library of original in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library) contains a detailed set of instructions to the plantation tanner.

²³ Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 55.

²⁴ Russell, Diary, 273.

On Burnside's Orange Grove Plantation were rude sheds littered with fragments of whiskey bottles where gangs of contract laborers had lived. Inquiry revealed that one John Leghlin of Donaldsonville was a contractor who regimented his fellow Irishmen into this killing labor by judicious use of alcohol. "Leghlin does not give them half the rations we give our negroes, but he can always manage them with whiskey," explained the overseer. This astute contractor plied the reistering Irishmen with generous quantities of an intoxicant called "forty-rod;" allowed them to carry on a free for all fight during the night; and the next morning wangled their signatures on a contract to cerve on the plantations where the job was too backbreaking for Negroes.²⁵ "Heaven knows," mused Russell, "how many poor Hibernians have been consumed and buried in these Louisiana swamps, leaving their earnings to the dramshopkeeper and the contractor, and the results of their toil to the planter."²⁶

Besides demanding free labor in the more dangerous tasks, the planter often found it necessary to hire additional hands during the grinding season. The manufacturing process on sugar plantations required more labor than the agricultural. Therefore, regular slave forces were able to

²⁵ Ibid., 278.

²⁶ Ibid., 273.

grow more cane than they could work at the sugarhouses, and proprietors frequently supplemented their labor supply with "Cajun" farmers paid by the day.²⁷

Slavery theoretically provided the blacks with subsistence. They received in return for their services all the essentials of life. Actually, planters found it to their best interest to bestow gifts at intervals as inducement to superior performance. The custom on numerous plantations was that distributions of money were made at Christmas to each industrious family.²⁸ Other bonuses might be granted to individual slaves from time to time to let them know that the master appreciated their efforts.

Of infinitely more substantial benefit to the Negroes, however, were individual garden plots in which each family might cultivate vegetables to supplement the meal, bacon and molasses of the customary ration. Superior wood and cane cutters often received money for extra work. Frequently masters permitted their slaves to hunt, fish, collect driftwood, pick moss and hire themselves out in order to make a little spending money. And Negro ingenuity,

²⁷ Moody, Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations, 59.

²⁸ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 660.

coupled with sublime disregard for the sanctity of property, added to his income. Petty traders thronged the Mississippi in boats, coasting in to shore under cover of darkness and trafficking with the blacks. Pipes and other machinery from the sugarhouses gave the laborers excellent barter material. The planters complained bitterly that these "chicken thief" merchants could induce the Negroes to steal anything from the plantation in exchange for a drink or some bauble.²⁹

Slaves enjoyed amusements consistent with their low place in the social pyramid. Usually Sundays were days of rest, except in the grinding season. On plantations where religion was encouraged, worship services offered the blacks an avenue of social expression.³⁰ Unless conditions in the field and sugarhouse made grinding imperative, Christmas was a day of festivity for chattel as well as master. Bay-side Plantation on Bayou Teche was typical. On Christmas Day of 1860, while the owner, F. D. Richardson, feasted in the mansion, his Negroes sank their teeth into roast pork that he had contributed to enliven their holiday.³¹

The barbecue was considered a special treat for slaves. Fourth of July barbecues were among the merriest

²⁹ Ibid., 674-675.

³⁰ Bayside Plantation Journal, May 27, 1860.

³¹ Ibid., December 25, 1860.

scenes ever witnessed on plantations. "Whining fanatic" abolitionists were invited to visit one of them in order to acquaint themselves with the true nature of the South's institution. These open air feasts were characterized by great quantities of tasty food and keen appetites. "Smoking viands, . . . piles of loafbread, bowls of Irish potatoes, dishes of tomato sauce and tubs of savory hash" sat in the shade awaiting welcoming mouths. As the husky blacks proceeded to the task at hand they cracked "rough and capital jokes . . . on the fight and victory over General Green [the grass]."32

The highlight of the social season for the slaves was the sugarhouse dinner and ball at the end of the grinding period. Frequently invigorated with rations of whiskey, the excitable blacks cavorted about the wide sugarhouse floor in a "double shuffle of thumping ecstasy."33 These diversions, sprinkled at intervals among periods of gruelling toil, were water in the desert to the fun loving Negroes and did much to buoy up their spirits.

Sugar agriculture was a cycle of planting, hoeing, cutting and hauling to the sugarhouse for grinding. In January seed cane saved from the previous season's yield was planted in deep furrows laid open by double mouldboard

32 DeBow's Review, XXIX (1860), 360.

33 Russell, Diary, 256.

plows. For this operation the field force was organized into three gangs. One brought the cane by armfuls from the carts and dropped it by the furrows; the second placed it in the ground with two or three stalks parallel; and the third covered it with a layer of soil with crude, broad-bladed hoes. When the young cane made its appearance above ground the earth was carefully plowed away from the shoots. Throughout the spring and summer hoe gangs were busy scraping the grass. By July the cane stood five or six feet high. The wide furrows between beds were kept clean of grass so that they might serve as ditches to drain surplus rainwater into the canals designed to carry it into the swamp.

Planters were slaves of the weather in harvesting, because the Louisiana growing season was too short for the cane to ripen thoroughly. Cultivators were torn between the desire to delay, in order to get a greater sugar content, and the urge to cut and grind before freezing weather ruined the crop.

October was the usual month to commence cutting. Cutting gangs, armed with knives, advanced into the field to fell the tall cane. The first cane cut-- on the more scientifically managed places the finest-- was "mattressed" as seed for the next season. This process consisted of laying the cane unstripped of leaves in "mats" and covering

it over with earth to protect it from the climate. The gangs were then ready to cut for the mill. This was a routine of four strokes of the blade to each cane. Two sweeping vertical blows stripped it of leaves; a horizontal movement cut it at the ground; and a final chop took off the top. Mule carts transported it to the sugarhouse.

As long as the weather was favorable, cutting, hauling and sugar making gangs worked simultaneously. The first frost drove the Negroes from the sugarhouse into the field to assist the cutting and hauling gangs in "windrowing" the threatened cane. This was the hurried cutting of the remainder of the crop so that it might be laid unstripped in the furrows, where it had additional protection against the elements until it could be ground. When the cane was windrowed, grinding went on apace day and night in a herculean effort to save as much of the harvest as possible.³⁴

The sugarhouse was the industrial nerve center of the plantation. There the juice was ground from the cane between great iron, steam driven rollers. Application of heat and limewater to the raw juice brought impurities to the top in a scum which was easily dipped off with long-handled ladles. The purified juice then passed through an

³⁴ Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South, 121. See also Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 666.

array of open kettles, each with a Creole name such as the "grande," the "flambeau," the "sirop" and the "batterie," until it boiled to crystallization. Then it was drawn off to cool. Once again impurities which had risen to the top were dipped off, and the resulting mother liquid went into great hogsheads which were stored in a spacious room of the sugarhouse. There the liquid drained in the form of molasses into great vats, called cisterns. After the hogsheads had drained sufficiently they were refilled and allowed to drain again. This process was repeated until the hogsheads were full of sugar. Molasses was scooped out of the cisterns and barreled for shipment, usually in the amount of about seventy gallons to the hogshead of sugar.

During the 1840's and 1850's the larger plantations installed machinery designed to improve sugar quality and increase processing efficiency. Vacuum pans-- closed retorts for steam condensing-- permitted boiling at lower temperature, thus reducing the amount of molasses by-product and bringing forth a superior grade of sugar. Methods were discovered whereby the "bagasse"-- pulp of the cane after the juice had been pressed out-- could be used as fuel. This brought a great saving in wood cutting on many plantations and in coal buying on others. A further economy in fuel resulted from adoption of the "Rillieux" invention for using steam from the syrup in heating the

kettles. Quality was enhanced by the introduction of "Dumont" filters in which the syrup passed through bone-black, which strained out any remaining impurities and bleached the liquid. And a few of the most elaborate sugarhouses boasted "centrifugals." These were great steam driven spinners in which the sugar crystallized.³⁵

Grinding brought to the slaves the most driving labor of the year. Olmsted was assured by his host that during the previous season every able-bodied man, woman and child on his plantation, including the overseer and himself, had worked fully eighteen hours a day. From October until January sugar making was not broken, and fires under the boiler never went out. The hands worked in shifts, with three-quarters of them constantly at their stations. During the entire period no man got more than six hours of rest out of twenty-four.³⁶

The journal of Bayside Plantation on the Teche reveals a normal master's carefully planned routine and allocation of labor throughout the sugar making season. Early October of 1860 found the plantation slaves mattrassing

³⁵ Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, II, 741-742. See also Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 242; Ozanne, The South As It Is, 86; and Lawrence Van Alstyne, Diary of an Enlisted Man (New Haven, 1910), 153-154. The inventor of the Millieux process was a Louisiana Negro.

³⁶ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 668.

seed cane, making barrels and preparing hogsheads to receive the sugar. When the cane was matted all workers were brought to the sugarhouse to ready the machinery for grinding. Hauling commenced on October 11. From that time forward the hands were thrown into field or sugarhouse, as the situation demanded, so as to maintain the proper balance between cutting and grinding.³⁷

Rigorous as was the toil of the harvest, the blacks apparently enjoyed that season more than any other. The master shored up their morale with generous portions of food, whiskey, tobacco and coffee, and the entire process assumed the atmosphere of a frolic.³⁸

Though planting cane and making sugar were the primary chores of the plantation, they by no means exhausted its tasks. Contrary to the popular idea that sugar was grown to the exclusion of all maintenance crops, planters of lower Louisiana strove to attain self-sufficiency for their estates. The representative plantation raised corn, hay, peas, beans, Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes to feed the master's entourage. Besides these subsistence crops, every establishment had its herds of beef and milch

³⁷ Bayside Plantation Journal, October 2 to December 5, 1860, passim.

³⁸ Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 668.

cattle, swine, oxen, mules, horses and sheep.³⁹

The Negroes devoted most of their time, other than that in cane planting and harvesting, to the care of these subsidiary products. And even here their work was not done. Wood for the boiler had to be cut from the swamp at the rear of the fields or fished from the river in the form of driftwood. Constant repairs on the levee were required. And the slaves bore the brunt of keeping the plantation roads in condition. This was a chore that became especially onerous during the grinding season, when ever use and inclement weather frequently converted these cart trails into quagmires.⁴⁰

Cane plantations presented a coordination of agriculture and manufacture. High priced machinery and

³⁹ Unpublished United States Census Returns, 1860, Schedule IV, Agriculture (Microfilm in the Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, of original in the Duke University Library). This statement is based upon an examination of the crops of over 300 plantations. William Littlejohn's place in Assumption Parish was a typical cane estate in its crop diversification. In 1860, on 1,000 acres of cultivated land, Littlejohn produced: 220 hogsheads of sugar, 13,600 barrels of molasses, 100 bushels of peas and beans, twenty-five bushels of Irish potatoes, 500 bushels of sweet potatoes, 5,000 bushels of corn and twenty tons of hay. He owned eight horses, fifty mules, twenty-four milch cows, four work oxen, thirty-two beef cattle, sixty sheep and thirty hogs.

⁴⁰ Bayside Plantation Journal, September 2-24, 1860, passim.

Negroes were essentials in the production of sugar. Overseers bore the responsibility of keeping personnel on schedule and apparatus in condition. And proprietors strove to harmonize all elements of their establishments in order to achieve as full a measure of efficiency as possible.

CHAPTER III

SECESSION AND FARAWAY WAR

The secession crisis resulted in a division of opinion between Louisiana sugar planters; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it brought into full view the schism that already existed. Throughout the 1850's the great lower Mississippi Valley proprietors had clung to a nationalist political philosophy. So deeply grounded was this Whig sentiment that many sugar growers never fully accepted secession. The Charleston Convention of 1860 had reflected clearly this divergence of political thought. When the Louisiana delegation indignantly followed the belter, William L. Yancey, from the hall, two of its members remained seated. It was significant that the leader of the seceding Louisiana delegation, ex-Governor Alexander Mouton, was a sugar grower; nor was it of less import that James McHatton, one of the two men who refused to leave, was a proprietor of cane-fields. A scene occurred that presented in minuscule the unionist-secessionist conflict within the mind of the sugar land. This was the "Creole Hotspur," Mouton, denouncing

with defiant finger the adamant McHatton.¹

The presidential election of 1860 sharpened the relief of the clash of ideas between planters. The political situation along Bayou Lafourche was an excellent example of this discord. The sugar-dominated parishes of Ascension, Assumption and Lafourche went for Stephen A. Douglas--a clear unionist mandate. On the other hand, the Pughs-- among the greatest of the Lafourche planters-- were zealous Breckinridge supporters. In fact, A. Franklin and W. W. Pugh strove to defeat Douglas by conducting political barbecues throughout the disaffected parishes.² Six lower sugar parishes were for Bell; this also bespoke unmistakable unionist sentiment. The northern and western cane parishes voted for Breckinridge, who carried the state.³

Presidential election day in November of 1860 did not cause an immediate convulsion in the cane country. The Palfrey Plantation Diary contains this laconic entry:
 "Presidential Election day . . . returned from N. O.

¹ Eliza McHatton Ripley, From Flag to Flag; a Woman's Adventures and Experiences in the South During the War, in Mexico, and in Cuba (New York, 1889), 47. Cited hereafter as Ripley, Flag to Flag. ✓

² A. Franklin Pugh Plantation Diary, October 28, 1860 (MS. in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University). ✓

³ Willie Malvin Caskey, Secession and Restoration of Louisiana (University, Louisiana, 1938), 14.

having procured 2 new boilers from Leeds & c.-- found the mill & Kettles still going. . . ."⁴

The period from the election of Lincoln till the end of 1860 was the incubation time of secession fever. Louisiana sugar planters watched with grim intensity the dissolution by South Carolina of her ties with the "Union . . . subsisting . . . under the name of the 'United States of America.'" Taut as a fiddle string, A. Franklin Pugh quadrupled his cigar smoking as he awaited the withdrawal of other states.⁵

The Louisiana legislature set January 23, 1861, as the date for the meeting of the convention to settle the secession question for the state. Sugar cultivators commenced to marshal the forces of secession. On December 27 Effingham Lawrence addressed in "forcible, eloquent and impressive language" a Plaquemines Parish meeting of the "friends of Southern Rights and separate State Secession." Lawrence dwelt upon the long forbearance of the South under Northern aggression. He said that it was the right and duty of the South to "stand to her honor;" that she should seek that equality with which she came into the Union, but of which she had been deprived. "The duty of Louisiana and

⁴ Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 6, 1860.

⁵ Pugh Plantation Diary, January 5, 1861.

every citizen thereof," cried Lawrence, "was to stand and defend Louisiana through fire and blood if necessary."⁶

The Pughs, though surrounded by conservatives, plunged with vigor into the task of sending secessionists to the convention.⁷ By January 8 it had become apparent that the state would secede. On that day A. Franklin Pugh wrote exultingly in his diary:

The news is very good from the City. 20 out of 25 Secessionists elected--enough to carry the State out by the first of March, if not before at which I am greatly rejoiced. Well done Mobilians, . . . well done Louisiana; down with the old confederation for the South, let the Yankees take care of themselves and ever after this hold their peace about the affairs of Louisiana.⁸

Four days later Pugh soberly commented on the seizure of Federal forts in Louisiana by state troops: "So far, very good, but what next? We must keep what is left of Uncle Sam at arm's length or he may do us some harm." Pugh thought that the seizures had rendered secession inevitable; that "they could not retrace their steps." And he was supremely happy over the outlook.⁹

⁶ New Orleans Daily Crescent, December 27, 1860.

⁷ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 76-77. See May, The Earl of Mayfield, for a story that develops the theme of Louisiana sugar planters who remained at heart loyal to the Union.

⁸ Pugh Plantation Diary, January 8, 1861.

⁹ Ibid., January 12, 1861.

Louisiana sugar planters led the movement which took the state out of the Union.¹⁰ Thirteen of the cane parishes were represented in the secession convention in January of 1861 by immediate secessionists. Among this number were the great sugar parishes of Iberville, St. Mary, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Martin and St. Charles. Nine sugar growing parishes sent cooperationist delegates. Many of these advocated secession; the question with them was one of method. Some called for further attempts at reconciliation-- such as constitutional amendments guaranteeing slavery. In the event these efforts failed, the Southern states should withdraw in a bloc. Most of the cooperationists, however, would have no more overtures to the Federal government. They desired the immediate election of delegates by all slaveholding states; these delegates to meet in convention and form a Union.¹¹ A. Franklin Fugh and his brother-in-law, R. C. Martin, were among this cooperationist element.¹²

The convention was dominated by sugar growers.

¹⁰ James K. Greer, "Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIII (1930), 643; and Lane C. Kendall, "The Interregnum in Louisiana in 1861," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVI (1933), 395-396.

¹¹ Kendall, "The Interregnum in Louisiana in 1861," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVI (1933), 395.

¹² Lathrop, The Fugh Plantations, 80.

Effingham Lawrence of Plaquemines Parish called the meeting to order. John Moore, sugar producer and judge from St. Martin Parish, nominated ex-Governor Alexander Mouton for president; and the convention immediately elected this sugar planting "Creole Hotspur" of the ill-fated Charleston Convention. The determination of the group was expressed in President Mouton's opening address. "We are engaged," said he, "in an important cause, the cause of a brave, loyal and enlightened people asserting their rights." "I trust," Mouton continued, "that, with the help of God, [we] will be able to carry them out."¹³

The convention voted Louisiana out of the Union without serious opposition. Sugar Planter John Moore introduced the ordinance of secession.¹⁴ Two cooperationist attempts to stay immediate, separate Louisiana secession failed, and after these efforts were voted down most of the cooperationists swung into line and went for immediate secession. The withdrawing ordinance passed by the overwhelming majority of 113 to seventeen.¹⁵

The men who took the fatal step of severing the state's ties with the Union were great slaveowners.

¹³ New Orleans Daily Crescent, January 29, 1861.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ New Orleans Weekly Delta, January 19, 1861.

Doubtless their desire to protect the "peculiar institution" was the motivating factor behind their action. The New Orleans Daily True Delta declared that the Louisiana secessionist delegates collectively owned more Negroes than any other political convention of equal number in the entire South. A. Franklin Pugh, possessor of scores of slaves, solemnly penned this panegyric to those who had voted the state out of the Union, "All honor to the men, who had the courage to take this first step, to prosperity which will be as permanent as earthly things may be."¹⁶

Mrs. Eliza McHatton and her household at Arlington Plantation near Baton Rouge reflected the joy of the cane land over the news of the formation of the Confederacy. They decided to make a Confederate flag. In festive mood they gathered red flannel, white cotton cloth and blue denim; and a colorful composite of these became the stars and bars. Even the Negroes were enthusiastic; they contributed a pole. The improvised flag was then run up jauntily on its standard on the levee. The entire household "danced round and round, singing and shouting in exuberance of spirit." A small stern-wheel steamboat puffed up the river and its whistle and bell saluted the waving colors. Passengers and crew cheered and waved hats and newspapers till the craft wheezed out of sight.¹⁷

¹⁶ Pugh Plantation Diary, January 27, 1861.

¹⁷ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 11-12.

The sands were running out for a South at peace, and cane planters were in the vanguard of militant Southerners. On February 7, 1861, Richard Taylor-- sugar planter, son of a President of the United States and future Confederate commander in Louisiana-- introduced the motion to create a state military organization.¹⁸ In April the Pughs distributed handbills calling a mass meeting of Bayou Lafourche folk "for the purpose of arousing a military spirit among the people." At the meeting on April 20 Richard Taylor delivered a fiery discourse against the aggressor North.¹⁹

Mrs. Caroline E. Merrick captured the spirit of the hour in her description of the times. She heard planters and others around her assert that there was no other course but to fight; that no other door was open. They fully believed that their position as freemen-- "their all"-- was at stake. The prevailing sentiment was that without slavery the finest sugar plantation in the state would be worthless. Appeal was made to history in the argument: "The British thought our forefathers were wrong. We have ten times the cause for revolt which they had." The election of a "Black Republican" to the presidency was

¹⁸ New Orleans Daily Crescent, February 7, 1861.

¹⁹ Pugh Plantation Diary, April 18, 1861.

held to be an invasion of the constitutional rights of the South. "We shall and must succeed," was the resolute cry of Louisiana planters.²⁰

Overseer J. A. Randall of Magnolia Plantation below New Orleans undoubtedly uttered on June 13, 1861, the ultimate in venom against the Yankees when he prayed:

This Day is set a part by presedent Jefferson Davis for fasting and praying owing to the Deplorable condishien ower Southern country is In My prayer Sincerely to God is that Every Black Republican in the Hole combined wherl Either man women o chile that is opposed to negro slavery as it existed in the Southern confederacy Shal be trubled with pestilences & calamitys of all kinds & drag out the Balance of there existence in misry & degradation with Scarsely food & rayment enoughf to keep sole & body to geather and O God I pray the to Direct a bullet or a bayonet to pierce the hart of every northern Soldier that invades southern Soil & after the Body has Rendered up its Traterish Sole gave it a trators reward a Birth in the Lake of fires & Brimstone My honest convick-sion is that Every man women & chile that has gave aid to the abelishionist are fit Subjects for Hell I all so ask the to aide the Sothern confederacy in mantaining ower rites & establishing the confederate Government Believing in this case the prares from the wicked will prevailith much--Amen--²¹

Russell found the faith of the sugar planters in the Southern cause "indemitable." Their theory was that with trusted slaves to grow corn, sugar and cotton the Confederacy would be unassailable; that Southern youth would perform

²⁰ Caroline E. Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land; a Southern Matron's Memories (New York, 1901), 28. Cited hereafter as Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land.

²¹ Magnolia Plantation Diary, June 13, 1861.

brilliant feats on the battlefield. "With France and England to pour gold into their lap with which to purchase all they need in the contest, they believe they can beat all the powers of the Northern world in arms," wrote Russell. And the cane planters, also, chanted the refrain, "Cotton is King." The English correspondent felt that illimitable fields tilled by legions of Negroes opened upon the Louisiana planters' sight. "They behold the empires of Europe," said he, "with their manufactures, their industry, and their wealth, prostrate at the base of their throne, crying out, 'Cotton! More cotton! That is all we ask!'"²²

Edmund J. Forstall, a sugar planter who devoted much time to the study of economic affairs, advanced an interesting thesis regarding the South's financial potential. He maintained that the Confederacy could raise an enormous revenue with which to fight the war, by a small direct tax. On the other hand, the people of the North, deprived of Southern agricultural products, would refuse to pay taxes; this would cause the accumulation of tremendous debts by the Union and inevitably lead to its financial ruin.²³

²² Russell, Diary, 260.

²³ Ibid.

During the early months of the war the sugar planters' "indemitable faith" in the military prowess of the South was matched by their high regard for the abilities of President Jefferson Davis. A question invariably asked Russell was: "Have you seen our President, sir? don't you think him a very able man?" The reporter was of the opinion that such unanimity in the estimate of the chief executive's character would prove of incalculable value in the impending struggle.²⁴ Could he but have known of the great change in public opinion that was in the offing!

Dissenting voices occasionally were heard. Mrs. McHatton recorded that the planters were oblivious to the ominous clouds that hovered over them. Her colorful prose gives insight into the mind of the cane country in those fatal days of 1861:

Prophets arose in our midst, with vigorous tongue and powerful eloquence lifting the veil and giving us glimpses of the fiery sword suspended over our heads; but the pictures revealed were like pages in history, in which we had no part nor lot, so hard was it for people who had for generations walked the flowery paths of peace, to realize war and all that that terrible word imports.²⁵

These prophets were drowned out in the clamor for action.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 10.

With secession accomplished, and war with the North rapidly becoming a certainty, bayou country planters threw their energy and money into the effort to raise troops. In April A. Franklin Pugh attended a meeting of the police jury of Assumption Parish "convened to take into consideration the state of the country." He felt that everything went well at the meeting. "Handsome appropriations" were granted to volunteer companies forming in the parish; and Pugh made a donation of \$250 to the military.²⁶

Parish police juries, dominated by sugar planters, hastened to vote funds for military purposes. In Iberville Parish \$750 went to one unit; such outfits as the Bayou Goula Guards, Iberville Grays, Home Sentinels and Gros Tete Fencibles received \$500 each.²⁷ The Jefferson Parish police jury voted \$1,000 to an elite cavalry unit known as the Jefferson Rangers.²⁸ In St. Charles Parish \$10,000 were appropriated to finance military companies and families of volunteers. This action was taken, said the president,

²⁶ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 91.

²⁷ Historical Records Survey, Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana; Number 24, Iberville Parish (Plaquemine), Series I, Police Jury Minutes (University, Louisiana, April, 1940-March, 1942), I, April 9, 1861. Cited hereafter as Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes.

²⁸ Historical Records Survey, Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana; Number 26, Jefferson Parish (Gretna), Series I, Police Jury Minutes (University, Louisiana, June, 1939-February, 1941), III, December 1, 1860. Cited hereafter as Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes.

because a citizen of the parish was "straining every nerve to raise a Company for the defense of our homes and fire-sides."²⁹

On April 23, 1861, the town of Franklin on Bayou Teche witnessed the mustering in of volunteers to a local company. Officers of the outfit were elected, and the occasion gave opportunity for a number of distinguished citizens to address the crowd. Among the orators was Judge William T. Palfrey, Teche sugar planter. These speakers "seemed to vie with each other who would be first in the race in tender of personal services and money to defend the flag of the Confederate States;" and it was recorded that their "patriotism and gallantry had enshrined them in the heart of St. Mary [Parish]." Following this burst of eloquence, the police jury found it easy to appropriate \$20,000 for the defense of parish and state.³⁰

Many planters followed the example of A. Franklin Pugh in making personal contributions to the cause. John Hampden Randolph, owner of Nottaway Plantation in Iberville Parish, subscribed \$500 to a \$1,250,000 loan floated for

²⁹ St. Charles Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 24, 1861 (Transcription in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, of original in the St. Charles Parish courthouse, Hahnville, Louisiana). All subsequent citations are from the transcription.

³⁰ New Orleans Daily Crescent, April 23, 1861.

the defense of New Orleans and granted \$100 to the Bayou Goula Guards and varying amounts to other military organizations.³¹ Planters sometimes made small donations for general relief of the needy in the emergency. On September 1 the Magnolia Plantation overseer scrawled into his journal, "Shipt two Bbls of Mollases and 282 Punkins to the Charity Markit for the Benefit of the Pore Per Str Empire Parish."³²

Home companies for local defense were popular among sugar producers. These military expedients permitted proprietors to fulfill their desires to serve their country, and at the same time remain at home to attend plantation affairs. Thus, these local units were ideally suited to both the martial and domestic needs of the bayou area citizens. A. Franklin Pugh was active in the weekly drills of a home company in Assumption Parish;³³ and W. W. Pugh, a regimental commander, frequently used his Woodlawn Plantation pasture as a drill field.³⁴

Sugar planting military commanders had their vexations. Colonel W. W. Pugh met with what he considered

³¹ Paul E. Postell, John Hampden Randolph, a Southern Planter (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1936), 118. Cited hereafter as Postell, John Hampden Randolph.

³² Magnolia Plantation Journal, September 1, 1861.

³³ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 101.

³⁴ Ibid., 123.

exasperating inefficiency in handling his regiment. He recruited men in Napoleonville without arms, as ordered by state militia headquarters, but no sooner had he filled the regiment than state authorities informed him that the soldiers must have their own arms to be of any use. Indignantly Pugh wrote to his superior officer and kinsman, Brigadier General R. C. Martin:

This situation has produced great demoralization among the militia and great dissatisfaction with their colonel, as they ignorantly attributed all their trouble to him and openly charged that the whole movement had its origin in a desire to force them into the Confederate, and not the state service, as was represented by orders from Headquarters.³⁵

Throughout the latter months of 1861 and the spring of 1862 many sugar growers and their sons joined the Confederate army. For instance, in St. John the Baptist Parish Captain Lezin Beene, a cane producer, organized a company called the Stephens Guards which he led until he fell in action in Virginia.³⁶ Russell chatted about military affairs with Alfred Roman, son of ex-Governor Andre Roman; this Creole planter's son commanded a company of men of the best families in the sugar country-- "planters and the like."³⁷ Duncan S. Cage and John J. Shaffer, Terrebonne

³⁵ Ibid., 126.

³⁶ Lubin F. Laurent, "History of St. John the Baptist Parish," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VII (1924), 325.

³⁷ Russell, Diary, 259.

Parish landowners, raised and commanded companies for the Confederacy.³⁸ On June 12, 1861, W. W. Martin, nephew of A. Franklin Pugh, became a junior second lieutenant in Company K, Eighth Louisiana Volunteers; and by the end of the month this unit was at Camp Pickens, Virginia.³⁹ The diaries and personal observations of contemporaries indicate that the war spirit was high among sugar plantation people.

Boys of lower Louisiana sometimes underwent a concentrated course in military instruction before entering the Confederate army. The New Orleans newspapers abounded in advertisements such as the following:

Gentlemen . . . desirous of military instruction . .
 . . A graduate of West Point has volunteered services
 as Drill Master.

Geo. H. Rozet⁴⁰

When seventeen-year-old David Merrick wrote from Centenary College to request permission to enter the service, his parents gently refused. "Do not act hastily," cautioned his mother; "I know you are patriotic and are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of your country, but you must learn much before you go into the army." By June 1, 1861, however, the boy was at home, preparing to leave for

³⁸ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 131.

³⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁰ New Orleans Daily Crescent, April 20, 1861.

Virginia. The proud but anxious mother wrote that her son had a drill master who was teaching him movements of the company, battalion, regiment and brigade. "His father . . . I think wishes him to have a commission," she said.⁴¹

Gallantry and tragedy walked hand in hand in the lives of sugar planters during the early days of the war. The case of young Duncan Minor, son of William J. Minor, presented both elements. This seventeen-year-old lad joined the Natchez Light Infantry late in 1861. His father fumed that the boy was influenced by "a set of feelish women" who played upon his strong desire to serve his country.⁴²

On January 21, 1862, young Minor returned from Bowling Green, Kentucky, with typhoid fever; and the planter had a premonition that his son would die. The youthful soldier had written a letter of such noble sentiment, explaining to his parents why he had to enter the service, that "a sort of conviction had come over [the father] that this boy of seventeen who could write such a letter was not to live long." The brave die young! On February 2 William J. Minor implored the ministers of the Natchez churches to pray for his failing son. But two weeks

⁴¹ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 29-30.

⁴² Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, May 20, 1862.

later the anguished parent wrote, "Our dear son Duncan continued to get worse & worse till 630 P. M. on Monday the 17th inst., when he died without a struggle." The heart-broken planter assuaged his grief with the statement that his son "deserved as much credit for patriotism as if he had been killed in battle."⁴³

Sugar plantation folk plunged with enthusiasm into the Civil War. Though the cane area lay far from the fighting zone in Virginia and Kentucky, it served initially as an unassailable base of manpower, money and supplies for the Confederacy. One Baton Rouge Volunteer Rifle Company contained nine planters and planters' sons out of a total of eighty-five members-- a respectable number, if one considers that twenty-two occupations were represented in the company.⁴⁴ It is impossible to ascertain the number of planter families who contributed without stint to the distant Southern armies. Certainly some sugar producers opposed the conflict and did as little as possible to support the South, but contemporary newspapers, diaries and travel accounts were one in expressing the general opinion that the people of the cane estates gave generously of their sons and wealth to the cause of the Confederacy.

⁴³ Ibid., January 21, 31; February 2, 19, 1862.

⁴⁴ William Watson, Life in the Confederate Army; Being the Observations and Experiences of an Alien in the South During the American Civil War (London, 1887), 126. Cited hereafter as Watson, Life in the Confederate Army.

CHAPTER IV

EVE OF INVASION

The Louisiana sugar industry operated largely on borrowed capital. Cane growers were prosperous because they enjoyed good credit. But an establishment that runs on borrowed money needs a flexible and lenient money market. The great New Orleans firms of commission merchants provided slaveholders with this market in normal times. Planters customarily drew on these firms for supplies and cash throughout the year; and the necessary adjustment was made when the crop was sent to market. Notes were easily renewed in case of unfavorable growing seasons, crevasses in the levee or other unexpected mishaps.¹

Eighteen-sixty, however, was not a normal year. Political tension created anxiety in the business world, and this resulted in a general tightening of credit. Numerous sugar planters, besides owing money advanced to make the year's crop, were heavily in debt to New Orleans banks for loans made in past years to purchase additional land. Figures of indebtedness of the Pughs and their

¹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 85. See also Prichard, "The Effects of the Civil War on the Louisiana Sugar Industry," Journal of Southern History, V (1939), 319.

kinsmen, the Martins and Littlejohns-- owners of nearly a score of plantations along Bayou Lafourche-- reveal the nature of the situation. In 1860 R. C. Martin owed a large sum on Albemarle Plantation. Melrose Plantation, property of William Littlejohn, bore a tremendous mortgage of \$110,000. W. H. Pugh and Company, of which A. Franklin Pugh was manager, owed in March of 1861 the amount of \$41,000 to the New Orleans firm of Foley, Avery and Company. In addition, the Pugh company was indebted for \$25,000 to a New Orleans bank on land previously purchased.²

The anxiety occasioned by national affairs was reflected painfully in a sudden decline in land value. Numerous sugar plantations were advertised in New Orleans newspapers at greatly reduced prices. And on December 27, 1860, A. Franklin Pugh attended an auction where a place formerly worth \$80,000 was sold for \$54,000.³

The sensational circumstances involved in severing ties with the "Old Confederation" absorbed much of the cane planters' time and thought. Military preparations claimed their energies. But the humdrum activities of making sugar were not relaxed. A remarkable tenacity of routine asserted

² Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 85-86.

³ Pugh Plantation Diary, December 27, 1860.

itself on sugar establishments in the tense days of 1860 and 1861; and on many places this discipline was never broken, even under the stresses and dislocations of invasion.

The sugar acreage planted in 1861 was large. Planters based their crops on the amount of seed cane matted in the fall of 1860. The yield of the 1860-1861 season had been good-- 228,753 hogsheads of sugar and 18,414,550 gallons of molasses. Therefore, rumblings of secession and war had not affected the 1861 acreage; the cane was in the ground before the war started, and the next season's production was fixed.⁴

All things were favorable to the crop during the growing season of 1861. While masters talked politics and drilled in plantation pastures with home companies, slaves went about their chores with customary placidity.⁵ Routine on Magnolia Plantation below New Orleans may be accepted as representative in the bayou land. After the grinding season ended in January of 1861, Overseer J. A. Randall distributed boots and shoes to all Negroes who needed them.⁶ January, February and part of March were occupied with

⁴ Champomier, Statement, 1860-1861, 39.

⁵ Champomier, Statement, 1861-1862, vii-viii.

⁶ Magnolia Plantation Journal, January 20, 1861.

planting seed cane and shipping sugar and molasses to New Orleans. By March 21 the planting was finished; 425 arpents of cane had been laid in the furrows.⁷ While some of the gangs were planting cane, others planted corn. By the end of the cane planting period Overseer Randall had 104 arpents of corn in the ground.⁸

From March 21 forward the Magnolia slaves were thrown into the routine of cultivating the cane. During the same period they plunged into the numerous tasks subsidiary to sugar growing. In April additional corn was dropped; a detail of Negroes went into the sugarhouse to repair and clean the machinery; and fence building occupied the time of others. On April 8 Randall dispatched one gang of Negroes to hoe ratoons. Two days later he ordered nine two-mule plows into the fields for the purpose of "baring off" ratoons, and at the same time eighteen two-mule plows were sent into the plant cane.⁹

The momentous events at Fort Sumter on April 12

⁷ Ibid., March 21, 1861. An arpent is about four-fifths of an acre.

⁸ Ibid. Some proprietors planted more corn than usual because of the unsettled state of national affairs.

⁹ Ibid., April 8, 1861. Ratoons are shoots from stubble cane. If allowed to mature, ratoons produce sugar, though not as much as plant cane. In Louisiana, sugar may be extracted profitably from these shoots two years in succession. "Baring off" is plowing the earth away from the cane.

failed completely to shake the tenacity of routine on Magnolia Plantation. Throughout the remainder of the month the slave force was split into hoe gangs and plow gangs. On April 26 while one gang hoed, twenty-three plows worked plant cane; at the same time six four-mule plows were breaking ground.¹⁰ On April 29 a corn crusher was installed; and during the following weeks numerous references to its use appeared in the plantation journal.¹¹

May was devoted almost exclusively to plowing and hoeing the growing cane sheets. On May 29 the dread stock disease, charbon, appeared and killed a mule. In June the Magnolia blacks enjoyed a dubious respite from the cane cultivating routine; Overseer Randall recorded on the tenth, "All Hands [are] seting [sic] out Sweet potatoes Slips."¹² Attention to auxiliary crops took up the remainder of the month.

In July the Magnolia Plantation force commenced to make preparations to receive the harvest. A number of workers were picked out of the plow and hoe gangs and put to splitting hoop poles, and the plantation coopers busied themselves with shaving staves and building hogsheads and

¹⁰ Ibid., April 26, 1861.

¹¹ Ibid., April 29, 1861.

¹² Ibid., June 10, 1861.

barrels. In the meantime, charbon ravaged the stock unabated, and by the end of the month twenty-five out of ninety mules were dead.¹³

By August the crop was approaching maturity and required little labor. The hands were in full preparation for the cutting season. Throughout the month wood cutting for the boilers, ditch cleaning, hogshead making, fodder pulling and road mending went on apace. An entry chosen at random from Overseer Randall's Journal gives a good idea of his breakdown of the plantation labor force into various details:

18 men Ditching
 34 In Corn Crib till noon After noon cleaning
 Ditches
 7 men shaving Staves
 2 men at Draning Mashean
 4 men working on mud Boat
 4 in Hospital¹⁴

Political disturbances had little effect in 1861 on the life and labor of Magnolia Plantation's slaves.

Cutting and grinding commenced early on many Louisiana plantations. A. Franklin Pugh ordered his overseers on Boatner, Augustin, Whitmell and New Hope plantations to begin grinding before the end of September. This was an unheard-of date to start harvesting; perhaps the astute Pugh foresaw a drop in sugar prices. Perhaps he merely desired

¹³ Ibid., August 12, 1861.

¹⁴ Ibid.

to get his plantation supplies early. Be that as it may, he found the cane green and the yield small.¹⁵

William J. Minor, fearing cold weather, ordered his overseers to "Begin to windrow with the first drop of Rain after the 9th of November--." ¹⁶ The slaves of Magnolia Plantation started cutting cane on October 14; thirty-one knives were at work; and eight carts hauled cane to the sugarhouse. Women with suckling babies were put at scrubbing the sugarhouse in anticipation of the hectic weeks of grinding ahead.¹⁷

Once grinding was under way it proceeded at a mad pace, for planters were soon aware that their yield would be great. The large amount of seed cane planted the previous winter, coupled with an unusually favorable growing season, had prepared the way for a record-breaking crop. A glance at the Magnolia Plantation Journal reveals the assignment of slaves to duty during grinding as follows:

- 19 hauling cane
- 40 cutting
- 11 readying cane for the mill
- 2 preparing hogsheads
- 20 working sugar house machinery
- 8 working in stables
- 11 working in the dwelling house
- 1 working in the garden
- 2 unloading coal at the wharf
- 3 nursing
- 17 sick¹⁸

¹⁵ Lathrep, The Pugh Plantations, 109.

¹⁶ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1868, October 31, 1861.

¹⁷ Magnolia Plantation Diary, October 14, 1861.

¹⁸ Ibid., November 17, 1861.

So heavy was the crop that on many plantations the slaves were required to work on Christmas day. The Bayside Plantation Journal entry-- "Christmas day, all hard at work making sugar"-- is typical. When all returns were in, most individual plantations reflected the universally great crop of the sugar industry in general. Over half of the Pugh plantations yielded more than ever before.¹⁹ On February 3, 1862, the Magnolia Plantation sugarhouse closed down after having turned out 1,818 hogsheads.²⁰ The total crop for the state in 1861-1862 was 459,410 hogsheads-- the greatest in the history of the industry.²¹

Most sugar plantations strove to attain self-sufficiency before the war. Legend has it that Valcour Aime of St. James Parish once won a \$10,000 bet by serving a perfect dinner, all of which-- fish, game, fruits, nuts, coffee, cigars and wine-- he supplied from his plantation.²²

¹⁹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 110-111. This was true despite the fact that A. Franklin Pugh started grinding too early.

²⁰ Magnolia Plantation Journal, February 3, 1862. Magnolia Plantation refined sugar for other plantations, as well as its own. For example, journal entries of December 28 and 29 state that 267 and 154 hogsheads of sugar arrived on these respective dates by steamer, to be refined. The following boast was written in bold hand under the entry of October 15, 1861: "Began to Roll 15 Ocbr--1861 Made 1800 Hds Sugar on Magnolia Plantation Largest Crop ever made on one place with 80 hands."

²¹ Champomier, Statement, 1861-1862, 39.

²² Louisiana Guide, 553.

But not every planter was a Valcour Aime. Plantation records reveal that few estates on the eve of war and invasion were able to maintain themselves in basic foodstuffs. Magnolia Plantation purchased in 1860, in addition to manufactured goods, the following items:

177½ barrels, 43 sacks, and 44 bags of rice.
 1750 barrels, 286 sacks, and 350 bags of corn.
 4 barrels of flour.
 56½ barrels, 37 sacks, and 29 bags of bran.
 56 loads of straw.
 25 bales of hay.
 50 bags of cowpeas.
 911 barrels of beef.
 50 barrels of pork.
 3 casks of shoulder.
 2 barrels of mackerel.
 1 beef cattle.²³

Journal entries indicate that this weakness was not overcome during the first year of the war; in May of 1861 the overseer recorded the purchase of 1,763 barrels of corn, plus 9,403 pounds of hogs' heads.²⁴

The Pughs in November of 1861 were short of pork to feed their slaves. They bought beeves as a substitute and pastured them in cane stubble.²⁵ In February William T. Palfrey intercepted a flatboat of corn on Bayou Teche and purchased 500 barrels.²⁶ During that same month Governor

²³ J. Carlyle Sitterson, "Magnolia Plantation, 1852-1862; A Decade of a Louisiana Sugar Estate," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXV (1938), 204-205.

²⁴ Magnolia Plantation Journal, May 3, 14, 1861.

²⁵ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 111.

²⁶ Palfrey Plantation Diary, February 2, 1861.

Thomas O. Moore, Rapides Parish sugar planter, authorized his manager to procure \$210 worth of pork for the slaves.²⁷ Judge John Moore of St. Martin Parish-- he who introduced the Louisiana secession ordinance-- made numerous purchases of pork during the winter of 1861.²⁸ These examples afford an idea of the feed shortages on sugar estates at the outbreak of war. It is probable that other proprietors were not materially more successful than these at maintaining self-sufficiency.

As early as January of 1861 certain voices were heard in the cane country urging a shift in agriculture from sugar to corn. One writer to the New Orleans Daily Crescent, signing himself AGRICOLA, thought that enough land should be planted in corn to feed the entire South. This should be done, said he, even if the season should be unfavorable. "If our people have enough to eat," maintained the writer, "they can defy the world in arms-- Forewarned-- forearmed!"²⁹ Russell found that Louisiana sugar planters had, to a certain extent, heeded this admonition; they had dropped an extraordinary amount of corn in the spring of

²⁷ Invoice from A. Miltenberger to Thomas O. Moore, February 1, 1861 (MS. in the Thomas O. Moore Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

²⁸ John Moore Plantation Journal, January 3, 1861 (MS. in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

²⁹ New Orleans Daily Crescent, January 18, 1861.

1861.³⁰ A. Franklin Pugh was prophetic regarding the growing of corn; in June he stated that he was more concerned about his corn crop than his cane. Pugh felt that the cane would not bring much revenue, but he was determined to have enough corn the next year, "if he had to plant the whole plantation in corn."³¹

The weakness in the provision of maintenance crops was not serious in peacetime. Possibly the watercourses of Louisiana reduced the cost of transportation to the point that it paid planters to concentrate on sugar rather than gain complete self-sufficiency. But war was another thing.

Sugar planters at first failed to grasp the effects of naval and economic warfare on their produce. Russell found that a favorite theme of conversation among them was the absurdity of supposing that they might be injured by blockade. This correspondent-- a navy-conscious Englishman-- soberly warned, "They may find out, however, that a blockade is no contemptible means of warfare."³²

Russell went on to point out that sugar growers had less to fear from a blockade than cotton planters. "In the event of a blockade," said he, "the South can use its sugar

³⁰ Russell, Diary, 265.

³¹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 107.

³² Russell, Diary, 265.

ad nauseum, whilst the cotton is all but useless in consequence of the want of manufacturers in the South." Planter John Burnside of Ascension Parish, however, did not share the optimism of other cane producers. He was uneasy about his prospects owing to the war. He had expected to realize in the neighborhood of \$400,000 from his 1861-1862 sugar crop; instead, he stood to lose heavily if sugar could not be shipped to the North. "I fancy, indeed," asserted Russell, "he more and more regrets that he embarked his capital in these great sugar-swamps, and that he would gladly invest it at a loss in the old country [Ireland]." ³³

Soon the Federal navy was patrolling the Gulf. This blocked the great Mississippi trade artery and stifled the sugar market. The price of sugar sank, as that of corn, pork and other plantation necessities climbed. Quickly the problem of feeding and clothing scores of slaves became urgent to hundreds of Louisiana cane growers. A. Franklin Pugh made the situation clear in this pessimistic statement:

[There were] more people than I ever before saw [in New Orleans] at this season. Everything is very high and looking upwards except sugar and molasses which are both going down very rapidly. . . . I doubt if 50 bhdz of New Sugar and 200 Bbs of New Molasses have been received and yet the market has fallen from 9 cts to 6 cts [a pound] since the first was sold. ³⁴

³³ Ibid., 283.

³⁴ Pugh Plantation Diary, October 12, 1861.

Pugh was right in his forecast; only ten days later sugar was down to three cents a pound.

The war was felt early on sugar plantations when it swept away much of the white manpower of lower Louisiana. One of the boasts of the South was her ability to supply her armies by use of faithful slaves at home in the fields. The loss of white men to the army put Louisiana landowners to the test. This deficiency did not harm plantations as much as it did small farms, but it did seriously affect sugar domains. The ingenuity of planters was severely taxed to replace personnel who left early for service. Slaves took the places of skilled artisans and ditch diggers on most places. The overseer shortage was more critical. This problem was usually solved by the simple expedient of doing without. Out of patriotism many owners doubled up in managing plantations; for example, one man took over five establishments besides his own. Doubtless this improvisation was widely used in the emergency.³⁵

Louisiana sugar planters formed a pro-tariff minority in the midst of a strong anti-tariff majority. Observers were quick to catch the anomaly of the situation; here was a group whose livelihood depended upon protection, casting its lot with the offspring of South Carolina nullificationists.

³⁵ Bell I. Wiley, Southern Negroes, 1861-65 (New Haven, 1938), 50. Cited hereafter as Wiley, Southern Negroes.

In February of 1861 the Louisville Journal chided sugar planters for their role in secession, predicting that the Confederacy would lower or abolish the duty on sugar. "And how do you think your sugar planters will relish the change?" queried the Louisville editor; "Won't they be as sour as their sugar is sweet?"³⁶

The editor of the New Orleans Daily Crescent replied that no one knew what would be the tariff policy under the Confederacy and retorted smugly that Louisiana planters were motivated by higher impulses than sheer monetary gain. "Perhaps they will be still more astonished," stated the New Orleans commentator, "when we tell them that a majority of the sugar parishes of the State elected delegates to the convention, in favor of immediate secession." And when the North threatened to remove duties on Cuban sugar, the Daily Crescent replied, "We may so shape our commercial policy as to destroy the market for Northern manufactures here, and establish one for the manufactures of England, France and Belgium."³⁷

Sugar proprietors hoped for concessions in matters of tariff from their cotton-growing political bedmates. A letter written in November of 1861 from William J. Minor

³⁶ New Orleans Daily Crescent, February 6, 1861.

³⁷ Ibid.

to General T. J. Wells summarized the attitude of these cane planters:

The friends of the Hon D. F. Kenner will bring him out as a candidate for the Senate of the C. S.-- I think, he is the man for the times & the place, & especially the man to represent the sugar interest-- Howell Cobb told me Kenner made more reputation in the provisional congress than an Y man in it-- If we can elect Kenner to the Senate, we will beat the jew Benjamin, who, I understand will be candidate, & will enable us to Send an other good Sugar man to the lower house. If you think with me, I wish you would use yr. influence with the Senator & representatives elect from yr. Parish.--38

Obviously cane producers had no intention of giving up any favors enjoyed in growing their product.

The parishes of the Louisiana sugar bowl were in the heart of the black belt. Southerners had always contended that the slaves could not be induced to revolt; the Negroes were so well treated and so happy, ran the belief, that they had no desire to change their status. The situation in 1860 and 1861 promised to put these theories to the test. The election of a "Black Republican" to the presidency and the rumblings of the chariots of war in the North changed the scene. The slaveowners of the sugar area ceased to believe these teachings so staunchly. They looked about them and saw a multitude of blacks who might at the right moment burst into rebellion.

³⁸ William J. Minor to T. J. Wells, November 19, 1861 (MS. in the William J. Minor and Family Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

Patrols had always been an integral part of the discipline of Southern Negroes. These organizations existed by law in all slave states. But, except for moments of alarm when a rumor of revolt swept the countryside, these groups had grown perfunctory in carrying out their assigned duties, and in many places patrols existed on paper only.

Planters quickly set about late in 1860 to close up the gaps. They realized the necessity of reshaping the section's patrol policy in order to keep the slaves quiet in the midst of rapidly mounting national tension regarding their status. The police jury of Assumption Parish thought that regulations for Negroes were worthy of passage along with "resolutions on the solemn question of Louisiana and the Union."³⁹ In December of 1860 citizens of Lafourche Parish did not await legal action, but formed a vigilance committee and drove off an objectionable white man. A. Franklin Pugh thought that this action had "had a very happy effect on the Negro population of the neighborhood," and said that such a committee "would do good in Assumption."⁴⁰

Regulations for patrols adopted by the St. Charles Parish police jury on December 19, 1860, were a good example

³⁹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 82.

⁴⁰ Pugh Plantation Diary, December 14, 1860.

of measures designed to curb Negro activities in the cane land. The parish was split into five districts, each with a patrol and patrol chief. All patrols were to make rounds twice a week for at least six hours at a time. They were charged to be particularly alert on Saturday nights and on the eve of feasts and church gatherings. All white men between eighteen and fifty were eligible to serve and must do so at their appointed time. In case of a disturbance involving Negroes, the patrol chief was authorized to deputize all white men in his district. Patrols had authority-- with the permission of owners or overseers-- to make inspections of slave quarters on the plantations. Any strange Negro discovered without a pass on a plantation was to receive twenty lashes and be placed in the stocks until his owner arrived to claim him. The same treatment was to be meted out to any Negro caught off his plantation without a pass.

Whites were forbidden by the St. Charles Parish police jury regulations to trade with Negroes. All plantations were to have one white person per thirty blacks. Slaves were prohibited to carry arms of any sort off the plantation. Owners who allowed Negroes to hunt might arm them, but they were confined to the immediate plantation and must carry written permits to the effect that they were hunting.⁴¹

⁴¹ St. Charles Parish Police Jury Minutes, December 19, 1860.

In February of 1861 David Pugh of Madewood Plantation on the Lafourche stated, "The Negroes have got it into their heads they are going to be free on the 4th of March." He proposed a patrol to let the blacks know the error of their way.⁴² Patrols soon were riding the countryside in Assumption Parish, and the Pughs took an active part in them; by June A. Franklin Pugh was captain of the one in his ward. His patrol board met once a week at one Florian Rodrigue's store and planned the activities of the coming week. At a meeting on July 21 the group decided to set up a special patrol to circulate once a week after midnight, in addition to the regular patrols already in operation.⁴³

Vigilance committees paralleled the patrols. The actions of all suspicious whites were watched by these self-appointed "committees of public safety." Danger always lurks in situations where unauthorized police groups are active, and the cane country was not immune to unwarranted acts of violence by vigilance committees. On May 30, 1861, A. Franklin Pugh noted disapprovingly in his diary that a group of whites had "killed a poor harmless man in Painscourtville . . . A very cowardly act--." ⁴⁴

⁴² Pugh Plantation Diary, February 24, 1861.

⁴³ Ibid., July 21, 1861.

⁴⁴ Ibid., May 30, 1861.

As the summer of 1861 wore on, citizens of the bayou land became increasingly apprehensive of the Negroes. This fear was reflected instantly in a tightening of the shackles. The Iberville Parish police jury in June decreed that no slave might own a "boat or skiff." Negroes found with boats in their possession were to receive fifteen lashes. White men were to accompany groups of slaves moving from one plantation to another. No Negro was allowed to marry on a neighboring plantation except with the written consent of both masters. In cases where slaves were married to women on other plantations-- "bread wives" in Negro parlance-- the husbands were permitted to visit but twice a week. And when visits were made, the blacks had to bear passes explaining their marital situations and specifying their visiting nights.⁴⁵

Apparently most patrols were conducted with admirable discipline and discretion. Patrol captains frequently were planters, men who had an interest in the just treatment of Negroes. But fair play to the blacks did not always characterize the actions of cane country whites. William T. Palfrey recorded an incident that clearly pictures the savagery to which Negroes were sometimes subjected in that period of interracial tension. This Bayou Teche judge

⁴⁵ Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 4, 1861.

and planter wrote angrily on June 9, 1861:

Last night, about 9 o'clock a Mr. Whittaker overseer for Mr. Bethell and an engineer at work for Mr. Lynch, beat in a cruel manner, one of Mrs. Meades' Negro men (Abram) on his way to my plantation, and in my lane-- also took into custody my negro man Little Edward, without provocation & on my premises.--Also the mulatto man--Henry, belonging to Mr. Meade, & took all three to Mr. B's town place--I followed & found all three in the stocks, the negro Abram covered with his own blood, his clothes torn from him, & beaten & swollen in a terrible manner. I procured the release of Henry and Edward, but the release of Abram was refused on the ground that he had resisted-- He said he had only struggled to get away, thinking they meant to kill him.-- It was a brutal transaction on the part of these men, as I believe.-- having known Abram for the last 15 years, as a harmless, inoffensive negro.-- Has a wife & family on my plantation, & was as usual, coming to visit them. Being employed at the time at his mistress' place which adjoins my own, he thought, as he told them, that for so short a distance, he did not need a pass.-- These men were not patrolling but returning from Centreville, & no doubt intoxicated when Abram was beaten, was about 100 yds. below my sugar house gates-- They stopped & abducted Henry & Edward about 100 yds. within my lower line, passing as they went, by Mrs. Meade's gate.⁴⁶

This sorry episode throws light on race relations in the cane country. The beating was not done nor approved by a planter. Overseer Whittaker exhibited that hostility that lower class whites so often felt for the Negro. Whittaker's employer, P. C. Bethell-- as explained by a note in the margin of Palfrey's diary-- was absent at the time. Had he been at home he possibly would have stayed his overseer's vicious hand.

⁴⁶ Palfrey Plantation Diary, June 9, 1861.

The white men were not on an authorized patrol. A patrol probably would have been commanded by some responsible citizen-- perhaps a planter-- and would have been sober. Had Abram been intercepted by a patrol, the chances are that he would have been given a specified number of lashes and held under arrest until his mistress claimed him; he would have escaped the bludgeoning dealt out by these drunken whites. Palfrey's account of the incident also reveals a certain disregard on his part for the strict letter of the law, where Negroes were concerned. Obviously he felt that it was all right for Abram to visit his wife and family under the circumstances without a pass, even though police jury regulations required one. This is indicative of the great planters' tendency to temper the rigor of patrol rules with common sense.

The overseer's refusal to surrender Abram to a man of Palfrey's caliber is interesting. Why would a lower class white defy the wishes of a wealthy judge and sugar planter? The logical assumption is that Whittaker was taking advantage of the hostility and fear felt by the white people of the town toward the Negroes.

Levee patrols were vital to the planters of lower Louisiana. A crevasse in the barrier that held back the Mississippi could in a few hours undo a rich proprietor. Mrs. Eliza McHatton told how in 1862 fear of sabotage to the levees haunted those planters whose estates lay below

the level of the river. "It is a fearful sight," said she, "to see the relentless flood plunging by, . . . many feet above the ground on which you stand, an embankment of earth your only defense, and the waves of passing steamboats . . . falling in spray at your feet." And it was terrifying to realize that one malicious cut of a spade would make an "insidious fissure" through which the torrent would roar to destroy thousands of dollars worth of property. Day and night "trusty men with shovels and lanterns" walked the earthen barrier, guarding against the much feared calamity.⁴⁷

By 1862, according to Mrs. McHatton, fear of the Negroes had outstripped that of crevasses. Her husband was a levee inspector. When he discovered a dangerous spot in the levee on a neighboring sugar plantation, he immediately notified all planters in the vicinity of Baton Rouge and called for help. But so fearful were the masters of slave assemblages, "so apprehensive lest they communicate from plantation to plantation, and a stray spark enkindle the fires of sedition and rebellion," that the response to his call was not adequate. As a result, the river cut a great hole in the levee between Baton Rouge and Arlington Plantation. Through the canefields and back for miles into the bayous rushed the water, "spreading and widening over

⁴⁷ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 19.

the rear swamps in its destructive errand, until it reached the river again in a bend twenty-five miles away."⁴⁸

Effective patrol work doubtless contributed greatly to the decorum of Negroes in the bayou section of Louisiana during the early months of the war. No untoward incidents occurred among the blacks before the Federal invasion. The state legislature was cognizant of the importance of this method of slave discipline. In 1862 this body passed an act subjecting to a fine of ten dollars or twenty-four hours imprisonment any eligible citizen who failed to take his assigned place on patrol.⁴⁹

Social life in the sugar parishes during the exciting days of secession and remote war was not the same as in time of peace and prosperity. Within a few months after the Fort Sumter incident most of the young men were gone from the plantations. The sweeping away of these boys-- sons of planters and beaux of plantation girls-- inevitably altered the colorful entertainments of the land.

Many people of the cane region watched in festive mood as the great planters who represented them cut the bonds between Louisiana and the Union. Dinners and balls often marked the occasion. In Thibodaux on Bayou Lafourche

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁹ Wiley, Southern Negroes, 34.

the Philharmonic Society jumped the gun on secession. When word reached this community that New Orleans had elected secessionists to the convention, the Thibodaux society gave a handsome ball. Throughout the afternoon fiery orators-- some of them planters-- plied the citizens with patriotic addresses. This ball fittingly rounded out a day "to which many in after years will revert with joy and pride," said the New Orleans Daily Crescent.⁵⁰

The departure of planters and their sons to the army gave occasion for varied social activities. Some left with the music of plantation balls ringing in their ears. To others the departing motif was a blend of patriotism and religion. When Captain Lezin Becnel of St. John the Baptist Parish had gathered his Stephens' Guards together to leave for the fighting area, he marched the company into the Church of St. John the Baptist. There, in solemn ceremony, a flag presentation was made to Captain Becnel. The large flag which he received had been made by the patriotic women of the parish. The commander then led his unit out of the church and down to the river where the steamboat Mississippi lay waiting. The steamer moved off to the wild cheering of the throng on shore. Bands summoned for the occasion struck up the spine-tingling

⁵⁰ New Orleans Daily Crescent, January 11, 1861.

strains of the Marseillaise. And Captain Lezin Beonel-- Creele, sugar planter and Confederate officer-- looked upon the canefields for the last time.⁵¹

In parts of lower Louisiana the war added zest to social activities. Mrs. Caroline Merrick tells the story of a beautiful young plantation girl who was in a convent school when the secession crisis loomed. After finishing school, she returned to her home near Port Hudson. There she married a dashing Confederate artillery captain. Her father gave a grand wedding, and while the band played, the assembled guests engaged in a "giddy dance." Leading figures in public affairs of the state attended the brilliant nuptials. One of these "great men" put on record a statement that was to become a triumph of inaccuracy. When consulted as to the seriousness of the war clouds that hovered over the land, he declared, "There will be no war; I will promise to drink every drop of blood shed in this quarrel."⁵²

Sometimes in the early days of the conflict temporary encampments sprang up on or near the sugar plantations. Mrs. Merrick wrote of one such camp. This

⁵¹ Laurent, "History of St. John the Baptist Parish," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VII (1924), 325. Captain Beonel died in battle in Virginia. ✓

⁵² Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 87.

little Confederate post was a shot in the arm to the social life of the plantation community. Young officers in handsome uniforms came to the plantation mansions for dinners and parties. Wives, sisters and sweethearts "virtually lived" in the camp. "The spotless new tents, with bright flags flying, the young men thronging around the carriages which brought their mothers and sisters as daily visitors," said the writer, "made this camp in the woods a bewitching spot."⁵³

Weddings remained highlights in the social life of plantation folk. In April of 1861 A. Franklin Pugh and his family attended the ceremony of R. C. Martin, Jr., and Maggie Littlejohn at Melrose Plantation, the Littlejohn estate. The evidence of war was reflected conspicuously in the absence of many friends of by-gone days. Though the group of guests at Melrose was small, Pugh thought that the affair went off very pleasantly. The next day General R. C. Martin, father of the groom, entertained the wedding party with a dinner at Albermarle Plantation. Apparently political and military cares were jettisoned temporarily. The dinner ended at about two-thirty in the afternoon, but all guests remained in pleasant conversation until nearly dark.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Pugh Plantation Diary, April 25, 1861.

Planters and their friends who remained at home continued to hunt and fish as their sons left for the battle zone. In August of 1861 a group of hunters chased a deer into the fields at Boatner Plantation on the Lafourche. A. Franklin Pugh wrote that Henry Boatner, Pugh's brother-in-law, joined in the chase. Either the huntsmen's marksmanship was poor or the deer's elusiveness was superior, for Pugh said, "Henry shot but did not kill, or even hit as far as he knows."⁵⁵ In March of 1862 the A. Franklin Pugh family engaged in an adventure doubtless borrowed from the plantation Negroes; they took off on a crawfishing expedition.⁵⁶ On the very eve of Federal invasion the Pughs remained fishermen. On April 11, 1862, the entire family journeyed to Bayou Corn to fish. Apparently this was a fish fry of considerable dimensions, for Pugh states that the family went "to attend a fishing party."⁵⁷ Doubtless a number of plantation families joined in the frolic.

The Confederate appeal to God for victory on the battlefield lent a religious tone to some of the activities of sugar planters. President Jefferson Davis on November

⁵⁵ Ibid., August 2, 1861.

⁵⁶ Ibid., March 1, 1862.

⁵⁷ Ibid., April 11, 1862.

16, 1861, declared a fast day throughout the South, and people of the cane land gathered in their churches to offer prayers for sons in the field. William T. Palfrey suspended all work on his plantation, though this was in the heat of the grinding season. He and his family went to church and fasted throughout the day.⁵⁸ It is possible that with sons facing death in far-off Virginia, sugar planters felt a real compulsion to respect this fast day.

Church going was traditionally a gay event to planters and their families. These assemblages continued to afford excellent opportunity for the airing of news and gossip, and for exchanging information. The chief effect of the war in its early stages on church activities was the dearth of young men it created. But perhaps plantation daughters compensated for the absence of their sweethearts by talking about them. Though A. Franklin Pugh was not regular in church attendance, his family was reasonably faithful. Pugh's diary throughout 1861 is punctuated with entries such as: ". . . Miss Duval [a guest] . . . went to the Catholic church, and Henry and Bell . . . went to the Methodist Church. Rev. Mr. Davis took dinner with us to-day--."59

⁵⁸ Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 15, 1861.

⁵⁹ Pugh Plantation Diary, May 26, 1861.

Most social events after the war commenced took a marked military flavor. The object of the citizens of lower Louisiana was to combine entertainment with promotion of the Confederate cause. Mrs. Merrick wrote that women staged "every species of bazaar, supper, candy-pulling and tableaux that would raise a dollar for the army."⁶⁰

The most complete and interesting account of one of these money-making entertainments in the sugar bowl was limned by Mrs. Eliza McHatton. Plantation women around Baton Rouge-- together with the wives of leading men of the city-- organized a "Campaign Sewing Society." Their primary object was to make uniforms and knit stockings for the Confederate army. The very name adopted by the group indicated how transient they considered the emergency. Mrs. McHatton was proud of the fact that "By wearing a knitting bag at her side and utilizing every moment, she was by no means the only one able to turn off a coarse cotton stocking, with a rather short leg, every day."⁶¹

The Campaign Sewing Society met regularly to discuss plans for raising money for the cause. The result of

⁶⁰ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 54.

⁶¹ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 13.

these conferences was a "tombola"-- a great lottery where all the prizes were donated, and every ticket drew one prize. Tickets sold for one dollar each. The energetic women secured a large hall, a stable and a warehouse in which to store the contributions, which "embraced every imaginable article from a tooth-pick to a cow!" Mrs. McHatton's description of the event is vivid:

The hall was soon overflowing with minor articles from houses and shops. Nothing either was too costly or too insignificant to be refused. A glass showcase glittered with jewelry of all styles and patterns, and bits of rare old silver. Pictures and engravings, old and faded, new and valuable, hung side by side on the walls. Odd pieces of furniture, work-boxes, lamps and candelabra, were arranged here and there, to stand out in bold relief amid an immense array of pencils, tweezers, scissors, penknives, tooth-picks, darning-needles, and such trifles. The stalls of the stable were tenanted by mules, cows, hogs, with whole litters of pigs, and varieties of poultry. The warehouse groaned under the weight of barrels of sugar, molasses, and rice, and bushels of meal, potatoes, turnips, and corn. As is ever the case, the blind goddess was capricious: with the exception of an old negro woman, who won a set of pearls, I can not remember any one who secured a prize worth the price of the ticket. I invested in twenty tickets, for which I received nineteen lead-pencils and a frolicsome old goat, with beard hanging to his knees . . . 62

The tombola was for the moment an overwhelming success. The women who sponsored it spent nothing to put it on; prizes, buildings and printing for publicity purposes had been donated; and the affair made a profit of \$6,000.

62 Ibid., 15.

But fate and Farragut were unkind to these ladies of the sugar land. Before the profits of the tombola could be sent to New Orleans that city had fallen to the Yankees. Cut off from supplies, and with communications with the army severed, the Campaign Sewing Society "sadly disbanded." "The busy workers," said Mrs. McHatton, "retired to their houses, the treasurer fled with the funds for safe-keeping, and, when she emerged from her retreat, six thousand dollars in Confederate paper was not worth six cents."⁶³

The plantation women of Assumption Parish met at the home of A. Franklin Pugh to discuss plans for aiding the Confederate army. They decided to make uniforms for the volunteers from that parish, and Pugh felt that they had "matured a plan" that would be successful. Their scheme provided that the men should manage for the cloth required in the uniforms; the women then were to do the sewing.⁶⁴

Public recitals and concerts were brought into the effort to raise funds. On August 29, 1861, A. Franklin Pugh wrote: ". . . Our folks . . . all but self and Miss Jane went to the Concert at Napoleonville, being about 8 o'clock P. M. The concert was given to raise funds to

⁶³ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁴ Pugh Plantation Diary, July 9, 1861.

provide shirts (woolen) for the volunteers."⁶⁵ Not long afterward Pugh recorded that Annie Pugh and a group of her friends had gone into Napoleonville to attend another concert. This performance was given in a Dr. Ford's warehouse; "Given for the benefit of Mr Faurien, a blind music teacher, who has given his services freely to the concerts . . . for the benefit of the volunteers" ⁶⁶

The press of political and military affairs did not crowd out the sugar planters' love of good horseflesh. William J. Minor ended his letter of November 19, 1861,-- that which implored General T. J. Wells to back Duncan Kenner for the Confederate Senate-- with this information, ". . . I have six horses in training . . . all doing well at present."⁶⁷ Only a few days before Federal forces surged across his Terrebonne Parish plantations, Minor wrote: "Genl. Camp & Dr. Stone came down to day to see the horses run.-- Dined at the Genls--." ⁶⁸

As the cane planters eagerly awaited news from the battles in Virginia during the early months of conflict, many smaller social events continued undisturbed. Diaries

⁶⁵ Ibid., August 29, 1861.

⁶⁶ Ibid., October 10, 1861.

⁶⁷ William J. Minor to T. J. Wells, November 19, 1861 (MS. in the William J. Minor and Family Papers).

⁶⁸ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, April 1, 1862.

and personal letters are filled with casual references to dinners enjoyed in the homes of friends. Russell dined with a group of the greatest sugar producers of the state-- John Burnside, Duncan Kenner and M. S. Bringier.⁶⁹ Numerous acquaintances, usually ladies, from time to time dined and spent the night at Boatner Plantation with the A. Franklin Pughs. Distant war changed, but did not crush, the rich social life of the bayou land. What would happen to plantation activities should war actually come to the cane country remained to be seen.

Patrols rode the countryside in the dark watches of the night, restricting the movements of Negroes, but the slaves were not denied social activities. William J. Minor in 1861 gave his hands on Waterloo Plantation two days off for Christmas and donated a barrel of flour and one-fourth of a barrel of sugar to make cakes for a slave dinner. He also contributed a hog for the affair. After dinner the Negroes had a great ball in the sugarhouse. The cautious master noted in his diary, "Strict decorum must be preserved at the Ball-- No one must wear a hat in the room"⁷⁰ Nor did William T. Palfrey allow the heavy sugar harvest to interfere with his workers' holidays.

⁶⁹ Russell, Diary, 279.

⁷⁰ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, December 19, 20, 1861.

His diary succinctly states:

December 25, 1861. Christmas--holidays commenced.--
January 2, 1862. Holidays ended--work begun.--71

Life, labor and diversion continued in the cane country on the eve of invasion; the tenacity of routine on plantations remained unshaken. But tension mounted as the inhabitants of the area realized that they were at war.

71 Palfrey Plantation Diary, December 25, 1861;
January 2, 1862.

CHAPTER V

BLOCKADE AND INVASION

Geography shielded Louisiana from land invasion. A tier of states, spreading from Virginia on the Atlantic to Arkansas west of the Mississippi, served as the buckler of the Confederacy. These border states absorbed the thrusts of the Union army for many months and sheltered the lower South from assault. But Louisiana bordered on the Gulf to the south. And the lower parishes of the state were traversed by four watercourses accessible by way of the Gulf: the Mississippi River, the Atchafalaya River, Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche. Therefore, the southern section of Louisiana-- the cane country-- was highly vulnerable to Federal naval attack; the sugar land was the soft underbelly of the Confederacy.

In June of 1861 a Federal blockade became effective off the mouth of the Mississippi. Two months later a squadron blockaded the mouths of the Atchafalaya, Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche.¹ The sugar planters found themselves forced to test their theories that a blockade would be of negligible effect. The strangling results of naval power soon became apparent, for in the fall of 1861

¹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 102.

producers were faced with the problem of disposing of their crop. November produced a positive reaction to the blockade. By then the grinding season was well under way, and planters were aware that they possessed an extraordinarily heavy yield.

Planters usually marketed their produce in one of three ways: most of them shipped it down the Mississippi to commission merchants in New Orleans, where the sugar was sold to the highest bidder at the levee market; others preferred to sell on the plantation wharves to merchants from St. Louis, Cincinnati and the Eastern cities; and some producers sold their merchandise in the cisterns, in which case the purchasers removed sugar and molasses at their own expense and responsibility.² Planters of the Bayou Teche area sold their sugar at Franklin in St. Mary Parish, to which point ocean going vessels proceeded to take on cargoes.³

Inadequate transportation, coupled with the blockade, choked off the sugar market in the fall of 1861. Under normal conditions the planters might have distributed

² Walter Prichard, "A Louisiana Sugar Plantation Under the Slavery Regime," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIX (1927), 177. "Selling in the cistern" meant selling the sugar that collected in the great sugar drainage vats in the sugarhouses.

³ Champomier, Statement, 1861-1862, Explanation.

their produce throughout the hinterland by railroad. But the Confederate railway system was taxed to capacity in moving troops and supplies to threatened areas in Virginia and Kentucky. Effingham Lawrence, owner of Magnolia Plantation below New Orleans, summed up the situation in his journal:

While Magnolias sugar Sold at 10 4 ⁴/₁₀ 4¢ per pound⁴
 So far-- But market Dull-- owing to impossibility of
 Shipping it-- Poor Sugars are hardly worth anything--
 1½ to 2¼-- for Refining grades-- I fear we shall not
 be able to do anything with our Sugars-- As there is
 no way of Distributing them throu the Country-- The
 Blockade & the Railroads all pushed with carrying
 Troops and Supplies--⁴

Not only had the blockade cut planters off from their markets, but also from their sources of supply. As a result, prices soared. The Magnolia Plantation master recorded: "Pork 45. \$ per Bl Bacon 25 . . . Salt \$10. per Sack-- Beef Cattle 2 to 3 Prices and few to be had and every thing wanted for Supplies in Shape of Necessaries Very Scarce and very High Fabulous Prices."⁵

On November 8 Lawrence noted that the railroads at Memphis and Grand Junction [Tennessee], were terribly congested. His white sugar, which up to that time had been in great demand, could no longer be sold at any price. "I fear," mourned this proprietor, "that we Shall not be able

⁴ Magnolia Plantation Journal, November 3, 1861.

⁵ Ibid., November 8, 1861.

to Ship or Sell any more Sugars for Some time as all the Transportation is taken up on the Rail Roads by our Troops and their Supplies."⁶ On the eve of invasion the firm of Darby and Fremantle, New Orleans commission merchants, wrote John Moore, "Market dull & slow . . . Sugar very irregular."⁷

Planters of lower Louisiana by the winter of 1861 appreciated fully Correspondent Russell's warning that a blockade was not a negligible means of waging war. What was to be done with the greatest crop of sugar ever grown in Louisiana? Obviously only one solution to the problem was possible. Sugar producers would have to discover new markets within the Confederacy and find ways of shipping to these emergency outlets. During the latter part of the grinding season the more resourceful proprietors began to work toward that end.

The South needed Louisiana sugar and molasses perhaps more urgently than ever before. The blockade and the severing of economic relations with the Northwest left Southern slaveowners lacking cheap food for their plantation slave forces. In desperation they turned to molasses

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Darby and Fremantle to John Moore, April 19, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

as a substitute. The letter of a cotton planter of Lake Providence, Louisiana, to W. W. Pugh revealed the writer's plight. "We find (now that Lincoln has cut off our supplies of meat)," said he, "that sugar and molasses is the very best kind of food for our negroes."⁸ And the use of molasses to feed the Negroes greatly increased throughout the South during 1862.⁹

Cotton planters besought sugar growers for aid in feeding their slaves. As early as October of 1861 Charles Mathews of Bayou Sara, owner of a Bayou Lafourche sugar plantation, received a letter begging for sugar and molasses. The salutation and opening sentence of the missive illustrated how cotton planters suddenly remembered their old sugar planting friends of by-gone years. "My Dear Charley," began this remote friend, "You will no doubt be somewhat surprised at receiving a letter from me as it has been several years since I have written to you." Perhaps Mathews was startled to have an old friendship so suddenly renewed. But the author then acquainted him with the purpose of the letter. "As there is great scarcity of meat in the country, every planter I believe is trying to get a good supply of molasses," he explained. He would be happy to exchange bales of cotton, at a fair price, for eight or

⁸ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 112.

⁹ Wiley, Southern Negroes, 27.

nine barrels of molasses and a barrel of good sugar. The cotton planter went on to say that he had been trading cotton for salt, Negroes' shoes and other items and he hoped that Mathews might look with favor upon the scheme.¹⁰

Other cotton producers proposed different plans for buying sugar and molasses. On October 29 Mathews received a letter that opened: "Dear Cousin Charles." This sender also desired sugar and molasses-- one hogshead and forty barrels. His plan for payment was to make a note payable sixty days after the lifting of the blockade. This writer was demanding as to the type of molasses he should get and the arrangements for shipping it. "Please send me a choice article," he wrote, "for molasses will be my main dependence to feed my negroes." The cotton grower also wished twenty or twenty-five barrels for his mother, but he urged: ". . . I wish you would send mine, by the very first boat you can. I would prefer it being sent by the Lafourche or the Natchez (steamboats) as I think they will wait a little while for their freight bill." In the margin he jotted, "Please use every exertion to get my molasses . . . as soon as possible & I will be very thankful." This insistent letter ended:

Your affectionate cousin
W. H. Buck¹¹

¹⁰ M. Buck to Charles Mathews, October 9, 1861 (MS. in the Charles Mathews and Family Papers).

¹¹ W.H. Buck to Charles Mathews, October 29, 1861 (MS. in the Charles Mathews and Family Papers).

Cotton planters, not realizing the trials of their sugar growing brethren, looked with envy upon the lot of the cane planters. A planter of Camden, Alabama, wrote in December of 1861 to Mathews asking for molasses. "I have no money," he said in preface to his request, "and my Negroes in Bolivar will be very soon out of meat and I dont know how to feed them except on molasses Bread & a little Beef." He desired thirty or forty barrels of molasses payable when the war ended. The cotton planter closed his letter with this shot: "If the war continues you Sugar planters will get very rich. Sugar & Molasses will be very high. Molasses now in Mobile at 45 cts per gall."¹²

Sugar planters sought to market their crop throughout the entire South, but the condition of the railroads usually made them ship to cities and plantations on rivers. In the winter of 1861 W. W. Pugh sent thirty hogsheads of sugar and five barrels of molasses to Nashville, Tennessee.¹³ Early in 1862 Pugh sold produce to planters on the Yazoo River in Mississippi, in Carroll and Morehouse parishes of Louisiana, and along the line of the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Texas Railroad. These sales were made by exchanging

¹² Sam Mathews to Charles Mathews, December 8, 1861 (MS. in the Charles Mathews and Family Papers).

¹³ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 112.

sugar for cotton at the rate of eight and one-half cents a pound for the former.¹⁴

Many proprietors looked to Texas for an outlet for their blockaded sugar. In January of 1862 A. C. Weeks wrote his relative, John Moore of St. Martin Parish, of his plans to visit Houston in an effort to find buyers. Weeks had purchased a boat for \$6,000 in which he intended to haul the crop. He desired of Moore the names of possible purchasers in Houston.¹⁵ Moore apparently discovered a satisfactory market in Beaumont, Texas, for on January 4 he shipped 100 hogsheads and on February 12, fifty-six.¹⁶

Perhaps some sugar planters held off in their search for inland markets in the belief that the blockade, and even the war, would be of short duration. If so, the fall of New Orleans in April of 1862 abruptly dispelled any such illusions. After the invasion, cane growers who were yet beyond the reach of Federal arms commenced a frantic effort to dispose of the huge stocks in their sugarhouses.

Throughout May of 1862 John Moore and his relatives strove to sell their crop. On May 14 L. W. Moore wrote that sugar was being sent up the Red River to Jefferson,

¹⁴ Ibid., 113.

¹⁵ A.C. Weeks to John Moore, January 13, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

¹⁶ Receipt from Southern Mutual Insurance Company to John Moore, May 31, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

Texas. Other consignments were being shipped up the Ouachita and Cocolody Rivers, and Camden, Arkansas, was mentioned as a possible market. The advantage of shipping to Arkansas was that a boatman had been discovered who offered his services at \$5.04 per hhd. instead of prevailing prices of \$10.04 per hhd. to Jefferson Texas." ¹⁷

A letter of May 16 from John Moore to a friend, Reuben White, of Shreveport, reveals the methods employed in this desperate probe for buyers. Moore informed his friend that he was shipping sugar on a steamboat bound for Jefferson, Texas. Since he had no purchasers in Jefferson, he had turned his produce over to Captain Willis Maise of the steamboat. Maise was to attempt to dispose of the merchandise. Moore requested White to assist the boatman in this effort. "Not being acquainted with any person there in whom confidence may be placed to Sell the Sugar," Moore wrote, "I have to beg of you to recommend Maise to some person." ¹⁸ Success in this attempt prompted Moore to try Jefferson again. ¹⁹

In May of 1862 William T. Palfrey shipped fifteen

¹⁷ L.W. Moore to John Moore, May 14, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

¹⁸ John Moore to Reuben White, May 16, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

¹⁹ Receipt from Southern Mutual Insurance Company to John Moore, May 31, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

hogsheads of sugar on the steamer Little Sallie to Jefferson and Preston, Texas. He recorded that this merchandise was consigned to Captain Gillet of the vessel, "for sale or barter."²⁰ Palfrey probably had his doubts as to the outcome of these "ventures," as he called them, but apparently he was well satisfied with the first trials. Late in May he sent ten more hogsheads on the Little Sallie "on a venture to Red River."²¹ A few days later he consigned a large shipment-- forty-nine hogsheads-- to the captain of the steamer Louis D'or on another run to the Red River.²² In return for the produce shipped on the Louis D'or, Palfrey received forty hogs and a "lot of smoked middling."²³ The normal medium of exchange-- money-- had virtually disappeared, and barter had replaced it. Palfrey continued throughout the summer and early fall to send his sugar north and west, where he traded it for various plantation necessities.

This resourceful sugar producer was able to dispose of his wares until his plantation was overrun in November of 1862 by Federal troops advancing up the Teche. His last sale was recorded on November 21 when he sold to Captain

²⁰ Palfrey Plantation Diary, May 12, 1862.

²¹ Ibid., May 27, 1862.

²² Ibid., June 6, 1862.

²³ Ibid., June 17, 1862.

Boudreau of the steamer Aichette four hogsheads of sugar for \$310 cash. At the time of this transaction, General Alfred Mouton's Confederate troops were dug in on Palfrey's plantation, awaiting the arrival of the enemy at any moment.²⁴

Planters' journals and diaries reveal the various inland markets to which cane growers turned for outlet. The Bayside Plantation Journal shows that in July of 1862 F. D. Richardson shipped sugar and molasses on the Indian No. 2 up the Ouachita.²⁵ And on August 7 William J. Minor wrote from Natchez: "Major J. F. Foster of St. Mary's Parish brot. over in stern wheel steam boat a lot of sugar & molasses-- He sold his sugar a good article at 8¢ and his molass [sic] at \$20 a barrel-- He paid \$30 freight on his sugar & \$10 on his molass [sic]---."²⁶

The case of Governor Thomas O. Moore typifies the complete story of the sugar planters' unremitting search for markets in which to sell the bumper 1861-1862 harvest. In June of 1862 the Governor sent twenty-five hogsheads of sugar to Jefferson, Texas, on the steamboat Genl. Hodges. This same steamer hauled seventeen hogsheads to Shreveport

²⁴ Ibid., November 21, 1862.

²⁵ Bayside Plantation Journal, July 26, 1862.

²⁶ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, August 7, 1862.

for Moore.²⁷ The captain charged ten dollars for each hogshead transported to Jefferson; eight dollars for each to Shreveport. The merchandise sold in Jefferson for \$1,536; that in Shreveport for \$950. These figures, reduced to pounds, mean that the sugar brought, with the cost of transportation subtracted, a fraction over five cents per pound.²⁸

In 1864 Moore, no longer Governor, was a refugee from his Alexandria plantation, but he yet had sugar to sell. In March an agent in Shreveport wrote to Moore, who was at Mansfield, that the ex-Governor had produce at Jefferson, Texas. If the owner wished the sugar returned to Shreveport, said the agent, he should send teams to bring it, as Confederate army orders protected teams of refugees from impressment. Or if Moore preferred to try to barter the sugar for bacon, suggested the agent, that might be arranged.²⁹ In the fall Moore tried to salvage a remnant of his produce by hauling it into Texas. A permit issued by General E. Kirby Smith, commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy, reveals the planter's plight:

²⁷ Bill of lading of steamboat Genl. Hodges to Thomas O. Moore, June 24, 1862 (MS. in the Thomas O. Moore Papers).

²⁸ By this time New Orleans was in enemy hands, and Moore could not ship his produce there at any price.

²⁹ H.J. Phelps to Thomas O. Moore, March 29, 1864 (MS. in the Thomas O. Moore Papers).

Ex-Governor Thos O. Moore of Louisiana, has permission to take into Texas, and to such point as he may select, sixty (60) hogsheads of sugar, which, together with the transportation required therefor, are exempted from impressment or interference.³⁰

The cane growers' prodigious efforts to market their blockaded crop were largely futile. Only a negligible amount of the great 1861-1862 harvest was ever sold. Diaries of plantation folk and accounts of Union soldiers testify that the invaders found the sugarhouses filled to overflowing with unsold goods.

In April of 1862 the Union army and navy struck at the soft underbelly of the Confederacy in a combined land and water assault. Flag Officer D. G. Farragut commanded the navy; General Benjamin F. Butler the army. Two strongholds-- Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip-- barred Farragut's approach on the river. This doughty leader determined to run his fleet past these fortifications and take New Orleans. Commander D. D. Porter's mortar fleet prefaced Farragut's attempt by lobbing a heavy concentration of shells against the forts. The folk of Magnolia Plantation listened to the bombardment and wondered what the future held in store for them. Overseer Randall took time to scrawl into the journal, "Herd a Tremendious Firing at Fort Jackson & St.

³⁰ Special Order by General E. Kirby Smith, September 22, 1864 (MS. in the Thomas O. Moore Papers).

Philup & presume the . . . mortar Fleet which is commanded by Porter Has Made the Long Look for an attack."³¹ Obviously Farragut's drive up the river came as no surprise to the plantation people below New Orleans.

The Federal commander led his fleet, under heavy fire, past the protecting forts and up the river toward New Orleans. Inhabitants of the sugar plantations that lined the riverbanks watched with mixed emotions. Effingham Lawrence's family was in New Orleans, supposedly for safe-keeping. His vitriolic overseer, Randall, had fled before the Yankee advance. His Negroes crowded the levee to see the sight. And the great sugar producer sat in his Magnolia Plantation mansion and phlegmatically recorded: "The Fleet are now passing the House . . . appear to be uninjured. they have burried [sic] a few Bodies in coming up a few miles below here--." ³² The forts, in which so much hope had been placed, had proved of little avail.

DeForest described in vivid prose the advance up the Mississippi as seen from the deck of a transport following in the wake of the "amazing Farragut." He wrote:

We are no welcome tourists, at least not to the white inhabitants; very few of them show themselves, and they do not answer our cheering, nor hardly look

³¹ Magnolia Plantation Journal, April 16, 1862.

³² Ibid., April 24, 1862.

at us; they walk or ride grimly by, with faces set straight forward, as if they could thereby ignore our existence. But to the negroes we evidently appear as friends and redeemers. Such joyous gatherings of dark faces, such deep-chested shouts of welcome and deliverance, such a waving of green boughs and white vestments, and even of pickaninnies, such a bending of knees . . . salutes our eyes . . . as makes me grateful to Heaven for this hour of triumph.³³

Most of the military manpower of Louisiana was in Tennessee or Virginia, fighting in the outer marches of the Confederacy to hold the invader at bay. The small force under the command of Confederate General Mansfield Lovell withdrew; New Orleans lay exposed to Farragut's guns. Not bred in the tradition of fighting at the barricades, the authorities of the city, like those of other Southern cities later, surrendered to the Yankees. General Benjamin F. Butler disembarked his army of 18,000 men and commenced the first large scale military occupation of the Civil War.³⁴

The presence of a Yankee army in New Orleans spelled the end of Confederate control in the southernmost sugar parishes. The planters of this area were in the firm grip of General Butler. What was the attitude of these proud sugar growers toward this turn of events? The

³³ John W. DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (New York, 1939), 104. Cited hereafter as DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion. ✓

³⁴ J. G. Randall, The Civil War and Reconstruction (New York, 1937), 580.

immediate reaction of many of them was to flee from the invader. When the cane producers became aware that their country might be taken, numerous of them determined not to live under the heel of the conqueror. This determination was brought about by twin forces-- pride and economic expediency. Planters were humiliated at the thought of living at the sufferance of the hated Butler and they felt the necessity to remove their valuable Negroes from the danger zone.

Some sugar proprietors fled their estates immediately upon receiving word that New Orleans was in Federal hands. J. B. Bond, described by the New Orleans Daily Picayune as one of the most energetic and successful planters in Terrebonne Parish, left early in the spring of 1862 for Texas.³⁵

A graphic account of the mass movement of cane country inhabitants occasioned by enemy invasion was written in April of 1862 by a refugee from the Lafourche. The diarist's family had resolved to leave the plantation if New Orleans should be lost to the Yankees. When it became apparent that the city would fall, elaborate preparations were made for the flight west. The steamboat Lafourche was chartered, loaded with half the previous

³⁵ New Orleans Daily Picayune, January 25, 1866.

season's sugar crop and located in the bayou before the mansion. A full head of steam was maintained in her boilers. All were poised for flight at the earliest advisable moment.

News of the surrender came the day after the capture of New Orleans. Faithful to their resolution, the family boarded the boat and made their way to Texas. The route of withdrawal lay along Bayou Lafourche to the Mississippi, thence to the Red and up the Red to Texas. The narrator's description of the retreat of terrified citizens of lower Louisiana is worthy of reproduction:

When we entered the Mississippi River it had become a seething mass of craft of all kinds and description that could be made into possible conveyances to carry away the terror-stricken people who were flying from their homes with their loved ones and treasures, all making a mad rush for the mouth of the Red River.³⁶

Most Bayou Lafourche planters remained on their estates throughout the summer of 1862. The Federal forces were engaged in consolidating their position around New Orleans and did not immediately expand their sphere to include the Lafourche area. By fall, however, General Butler was prepared to grasp this rich land from the hands of the scant Confederate unit holding it. General Godfrey Weitzel

³⁶ Frances Fearn (ed.), Diary of a Refugee (New York, 1910), 15.

was ordered to seize the section and on October 24 he entered Bayou Lafourche at Donaldsonville. Mrs. Josephine Nicholls Pugh left a description of the Federal column as it moved down the bayou on its errand; she called it a "martial host, proud and powerful . . . [with] ranks glittering in the sunshine."³⁷ This is a gross exaggeration of the modest brigade that Weitzel led, but to a plantation woman, alone with her children, the invaders must have appeared formidable beyond measure.

The Union thrust down the bayou struck General Alfred Mouten in position along the boundary of Himalaya Plantation-- one of the numerous Pugh places-- and W. L. Wynn's Georgia Plantation. In the resulting skirmish-- known officially as the battle of Georgia Landing-- Mouton's defenders were displaced and driven from the bayou. The result of this defeat was to leave the entire Bayou Lafourche sugar land in the hands of the Federals.³⁸

Numerous Lafourche planters fled as General Weitzel's brigade closed in upon them. Two days after the campaign began William Littlejohn left Melrose Plantation with fifty of his choice slaves and went to Alexandria.

³⁷ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 204.

³⁸ The War of the Rebellion; a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 128 vols. (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. I, Vol. XV, 158-180. Cited hereafter as Official Records.

General R. C. Martin fled to the west, and Edward Pugh and the family of Richard L. Pugh took many of their slaves to Texas.³⁹ By the early part of 1863 between one-third and one-half of the planters of the Lafourche district were in western Louisiana or Texas.⁴⁰ They took their best slaves with them.

Had the planters remained on their plantations and swallowed their pride, possibly their estates would have fared much better than they did. Most Federal soldiers who commented on the war in the cane country were of this belief. DeForest expressed this in his novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, in these cogent terms:

Space fails us to tell of the sacking of this land of rich plantations; how the inhabitants, by flying before the northern Vandals, induced the spoliation of their own property; how the negroes defiled and plundered the forsaken houses, and how the soldiers thereby justified themselves in plundering the negroes; how the furniture, plate and libraries of the Lafourche planters were thus scattered upon the winds of destruction.⁴¹

DeForest penned a similar sentiment in his reminiscences on the Lafourche campaign. He felt that if the proprietors had stayed they would have been provided military guards against much of the vandalism that occurred. "The blacks,"

³⁹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 196.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 198.

⁴¹ DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, 191.

said he, "have the credit of doing most of the looting, and they in turn are looted by the mauvais sujets of the rank and file."⁴²

Regardless of how the plantations of the Lafourche would have fared had their owners stayed at home, the fact is that these domains deteriorated with alarming rapidity. Lack of care and the depredations of Negroes, foragers and stragglers combined to strip them of their finery. Captain A. J. H. Duganne of the Union army left unexcelled descriptions of the desolation visited upon the Lafourche area after the owners of the plantations fled. "I ride along the banked-up margin of Lafourche Bayou," he wrote, "by acres of abandoned plantations, through miles and leagues of cane fields."⁴³ Duganne visited the deserted plantation of Major J. C. Potts near Houma, an estate which once possessed one of the finest libraries in the state. The owner had departed for the West when Weitzel's column bore down upon him. "He left the [Library], with his broad domain-- house, furniture, crops, stock, and 'people,'" said the observing Federal officer, "all to the spoil of squatters, provost-marshals, soldiers, and camp-followers."

⁴² DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 73.

⁴³ A.J.H. Duganne, Camps and Prisons; Twenty Months in the Department of the Gulf (New York, 1865), 49. Cited hereafter as Duganne, Camps and Prisons. ✓

"The negroes tell us," lamented the book-loving Duganne, "how the books were scattered, mutilated, and consumed as fuel long ago." This Yankee rummaged through the house until he found a "solitary volume of Hyperion-- blue and gold . . . in a deserted chamber-- the last sad relic of that splendid library."⁴⁴

Duganne apparently felt a deep sympathy for the planter refugees and looked with sorrow upon the derelict estates that lay in his path. He rode over the fields gathering vivid descriptions to write into his memoirs. His picture of the Leonard Johnson plantation captures perfectly the atmosphere of desertion that prevailed in the land. "The flowers are choking under grasp of rank weeds [and] rare fruit withers on unpruned limbs," he wrote; "The garden-walks are tangled, and a garden roller, in my path, is overrun with wild honeysuckles, . . . grass grows stirrup-high on the once beautiful lawn."

This Yankee intruder on the grass then explored the sugarhouse, Negro quarter and canefields. Let him speak for himself:

I ride on, past the sheds and out-buildings. Doors are swinging from jambs; roofs are falling in. Through a broken window of the sugar-house I see huge vats, half filled with molasses-- thousands of gallons-- soured and crusted with dust. A plough,

⁴⁴ Ibid., 53.

nearly buried in sand, is climbed over by tough grass . . . all things smell of neglect. . . . Out over the fields, with slackened bridle, I pursue the plantation-road, passing through miles of rotting cane, decadence of ungathered crops. . . .⁴⁵

DeForest recreated a composite of an abandoned Lafourche sugar plantation. The head of the Robertson family, went the story, had fallen leading a militia company at the battle of Georgia Landing. When this fight to save the plantations proved futile, the Robertsons gathered all the Negroes they could find and "refugeed" to Texas. Then the field hands, who had hidden in the swamps to avoid being carried to Texas, ". . . came upon the house like locusts of destruction, broke down its doors, shattered its windows, [and] plundered it from parlor to garret." They drank the contents of the wine cellar. Then, gloriously drunk, they made sport of soiling the rich carpets, ripping up chairs and sofas and defacing family portraits.

Standing in sharp contrast amid the destruction, said the author, was a piano. He suggested that perhaps the Negroes' love for the departed young "missus," or possibly the passion of their race for music, deterred them from injuring this instrument. The only living creature

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

in the house was a "half-starved grimalkin, who caterwauled dolefully." "To the merely sentimental observer," wrote DeForest, "it was sad to think that this house of desolation had not long since been the abode of the generous family life and prodigal hospitality of a southern planter."⁴⁶

An impression of the entire Bayou Lafourche area, left by a newspaper correspondent, demonstrates the general atmosphere of neglect that prevailed. This writer spoke of traveling for miles through "magnificent sugar plantations-- magnificent before the war--," but at the time the article was written, "in many instances tenantless, fenceless, and desolate."⁴⁷

Some Lafourche planters made an effort to remain on their plantations and comply with Federal orders. General R. C. Martin returned to Albemarle Plantation as a paroled prisoner of war in January of 1863. But this stormy petrel could never endure the interference of the Yankees. Finally the provost marshal of Assumption Parish ordered Martin to appear before him to answer charges. This official asserted that the sugar planter whipped his Negroes, refused to allow them to wear Union army clothing, threatened to

⁴⁶ DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, 223.

⁴⁷ New Orleans Daily True Delta, March 3, 1864.

shoot them and that he abducted blacks from the United States authorities. Martin was accused, further, of using language abusive of the United States, saying to his Negroes, "God damned the Yankees, they came here and stole you away, and now you come back when sick for me to support you." Rather than face this formidable array of charges, Martin once again fled; this time for good.⁴⁸

The Mississippi River was the main cable through which the Federal military current flowed into the sugar land. Shortly after the seizure of New Orleans, Farragut paraded his fleet up the river. Plantations that lined the stream's banks were at the mercy of the grim invader's guns, and this fact soon was brought home violently to cane country folk. Farragut had made known his intention to fire upon plantation houses or towns that harbored bush-whackers. In August the fierce commander's vessels were fired upon by partisan troopers in the vicinity of Donaldsonville, and true to his threat, Farragut swept the town with his "iron besoms of destruction."

This naval control of the Mississippi, plus the seizure of Baton Rouge, persuaded James McHatton to leave his Arlington Plantation near the capital city. Mrs. McHatton's story of the abandonment of their beloved estate

⁴⁸ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 276.

in December of 1862 is an epic.

McHatton prepared to flee by altering a rockaway-- a carriage-- so that the family might sleep in it. He then loaded a cloth-covered wagon-- a prairie schooner-- with provisions necessary to camping out during a long journey. Six of the plantation's best mules were stabled with their harness hanging in readiness for instant flight.⁴⁹

On the morning of December 17 the McHattons looked upon the river before Baton Rouge and saw Federal gunboats anchored there. A slave sent into the town to reconnoiter returned with the news that all who had harbored Confederates during the recent battle of Baton Rouge were to be arrested.⁵⁰ McHatton was guilty; his seizure was but a matter of time. Throughout the day Mrs. McHatton "wandered through the dear old rooms of the house where [she] had lived ten happy years." She bade farewell to a "whole armoire of dinner and ball dresses, that were of no use to [her]." Absent-mindedly she packed a trunk full of "laces, flowers, feathers, and other such useless things that were found here and there in boxes and drawers, leaving the packed things in a front room."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 51.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁵¹ Ibid.

During the night of the seventeenth the Negro sugar maker from a neighboring plantation brought word that the McHatton slaves were going to the enemy. Pickets on the adjoining place had told the Negroes that McHatton was to be arrested at daybreak. The husband instantly saddled his horse and rode through the woods to a rendezvous where his wife was to join him with the carriage and wagon the next morning. This decision proved to be a mistake.

The following morning Mrs. McHatton found the remaining blacks surly and disobedient; they refused to drive her to the appointed meeting place. One Negro man "had a misery in his back-- had it ever since the crevasse." Another "never druv in his life-- didn't [she] know he was de engineer?" Some of the Negroes said that one of the mules would not go, "that [Old Sal] was de balkinest mule on de place; she [would not] git a mile from [the house] 'fore she took de studs and wouldn't budge a step." At last one old servant, named Dave, agreed to drive the wagon until Old Sal balked. So, after hours of threatening, cajoling and pleading, Mrs. McHatton drove out of the yard. As she left, "Aunt Hanna"-- an ancient Negress who had been given a cabin in which to "sun away her half-blind . . . old age"-- stood erect and proud in the door of her hut and cried, "Good-by, madam-- I b'ar you no malice."⁵²

⁵² Ibid., 57.

What were the emotions of this vivacious plantation mistress as she fled her mansion before the whirlwind of the Yankee invasion? No trace of bitterness stained her reminiscences as she wrote:

So I rode away from Arlington, leaving the sugar-house crowded to its utmost capacity with the entire crop of sugar and molasses of the previous year for which we had been unable to find a market within "our lines," leaving cattle grazing in the fields, sheep wandering over the levee, doors and windows flung wide open, furniture in the rooms, clothes too fine for me to wear hanging in the armoires, china in the closets, pictures on the walls, beds unmade, table spread. It was late in the afternoon of that bright, clear day, December 18, 1862, that I bade Arlington adieu forever!⁵³

For two days this strong woman eluded Federal patrols with her rockaway and prairie schooner. She forced her reluctant Negro servant at pistol point to stay with her to drive the wagon. On the third day she struck a broad highway filled with wagons loaded with "furniture, beds, bundles, cooking-utensils . . . and barrels overflowing with hastily collected household effects. . . ." Bedraggled women "with whole families of shivering children, walked the dusty roadside." And thus the "rear-guard . . . of an army of wretched citizens fleeing from their broken homes" wended its way toward Texas and exile.⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 62-63.

A Yankee army chaplain who made a journey in 1863 up the Mississippi River coast from New Orleans to Baton Rouge was shaken at the evidences of abandonment and neglect that met his eyes. He left this sobering picture of the wages of war:

If you leave the city, and take the levee road to Baton Rouge . . . the desolation becomes all the more marked. There is not a single planter in the department who has not personally suffered through this war. Their crops of sugar-cane, yielding from five hundred to a thousand hogsheads of sugar, are still standing in February; and there is no hope of saving them, for the frost has been at work on them. Cane is standing now in March; thousands and tens of thousands of acres of it. Thus the crop of the past year is nothing; and that of the coming year will be the same.⁵⁵

Farther north along the Mississippi the story of desertion and waste was reminiscent of that in the vicinity of Baton Rouge. A Federal soldier stationed near Port Hudson in the summer of 1863 was depressed at the neglect that he saw in fine sugar plantations there. After describing one estate in a letter to his family the observer said: "The amount the people have lost must be incalculable. Northern people do not understand how thankful they ought to be that their section of the country is not the seat of war. One must see the ruin to judge of it." The heart of this sympathetic invader ached "to look at the elegant

⁵⁵ George Hughes Hepworth, The Whip, Hoe, and Sword; or, The Gulf Department in '63 (Boston, 1864), 92. Cited hereafter as Hepworth, Whip, Hoe, and Sword.

residences and situations abandoned by the owners and pillaged and wasted by the blacks and by both armies."⁵⁶

Planters in the northern rim of the cane land escaped the rigors of invasion until 1863, but in the spring of that year General Nathaniel P. Banks carried the war into the Red River Valley and succeeded in capturing Alexandria.⁵⁷ Sugar proprietors whose land lay in the Federal army's path followed the example of flight set months earlier by their brethren of the lower Mississippi and the Lafourche. Colonel A. J. Fremantle, an English military observer passing through Confederate Louisiana in May, was a witness to the coffles of slaves being hurried into Texas to escape the clutches of Banks's column. On the morning of the tenth this Englishman and his party were on their way from Minden to Monroe when news of the fall of Alexandria reached them. Fremantle observed: "The road today was alive with negroes, who are being 'run' into Texas out of Banks' way. We must have met hundreds of them, and many families of planters, who were much to be pitied, especially the ladies."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ William Fowler, Memorials of William Fowler (New York, 1875), 60. Cited hereafter as Fowler, Memorials.

⁵⁷ Official Records, Ser. I., Vol. XV, 296-300, 303-307, 308-313.

⁵⁸ A. J. Fremantle, Three Months in the Southern States; April-June, 1863 (New York, 1864), 45.

By the end of 1862 neglect and abandonment were rampant in the land of cane. The New Orleans Daily Picayune took sympathetic notice of the plight of citizens of the sugar bowl. An editorial penned in December of 1862 was a trenchant analysis of the awful choice that faced the planters of lower Louisiana throughout the war. The dilemma was: to remain on their estates and be subjected to the indignities and inconveniences of military occupation, or to flee with their best slaves and leave their fine homes to the ravages of time and the enemy. The editor wrote:

The poor people of the interior-- and by this phrase we mean all who are found upon the confines of disputed authority in Louisiana-- are in most trying straits. They are between two fires; and, in many instances, can hardly escape either partial or complete destruction but by fleeing from their homes, and leaving them scenes of desolation-- mournful mementoes of what the war has brought upon the people. The crops are left unharvested. The servants are demoralized and reduced to starvation and sickness. Property of all kinds goes to ruin. The members of the family seek a precarious living among distant friends.⁵⁹

Desolation reigned in the sugar land!

⁵⁹ New Orleans Daily Picayune, December 4, 1862.

CHAPTER VI

WINDS OF DESTRUCTION

From April of 1862 until the end of the war the cane country was a land of violence. The southern parishes, and those farther north that lay along the Mississippi, were within the sphere of effective Federal military occupation. The western and northern sections of the sugar land-- parishes along Bayou Teche and the Red River-- were disputed territory. Control of this interior zone fluctuated, falling first to one and then to the other of the contending armies. On two occasions the Union army thrust into the Red River Valley: in the spring of 1863, as mentioned in the previous chapter, General Nathaniel P. Banks sent a raiding column as far north as Alexandria; and one year later this Union commander made his ill-fated Red River campaign-- an all out effort to conquer the central and northern marches of the state. This attempt was frustrated by General Richard Taylor, commander of Confederate troops in Louisiana, in the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill.¹

¹ Richard Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction; Personal Experiences of the Late War (New York, 1879), 162-171, passim. Cited hereafter as Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction.

The Bayou Teche country played a unique part in military operations in Louisiana. Whereas the Mississippi was the line along which rolled the great right wheel of the invasion of the sugar land, the Teche bore the invaders along the left flank. DeForest noted a striking similarity between the role of the Teche land in the war in Louisiana and that of the Shenandoah Valley in the conflict in Virginia. This soldier-observer wrote, "The Teche country was a sort of back alley, parallel to the main street wherein the heavy fighting must go on; and one side or the other was always running up and down the Teche with the other in full chase after it."²

Federal supremacy in the Bayou Lafourche territory was fixed as the result of General Godfrey Weitzel's campaign in the fall of 1862. Temporarily in the summer of 1863, however, the Confederates recaptured this important sugar region. At that time General U. S. Grant was drawing the noose on Vicksburg, and General Banks was besieging Port Hudson, the complementary Confederate stronghold on the lower Mississippi. A bold plan was matured to relieve these beleaguered fortresses. General Richard Taylor was to launch a counterattack in lower Louisiana, striking at the city of New Orleans. The strategic objective of this

² DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 85.

move was to force Banks away from Port Hudson, so that the Confederate army there could escape and join General Joseph E. Johnston at Jackson, Mississippi, for an assault on Grant.

In June Taylor's forces burst into the Lafourche area like an avenging flame. One wing advanced to the bayou below Donaldsonville and thrust south along this stream; another captured Thibodaux and Brashear City. These two segments then converged upon a Union garrison at Bayou Boeuf, forcing it to surrender. Another Federal unit at Lafourche Crossing hastily withdrew to New Orleans, allowing the "shaggy ponies and long, lank, dirty mosstroopers" of the Confederate cavalry to scour the countryside. Taylor threatened New Orleans, Would the feint lure Banks from Port Hudson?

The audacious maneuver was of no avail. Banks refused to strike at the bait; and Vicksburg and Port Hudson were forced to surrender. Banks then quickly concentrated at Donaldsonville and prepared to drive the Confederates from the Lafourche. Taylor did not await this eventuality, but discreetly slipped away for the northwestern reaches of the state.³

³ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XXVI, Pt. I, 46-52, 186-232, 582-584, 911-914; Pt. II, 110-11, 116. See also Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, 118-147.

Frequently sugar plantations served as battlefields for struggling armies. For instance, the skirmish of Georgia Landing in 1862, which first drove the Confederates from the Lafourche territory, occurred on one of the Pugh places.⁴

The most complete account of a sugar plantation under fire was left in the Palfrey Plantation Diary. This record tells the story of the combined land and water assault of the Federals along the Teche early in 1863. In November of the previous year Federal gunboats commenced to probe up this stream and fire upon the Confederate steamer Cotton. Throughout the remainder of 1862 desultory firing continued between the Cotton and her adversaries. Palfrey developed great admiration for the officers and crew of the Confederate steamer. He once wrote, "Our only defences seem to be Capt. Fuller of the 'Cotton,' a gallant officer, & his crew."⁵ On January 1, 1863, Palfrey recorded that upon one occasion when the Federal fleet engaged the Cotton, the Yankees were driven off by the Pelican Battery of flying artillery; the planter was elated to see the enemy move back to Berwick Bay "in double quick time."⁶

⁴ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XV, 158-180, 587-588, 859-861.

⁵ Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 16, 1862.

⁶ Ibid., December 31, 1862.

The Cotton met her end only a few days later.

Palfrey's diary of January 14 contains the following description of her defeat:

About 8 A. M. a heavy bombardment took place between the enemy's gun Boats on the one side, & the gun Boat "Cotton" on the other-- which lasted about 2 hours, in which Capt. Fuller of the latter was wounded in both arms, & a lieutenant killed. 4 or 5 of the men were Killed & 12 or 13 wounded-- The enemy's gun Boats were Kept back by the obstructions at . . . the bridge-- . . . During the night, the heavy guns were taken from the "Cotton"-- She was sent down to below the fortifications & there sank for an obstruction, & upper work burned, by order from our general.⁷

In April of 1863 a skirmish was fought on Palfrey's plantation between the Federal column pushing north to Alexandria and General Alfred Mouton's brigade, which disputed the Yankee advance. On January 13 Palfrey recorded that couriers were bringing information of Federal troop landings in force at Berwick Bay. This intelligence sent the Confederates, who were encamped on Palfrey's land, into their entrenchments on his "lower line."⁸ On January 15 fighting raged on the plantation of P. C. Bethell below Palfrey's place, and during the conflict the dwelling house on the Bethell plantation was burned to the ground by the Confederates. Mouton drove his foe back to Berwick Bay.⁹

⁷ Ibid., January 14, 1863.

⁸ Ibid., January 13, 1863.

⁹ Ibid., January 15, 1863.

Throughout February the Southern troops remained in camp on Palfrey's premises. From time to time a battle appeared imminent. By the tenth, Palfrey was so disturbed that he sold \$5,000 worth of copper pans, worms, tanks and pipes from his sugarhouse. The buyer, a man from St. Martinsville, was to "take delivery as it stood and was to provide for taking to pieces & removal-- all at his peril & risk."¹⁰

On April 12 the fight which so long had threatened began. Palfrey's diary, written at the scene of battle, tells the story:

April 12, 1863

At 3 P. M. The engagement commenced-- & lasted with vigor about an hour & an half-- Our troops were principally within our entrenchments-- The enemy were repulsed & driven back-- with what loss I do not know-- Our loss trifling, if any.-- The great struggle is reported to come tomorrow--

April 13

The engagement was renewed this morning at 7 O'clock & has lasted all day-- The firing on both sides very heavy-- Our troops have stood their ground, tho assailed by 4 times their number.--

April 14

A flank movement on the part of the enemy (who have landed in large forces at a neighboring plantation) has forced our troops to retreat.-- They are marching every thing up the Bayou) . . . Our troops followed by the enemy passed through Franklin at different periods today till 2 P. M.--¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., February 10, 1863.

¹¹ Ibid., April 12, 13, 14, 1863.

Fighting in fields of sugar cane was an experience never to be forgotten by Yankee soldiers who participated in it. DeForest left an excellent account of a charge through the "inextricable chevaux de frise" of a canefield on the Teche. General Mouton's Confederate troops were in position on the Teche. Weitzel's brigade, of which DeForest was a member, assaulted the Southerners from the front, across a great expanse of cane. The soldier-author recorded that the brigade advanced toward the Confederate works in a long, single line that stretched from a wood on the left to the water on the right. The men pushed forward, "prostrating or climbing fences, and struggling amid horrible labyrinths of tangled sugar cane."¹²

Another description of the confusion and fatigue encountered in the movement of an outfit through miles of cane came out of the action on the Lafourche in the summer of 1863. On July 20 a Federal brigade moving south from Donaldsonville was surprised by the Confederates and driven in haste back to the town. A Yankee soldier who tasted this little defeat stated that his first sight of the Rebels came when he observed squads of them moving through rows of cane on three sides of him. The Federals took advantage of the one side on which there was no enemy to retreat toward Donaldsonville. This participant wrote:

¹² DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 87.

Confusion became worse confounded. Every attempt to keep in line failed, and in squads or alone, we pressed to the rear. It was a day of utter exhaustion. Pressing through corn ten feet high, the sun pouring down on us, unable to catch a mouthful of air, was bad enough, but we found scratching our way through the cane-fields tenfold worse. Cane presents an almost impenetrable jungle. Four miles, measured by rods, forty, as computed by discomfort and fatigue, passed over and we reached the river, some near the fort, at Donaldsonville. . . .¹³

The most vivid description of a battle witnessed from a sugar plantation came from the facile pen of Sarah Morgan, a Baton Rouge girl who was a refugee at Linwood Plantation near Port Hudson. During the night of March 14, 1863, Confederate troops defending this stronghold fought off a Union naval sally. "Such an incessant roar," exclaimed the excited girl as the terrifying clamor of battle mounted in intensity. At every cannon discharge, the plantation house shook on its foundation. The women clustered about a window from which they could see the "incessant flash of guns and the great shooting stars of flame, which were the hot shot of the enemy," and in the distance Sarah could see the light of burning houses.¹⁴

Union naval control of Louisiana's waterways placed sugar plantations under the muzzles of enemy guns.

¹³ Henry T. Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers (Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 1864), 337.

¹⁴ Sarah Morgan Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary (New York, 1913), 337.

From time to time the Federals pressed home this advantage by shelling establishments; sometimes for harboring snipers, again perhaps out of sheer deviltry. Gunboats dropped shells into the lawn of Arlington Plantation throughout the night following the battle of Baton Rouge.¹⁵ During this same engagement the steamer Essex fired upon the Nolan Plantation near the capital city.¹⁶ At one time during the war, Federal Commodore Levin Powell lobbed shells at The Cottage, the plantation house of his cousin, near Baton Rouge.¹⁷ And in November of 1862 Sarah Morgan wrote, as she listened to gunfire on the Mississippi, "The Yankees are banging away on some treasonable sugar-houses that are disobedient enough to grind cane on the other side of the river."¹⁸

Sugar plantations frequently served as camps for both armies during the conflict. William T. Palfrey's plantation on the Teche was for months during the winter of 1862 and spring of 1863 the camp site of General Alfred Mouton's brigade. The brigade commander made the Palfrey mansion his headquarters, and when General Richard Taylor

¹⁵ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 41.

¹⁶ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 161.

¹⁷ Louisiana Guide, 524.

¹⁸ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 289.

visited the camp he lived in this house. During the campaign up the Teche in 1863 General Banks made his headquarters at The Shadows, the plantation mansion of the David Weeks family; Weeks's widow died in this great house while it was occupied by the Federal commander.¹⁹

Federal outposts and garrisons often were established on abandoned sugar domains. A Union soldier who was stationed in a small detachment on the estate of J. L. Manning above New Orleans complained bitterly of his fate. This trooper was aghast that water filled the graves dug for his dead comrades; that bodies had to be held down with sabres to prevent their floating away.²⁰

In August of 1864 a skirmish of unusual interest occurred on the H. Doyal plantation near Donaldsonville. A Major Remington commanded a Union detachment on outpost duty at this estate. One dark night a Confederate force under the command of Colonel John S. Scott crept upon the unsuspecting Yankees, and Scott sent Remington a demand for unconditional surrender. The Union commander rejected this advance and succeeded in cutting his way through to Donaldsonville.

¹⁹ Louisiana Guide, 314.

²⁰ Henry Murray Calvert, Reminiscences of a Boy in Blue, 1862-1865 (New York, 1920), 173. Cited hereafter as Calvert, Reminiscences of a Boy in Blue. See also John W. Greene, Camp Ford Prison and How I Escaped; an Incident of the Civil War (Toledo, Ohio, 1893), 11, for a description of a Federal post on a sugar plantation.

In the Confederate unit was the son of the owner of the plantation. This young man hated Remington and had once sent him a challenge to duel-- an offer that had been ignored by Remington because ". . . he was too wise to give his enemy his wish and risk a valuable life in a senseless encounter." But the irate plantation youth had sworn to avenge the seizure of his father's property by killing Remington on sight; and the threat was almost consummated on the night of the battle. Seeing a Federal officer whom he took to be Remington, the Southerner fired. He hit his mark, but the victim was the wrong man, and the major escaped unscathed to Donaldsonville.²¹

Both armies sometimes requisitioned plantation mansions or sugarhouses as hospitals during a battle. In January of 1863 William T. Palfrey took into his home an eighteen-year-old boy who was sick. The planter provided the lad with a pleasant room and tenderly cared for him. Not long before this time Palfrey had received news of the death of his own son in battle, and possibly this blow made him more sensitive to the suffering of soldiers in the field.²² Later, immediately before the skirmish on the Palfrey plantation in April, the medical staff of Mouton's

²¹ Calvert, Reminiscences of a Boy in Blue, 203-207.

²² Palfrey Plantation Diary, January 2, 1863.

brigade requested both mansion and sugarhouse as hospitals. Palfrey willingly assented.²³

The Union army at one time seized The Cottage near Baton Rouge and used it as a hospital for many months. Cedars standing behind the mansion today were planted to mark the graves of Northern soldiers who died there.²⁴

The Federal army investing Port Hudson in the summer of 1863 converted plantation buildings and grounds into field hospitals.²⁵ DeForest left the following description of one of these improvised hospitals near Port Hudson that is a classic of brutal realism:

In the centre of this mass of suffering stood several operating tables, each burdened by a grievously wounded man and surrounded by surgeons and their assistants. Underneath were great pools of clotted blood, amidst which lay amputated fingers, hands, arms, feet and legs, only a little more ghastly in color than the faces of those who waited their turn on the table. The surgeons, who never ceased their awful labor, were daubed with blood to the elbows; and a smell of blood drenched the stifling air, overpowering even the pungent odor of chloroform. The place resounded with groans, notwithstanding that most of the injured men who retained their senses exhibited the heroic endurance so common on the battle-field. One man, whose leg was amputated close to his body, uttered an inarticulate jabber of broken screams, and rolled, or rather bounced from side to side of a pile of loose cotton, with such violence that two hospital attendants were fully occupied in holding

²³ Ibid., April 12, 1863.

²⁴ Louisiana Guide, 524.

²⁵ Caroline Lloyd (ed.), A Memorial of Lieutenant Daniel Perkins Dewey, of the Twenty-fifth Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers (Hartford, Connecticut, 1864), 103. cited hereafter as Lloyd (ed.), A Memorial.

him. Another, shot through the body, lay speechless and dying, but quivering from head to foot with a prolonged though probably unconscious agony. He continued to shudder thus for half an hour, when he gave one super-human throe, and then lay quiet forever.²⁶

Sugar estates frequently became refugee camps to civilians driven from their hearths by the fury of the conflict. Destitute families of soldiers sometimes went from plantation to plantation begging food.²⁷ Mrs. McHatton tells that people moving from place to place shunned towns along the river because these were points of Yankee control, and travelers sought a precarious refuge at the plantations. So frequent were these demands upon the mistress of Arlington Plantation that finally she set aside two rooms in the rear of the house for the convenience of these weary rovers.²⁸

Sarah Morgan recorded that refugees rushed from one plantation to another along the Mississippi, seeking to escape the wrath of Federal naval gunners.²⁹ In fact, Sarah and her mother and sister were for months guests of planter friends after the Union army seized Baton Rouge. They fled first to the Nolan plantation a few miles from

²⁶ DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, 257-258.

²⁷ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 183-184.

²⁸ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 44.

²⁹ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 147.

the capital city, but departed this place to the tune of a Yankee bombardment. Their final haven was Linwood Plantation within Confederate territory near Port Hudson.³⁰

The most interesting case of a sugar estate acting as a resort for homeless victims of war was that of Arlington Plantation below Baton Rouge. Early one August morning of 1862 Mrs. McHatton, the mistress, stood at her bedroom window watching the bombardment of the capital city, when suddenly she thought she saw a herd of stampeded sheep. A moment later she discerned that these were not sheep, but human beings, "swelling and surging, and rushing in the wildest hurry and flight, through a volume of dust made ten times more stifling by the fierce heat." These were a host of civilian refugees driven from their homes in the embattled city. Panting and pushing, many of them only half dressed, these frightened people hurled themselves upon Arlington Plantation for sanctuary. "They poured into our gates and invaded the house," asserted Mrs. McHatton; "a small army . . . of terrified human beings--all roused from their beds by firing and fighting in the very streets; rushing half-clad from houses being riddled with shot and shell."³¹

³⁰ Ibid., 145.

³¹ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 34.

The hostess struggled valiantly to feed "a great multitude with five loaves and no fishes." The men foraged, bringing in sheep and oxen which they butchered and cooked on the plantation lawn. Bits of smoked meat were passed among the famished people, and babies were given pieces of meat to suck. Twelve pounds of tea in the pantry soon disappeared. In the laundry, the men found immense iron kettles, customarily used for making soap. These were converted into improvised teapots; fires were kindled, and tea was made "ad libitum."³²

Mrs. McHatton felt the deepest sympathy for expectant mothers who had been caught in the turmoil. She asserted:

Time and time again Charlotte /a slave woman/, who was the Lady Bountiful of the occasion, came to tell me that first one, then another, and still another poor woman was in peril and little garments went from my scanty store to the innocent babes who opened their eyes on that eventful day, and nothing but the supreme terror of their mothers prevented them from first seeing light amid scenes of carnage and desolation.³³

One deserted sugar plantation served in the unique capacity of a parole camp. In October of 1863 paroled Confederate soldiers set up Camp Crow on a cane plantation two miles from Alexandria. The troopers selected the most commodious of the Negro cabins and converted them into

³² Ibid., 37.

³³ Ibid., 38.

barracks. Benches and bunks were constructed to enhance the convenience of the place, and cavalry mounts and artillery animals were put up in the plantation stables. A short distance from the improvised barracks was a field of ripening sugar cane, untouched by the departed owner. One of the daily tasks of the soldiers was to fill a cart with cane and distribute it to the camp. "For the remainder of the day," recorded a resident of Camp Crow, "[the men] sat upon the gallery and ate sugar-cane."³⁴

To Northern soldiers, sugar plantations with their mansions and elaborate sugarhouses were rich plunder. Those Federals who possessed an urge to tear things apart found ample targets in the cane country upon which to wreak their destructiveness. Some members of the invading army were fired with a zeal to destroy Southern property, feeling that this devastation was just retribution to planters for the sin of slavery. This sentiment was expressed by one Yankee in describing hardships suffered by Union soldiers who were "engaged in the noble crusade to stamp out human bondage." This humanitarian trooper wrote that he and his comrades were shivering under thin blankets, "waiting for orders to strike a blow that [would] prostrate that whole

³⁴ William H. Tunnard, A Southern Record; the History of the Third Regiment Louisiana Infantry (Baton Rouge, 1866), 310. Cited hereafter as Tunnard, A Southern Record.

institution, which [built] for a few oppressors such mansions, while it [doomed] the entire peasantry of the land, black and white, to hopeless poverty and wretchedness."³⁵

The Northerners brought no policy of Assyrian frightfulness into the bayou land; they did not visit upon the defeated inhabitants a wholesale, premeditated destruction of homes and other plantation buildings. But from time to time the invading armies wantonly burned and otherwise despoiled houses in scattered areas of the cane country. For example, in the spring of 1862 a detachment of the Twenty-first Indiana Infantry put the torch to the dwelling house and sugarhouse of Planter J. B. Bond of Terrebonne Parish, "leaving the plantation a smoking ruin."³⁶

William T. Palfrey charged the Union army with burning houses in 1863 as it retreated from a skirmish on the Teche.³⁷ And troops sent from Mississippi to reinforce Banks in 1864 burned houses said to be flying Confederate flags near the mouth of the Red River.³⁸

Perhaps the Red River area suffered more actual destruction than any other part of the sugar land. The beaten

³⁵ Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers, 164.

³⁶ New Orleans Daily Picayune, January 25, 1866.

³⁷ Palfrey Plantation Diary, January 15, 1863.

³⁸ E. Newsome, Experience in the War of the Great Rebellion (Carbondale, Illinois, 1879), 65.

Yankee army that Banks led back from Mansfield in 1864 fired sugarhouses, gins and factories in its path.³⁹ Governor Henry W. Allen said, "The track of the spoiler was one scene of desolation." He charged that while Alexandria was in flames, General A. J. Smith rode among his men, saying, "Boys, this looks like war!"⁴⁰ The following statement of Dr. J. P. Davidson, a citizen of Rapides Parish who was an eye-witness to the treatment meted out to that section, gives insight into the behavior of the hostile army:

It cannot therefore excite surprise in the minds of any, that the line of march of the army under General Banks can be traced like an Indian war trail, or the fire path of the prairie-- by smouldering ruins of villages, dwellings, gins, and sugar-houses-- the conversion of a rich, beautiful and highly improved agricultural region into a vast wilderness.⁴¹

This fiery accusation was exaggerated; the word "wilderness" was an overstatement. The assertion, however, is indicative of the suffering of the people.

³⁹ G. P. Whittington, "Rapides Parish, Louisiana; A History," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVIII (1935), 38.

⁴⁰ Sarah Anne Dorsey, Recollections of Henry Watkins Allen; Brigadier-General Confederate States Army, Ex-Governor of Louisiana (New York, 1866), 279. Cited hereafter as Dorsey, Recollections of Henry Watkins Allen.

⁴¹ Whittington, "Rapides Parish, Louisiana; A History," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XVIII (1935), 38.

A greater loss occurred in the sugar country from what might be termed petty vandalism than from the burning of homes and other buildings. Observers who left accounts of the invasion and occupation of the land never failed to point up this form of destruction. DeBow's Review published under the title, "The Plunderers in Louisiana," a letter from a Vermont campaigner describing the stripping of General Richard Taylor's estate. "I wish you could have seen the soldiers plunder this plantation," the writer declared; "The camp-kettle and pans I intend to send home, . . . they are made of heavy tin, covered with copper." The letter ended with a word about devastation in the entire Lafourche area: "All kinds of the best mahogany furniture [are] broken to pieces. Nothing is respected."⁴²

The letter of a Connecticut volunteer contained a perfect picture of the treatment often given these estates by Federal pickets. The correspondent was stationed on a plantation near Baton Rouge, "where not an article of furniture, not a door & scarcely a window remain[ed] in the house." The pickets had "decorated [the walls] with hieroglyphics & autographs," and Negro cabins and fences had been consumed as fuel.⁴³

⁴² DeBow's Review, After the War Series, II (1866), 538.

⁴³ New Orleans Daily True Delta, March 8, 1863.

DeForest lamented, "It is woful to see how this lately prosperous region [near Thibodaux] is being laid waste." He said that Negroes and soldiers roamed everywhere, breaking into and plundering plantation houses and "destroying furniture, books and pictures in mere wantonness."⁴⁴

The burning of fence rails for fuel was a tremendous blow to planters, in a day before the invention of wire fences. Most sugar establishments were enclosed by fences of cypress rails. These made excellent material for fires, and thousands of Yankee soldiers burned them in order to warm themselves and heat their rations. Personal reminiscences and contemporary military histories abound in stories woven around the procuring of these rails. Surgeon Charles B. Johnson of the Union army stated that every time his division halted during the Teche campaign of 1863, every man seized a piece of the nearest fence, and within a few minutes innumerable fires were heating coffee and broiling slices of salt pork.⁴⁵

Federal Soldier Frank M. Flinn told better fence-burning stories than Surgeon Johnson. This trooper

⁴⁴ DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 73-74.

⁴⁵ Charles B. Johnson, Muskets and Medicine; or Army Life in the Sixties (Philadelphia, 1917), 147. Cited hereafter as Johnson, Muskets and Medicine.

declared that his division had a streak of aestheticism in it-- a fastidiousness that made the men abhor that the zig-zag fences were out of line. Consequently, when the division halted, the members grabbed the nearest fence. Planter-owners complained to headquarters, whereupon an order descended that only the top rail of a fence should be taken. "The Nineteenth Corps adopted the order," asserted Flinn, "and took only the top rail as each one found them [sic] and the result was we got there just the same."⁴⁶

The impressment of horses and mules by the invaders was an irreparable blow to sugar growers. Apparently no planter escaped this catastrophe. When the Yankees visited Duncan Kenner's Ashland Plantation in the summer of 1862 they took away all of his racehorses, as well as mules.⁴⁷ William J. Minor's blooded horses were seized at the same time.⁴⁸ The New Orleans Daily True Delta asserted that in July of 1863 an expedition in the western sugar parishes netted the Federals 3,000 mules and horses.⁴⁹ And Union soldiers on the Teche in November of 1863 reported that great herds of horses and mules were driven

⁴⁶ Frank M. Flinn, Campaigning with Banks in Louisiana (Lynn, Massachusetts, 1887), 20.

⁴⁷ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, August 23, 1862.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ New Orleans Daily True Delta, July 3, 1863.

from the plantations.⁵⁰

An observer who traveled up the Mississippi as far as Baton Rouge in 1863 made the following generalization regarding the seizing of livestock:

The planters' horses have all been stolen, their mules and teams have all been confiscated. They stand in the midst of their great plantations, with the interest on a heavy mortgage staring them in the face, perfectly powerless Uncle Sam, with more than his usual foresight and severity, has pressed into the service of his soldiers the whole mule-force of the department.⁵¹

Federal troops stripped Louisiana plantations of a vast amount of property by foraging and looting. Every diarist who was in the sugar region during the war commented on the taking of food and provisions by Northern soldiers. For example, in April of 1863 over 100 army teams stopped for the night at one of William J. Minor's places, consuming and carrying away 250 barrels of corn and a large quantity of hay.⁵²

Yankees stationed at Donaldsonville in 1863 feasted on chicken, tomatoes, figs, milk and fresh meat. "On July 12," one Federal stated, "[soldiers] went up the

⁵⁰ Van Alstyne, Diary of an Enlisted Man, 226.

⁵¹ Hepworth, Whip, Hoe, and Sword, 92.

⁵² Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, August 12.

river about two miles on a foraging expedition . . . [and] cleaned things out good."⁵³ This same trooper when at Baton Rouge wrote of foraging along Highland Road; in a ten mile stretch he and his comrades took sixty barrels of molasses and five hogsheads of sugar.⁵⁴ In the vicinity of Port Hudson, foraging expeditions scoured the countryside, frequently remaining out for days at a time. These men "had to steal [sic] their hearts against the entreaties and protests of the rebel women," whose plantations they robbed.⁵⁵

Federal units on the Teche in 1863 literally lived off of the fruit of the land. "Enormous sweet potatoes could be had for the digging; oranges grew along the road plentifully as apples in Ohio," recorded one campaigner. And poultry was so abundant that army rations were discarded.⁵⁶ DeForest wrote that the Northern soldiers at Vermillion Bayou in 1863 were "foraging like the locusts of Revelation."⁵⁷

⁵³ Rodney W. Torrey, War Diary of Rodney W. Torrey, 1862-1863 (n. p., n. d.), 63.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44. See also Dewey, A Memorial, 51, for an account of foraging in the Baton Rouge area.

⁵⁵ J.S. Clark, Life in the Middle West (Chicago, 1916), 100.

⁵⁶ Albert O. Marshall, Army Life; from a Soldier's Journal (Joliet, Illinois, 1884), 291. For interesting accounts of foraging along the Teche, see: William H. Bentley, History of the Seventy-seventh Illinois Volunteer Infantry (Peoria, Illinois, 1883), 207; and Frank H. Mason, The Forty-second Ohio Infantry; a History of the Organization and Services of that Regiment in the War of the Rebellion (Cleveland, Ohio, 1876), 243. Cited hereafter as Mason, The Forty-second Ohio Infantry.

⁵⁷ DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 156.

At times these food-gathering expeditions were hazardous. In October of 1863 a party of Federals was surprised and captured on a Teche sugar plantation. The patrol members were so engrossed in eating their dinner that they relaxed security measures, and Confederate cavalymen crept upon them. The Southerners captured the Yankees' muskets, which were stacked unguarded in the yard, and made prisoners of the entire lot.⁵⁸

Frank M. Flinn described how in January of 1863 his unit took sugar and molasses from plantations near Plaquemine. The affair turned out to be a veritable molasses candy expedition. "Over every camp-fire," asserted this storyteller, "was a kettle of molasses, and along in the morning the boys were busily engaged . . . pulling candy."⁵⁹

When Banks pushed to Alexandria in 1863, his soldiers foraged for provisions, and cattle, hogs and sheep in great numbers were taken by the hungry troops.⁶⁰ During the 1864 campaign up the Red River, Banks ordered that sugarhouses should not be molested and placed guards to enforce the interdict. But enterprising Yankee soldiers

⁵⁸ Mason, The Forty-second Ohio Infantry, 243-244.

⁵⁹ Flinn, Campaigning with Banks, 15.

⁶⁰ G.P. Whittington (ed.), "Concerning the Loyalty of Slaves in Louisiana in 1863," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 489. ✓

were not to be denied; these sentries were "flanked" by thousands of men. "Our boys," recorded a member of a Maine regiment, "got more sugar than they could conveniently carry, therefore quantities were left on the ground the next morning."⁶¹

Plantation furniture and fixtures were looted freely by Yankee men and officers alike. In September of 1862 all of the silver was stolen from Bradish Johnson's plantation on the Mississippi below New Orleans.⁶² The Opelousas Courier charged on September 20 that "a robbing expedition" had cleaned many places along the Mississippi of all moveable property.⁶³

A Union soldier stationed near Plaquemine in 1863 left this classic account of a "strike" made by him and his comrades on a sugar estate:

We rushed in like a flock of sheep, and secured everything of value. The Captain and I got two nice chairs, a table, a wash-basin, stone-jug, tin measures, and a half-barrel of molasses . . . We gave a gracious permission to some poor whites nearby, who had kept aloof from the sugar-house out of fear of the owner, to help themselves ad libitum. Their eyes bunged out with joy, and

⁶¹ John M. Gould, History of the First- Tenth-Twenty-ninth Maine Regiment (Portland, Maine, 1871), 406.

⁶² Sitterson, "Magnolia Plantation, 1852-1862; a Decade of a Louisiana Sugar Estate," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXV (1938), 208-209.

⁶³ Opelousas Courier, September 20, 1862.

in they went. We confiscated a donkey and cart and proceeded to load up. Several others afterwards reached the spot and grabbed right and left The returning troop was headed by the donkey and cart, laden with old furniture of every kind As the donkey was unaccommodating, an officer walked at his side to help the driver effect a forward movement. Behind, a half-dozen captains and lieutenants marched, shouldering chairs, sweet potatoes, pots, pans, kettles, and other articles of domestic utility, and in this form we passed the guard and entered camp, and laid down our plunder in readiness for tent-pitching.⁶⁴

The pillaging of Duncan Kenner's lavish Ashland Plantation in Ascension Parish provided an incident of unusual interest. Kenner had hidden a vast quantity of wines and liquors under the floor of his plantation pigeon-house. After the looters had cleaned the wine cellar of what little resources were left in it by the owner, they reconnoitered for additional spirits. Finally the cache in the pigeon-house was discovered. Tradition has it that drunken soldiers were scattered along all of the roads in the vicinity of Ashland Plantation, and that the jails of Ascension Parish were filled to overflowing with the imbibers. A large stock of intoxicants was shipped by steamboat to nearby officers' quarters, and it was said that the officers had a "halcyon and vociferous time."⁶⁵

Sugar planters were forced to endure seizures by friend as well as foe. On many occasions Confederates

⁶⁴ Fowler, Memorials, 21-22.

⁶⁵ New Orleans States, January 25, 1925.

ransacked and pillaged in a manner reminiscent of Yankees.⁶⁶ In 1862 William J. Minor complained that a Confederate general refused to pay for provisions taken from Terrebonne Parish establishments for the use of the Confederacy.⁶⁷ In May of 1863 John H. Ransdell, manager of Governor Thomas O. Moore's Moreland Plantation near Alexandria, wrote the Governor that the crop would be lost if Confederate military authorities refused to release mules that they had seized. A letter from Ransdell to Moore a few days later revealed that the Confederates also had taken a quantity of meat from the plantation.⁶⁸ And Federal soldiers stationed at Port Hudson in the summer of 1863 claimed that sugar estates around this battered town had been sacked by Southern, as well as Northern, armies.⁶⁹

Bayou Lafourche plantations were called upon during the summer of 1863 to provide mules for General Taylor's counterattacking army. In July the Confederates took from Whitmell Plantation-- one of the Pugh estates-- forty mules.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 182.

⁶⁷ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, October 24, 1862.

⁶⁸ Whittington (ed.), "Concerning the Loyalty of Slaves in Louisiana in 1863," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 494.

⁶⁹ Clark, Life in the Middle West, 99.

⁷⁰ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 294.

And William J. Minor mourned in the fall of 1864 that "the Rebs" had taken the remainder of his thoroughbred horses.⁷¹

The most damning evidence of Confederate looting came from the accusing pen of William T. Palfrey. This planter suffered for months the pilfering and stealing of a Confederate outfit encamped upon his Bayou Teche domain. He was an eye-witness to the soldiers' misdemeanors. On November 4 Palfrey recorded, "The brigade . . . returned to their camping ground on my place & resumed their usual habits of depredation."⁷² A little over a month later Palfrey stated, "The brigade of Genl. Alfred (Mouton) is still encamped on my plantation, devastating my property; robbing & plundering me & my negro cabins. . . ."⁷³ When in December the Confederates temporarily evacuated Palfrey's land, he asserted: "They have left on my plantation, devastation & desolation behind them-- No discipline among them, & no regard to private property."⁷⁴ And on January 22, 1863, Palfrey struck off a brief compendium on the conduct of friendly troops, declaring bitterly:

Our troops have stripped me, by robbery, of nearly every resource for living from day to day, & what

⁷¹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, September 1, 1864.

⁷² Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 4, 1862.

⁷³ Ibid., December 10, 1862.

⁷⁴ Ibid., December 19, 1862.

is in reserve for me from the common enemy, is yet to be ascertained.-- From a condition of ease comfort and abundance, I am suddenly reduced to one of hardship, want & privation.⁷⁵

At the time that this Bayou Teche sugar planter wrote these words of lament, not a Yankee soldier had set foot on his place.

Partisan and guerrilla raids poured salt upon lacerations that planters suffered at the hands of Union and Confederate armies. Farragut's fierce reprisals against Donaldsonville and various plantation homes were brought on by partisan activities. Governor Thomas O. Moore, a refugee in Opelousas, had sent Captain J. A. Mc Waters, a partisan commander, to fire on Federal boats on the Mississippi. This resulted in retaliation, causing militia General R. C. Martin to issue orders that no partisan unit should come within Martin's area without his permission.⁷⁶

As early as the summer of 1862 raiders were striking plantations and sniping at shipping on the rivers. In August the steamboat Sumter was attacked while loading sugar above Bayou Sara. The mayor of the town notified the crew of their danger; they escaped, but the steamer was burned.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid., January 22, 1863.

⁷⁶ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 170-171.

⁷⁷ New Orleans Daily True Delta, August 19, 1862.

Guerrillas were active throughout the countryside, avoiding only river and bayou towns, where Federal garrisons were stationed. In the spring of 1863 a Yankee soldier in Baton Rouge wrote that guerrillas swarmed about the outskirts of the town, making a visit to the abandoned Perkins plantation extremely hazardous.⁷⁸

When F. D. Richardson of Bayside Plantation on the Teche visited his Bois Mallet Plantation near Opelousas, he found that the place "had been broken up & robbed by the disserters-- rogues who [had] long infested this neighborhood-- and everything taken off . . . which could be moved."⁷⁹ Apparently Richardson preferred the stringencies of military occupation at Bayside to the depredations of guerrillas at Bois Mallet, for he returned to the Teche for the remainder of the war.⁸⁰ An Ohio soldier asserted that in 1863 the land near Opelousas was so infested with guerrillas that Federal troops in the area could not cope with them.⁸¹

On October 24, 1864, A. Franklin Pugh found the commander of the District of Lafourche "very wrathful" about a strike by raiders in Assumption Parish. The general felt

⁷⁸ Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers, 164.

⁷⁹ Bayside Plantation Journal, May 11, 1863.

⁸⁰ Frank L. Richardson, "War as I Saw It," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VI (1923), 238.

⁸¹ Mason, The Forty-second Ohio Infantry, 242.

that workers on the plantations had withheld information that might have enabled him to intercept the foray.⁸²

Plantations leased from the Union army by Northerners were often singled out for exceptionally rough treatment by guerrillas. The New Orleans Daily True Delta carried an article in March of 1864 declaring that raiders were alarmingly active along the Mississippi between New Orleans and Donaldsonville. Lessees of government plantations, asserted the editor, received special attention from these marauders. "Among others," he wrote, "they have cleaned out the plantation of Mr. Nathaniel Page, one of the correspondents of the New York Tribune for this department."⁸³

Guerrillas struck in May of 1864 along the Opelousas Railroad in a sortie that admirably demonstrated their terroristic tactics. A Lieutenant Wrentrope led the band to a plantation leased by Thomas J. Henderson. Four white men were seized in the raid. One of them was led a few hundred yards into the field, tied and shot through the forehead. "This is a cold-blooded murder," railed the New Orleans Daily True Delta.⁸⁴

Guerrilla warfare was a fixture of the entire Civil

⁸² Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 360.

⁸³ New Orleans Daily True Delta, March 26, 1864.

⁸⁴ Ibid., May 31, 1864.

War in many parts of the sugar bowl. Perhaps the editor of the New Orleans Daily Picayune accurately appraised these ferocious despoilers when in 1862 he wrote, "The guerrillas do more harm to the inhabitants that yet remain upon their plantations, mostly females, than to the Federal forces."⁸⁵

The devastations of war in lower Louisiana were supplemented by confiscatory acts of the Union government. Acts of Congress passed on August 3, 1861, and July 12, 1862, authorized the confiscation of property employed in aid of the rebellion. The effectiveness of these statutes in Louisiana depended upon their implementation by General Benjamin F. Butler. This "malignant genius" had early in the war issued the following rabble-rousing harangue, which was indicative of his opinion on the subject of Rebel property:

Has it not been held from the beginning of the world down to this day, from the time the Israelites took possession of the land of Canaan, which they got from alien enemies-- and is it not the well-settled law of war to-day that the whole property of alien enemies belonged to the conqueror, and that it is at his mercy and his clemency what should be done with it?⁸⁶

⁸⁵ New Orleans Daily Picayune, December 4, 1862.

⁸⁶ Benjamin F. Butler, Character and Results of the War; How to Prosecute It and How to End It (Philadelphia, 1863), 17.

On November 9, 1862, Butler issued his confiscatory General Order Number 91. This order created the District of Lafourche, which included all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi, except the parishes of Plaquemines and Jefferson. All property in the District of Lafourche was declared sequestered; all sales and transfers prohibited. A sequestration commission, composed of army officers, was set up to administer the order. The claims of loyal persons and neutral foreigners were to be honored. By definition, "loyal persons" were those who had not borne arms against the United States since the fall of New Orleans, who remained quietly at home and who would "return to their allegiance."⁸⁷

General Butler remained in command in Louisiana only two months after he issued his sequestration order. Therefore, he did not have an opportunity to push the policy outlined to its limits. When in December of 1862 General Nathaniel P. Banks replaced the hated Butler, Banks immediately published a statement that no further seizures of property would be made.⁸⁸

In the few weeks that Butler was in command after General Order Number 91 was published, the sequestration

⁸⁷ New Orleans Daily True Delta, November 11, 1862.

⁸⁸ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XV, 643-645.

commission went into action against the planters of lower Louisiana. On December 14, 1862, Josephine Nicholls Pugh wrote to General Godfrey Weitzel imploring him to soften the harshness of Butler's policy:

By order of the sequestering committee we have this day had taken from us our last mules-- no I mistake, one old one which the children had in a cart was left behind-- When will this oppression cease-- is there no redress? I can only apply to you as my brother's friend-- Weitzel and Francis T. Nicholls, her brother, were classmates at West Point.⁷ I feel well assured you will do what you can-- this last act leaves us without the means of hauling wood or bringing water-- how are we to exist? I know not if you can be of any assistance-- I trust I can rely on your sense of justice to redress our wrongs.⁸⁹

In July of 1863 William J. Minor applied to General Banks for compensation for 186 hogsheads of sugar and 650 barrels of molasses taken by the sequestration commission. Banks refused, saying that he had no authority to pay for sugar.⁹⁰

An accurate tabulation of the amount of property seized on plantations is impossible. Butler stated that the sequestration committee "disposed of" more than \$1,000,000 worth of property.⁹¹ Reports of auction sales conducted by the commission during the months of November and December reveal that 5,500 hogsheads of sugar and 2,600

⁸⁹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 235.

⁹⁰ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, July 21.

⁹¹ Benjamin F. Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler; Butler's Book (Boston, 1892), 522. Cited hereafter as Butler, Autobiography.

barrels of molasses were sold.⁹² Planters feared and hated the commission, and even a firm supporter of General Butler-- United States Treasury Agent George S. Denison-- damned the commission as a "dishonest plundering concern" that "did an immense amount of mischief and injustice."⁹³

Plantations belonging to sugar growers prominent in Confederate civil or military affairs often were confiscated. For instance, Duncan Kenner's Ashland Plantation underwent this fate,⁹⁴ as did Judah P. Benjamin's Belle Chasse Plantation.⁹⁵

Sugar planters suffered crushing losses through destruction, confiscation, looting and neglect. Edmund J. Forstall, a cane grower and student of the sugar industry, calculated these losses in equipment alone at nearly \$70,000,000.⁹⁶ The New Orleans Price-Current scaled down this figure to \$50,000,000. But actual destruction to sugarhouses and machinery was less than \$50,000,000. This estimate was based upon the number of sugar plantations out of operation at the close of the war. In most instances,

⁹² Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 221.

⁹³ Ibid., 223.

⁹⁴ New Orleans States, January 25, 1925.

⁹⁵ Louisiana Guide, 560.

⁹⁶ Latham, Black and White, 171.

sugarhouses remained on idle plantations and should not have been counted total losses, though their machinery was damaged or ruined by vandalism and neglect. Forstall reckoned that the sugar industry would require a minimum transfusion of \$26,000,000 in capital to rehabilitate it.⁹⁷ The losses of cane growers from actual devastation to plants fell somewhere between \$26,000,000 and \$50,000,000-- tremendous at the least.

Lower Louisiana during the Civil War presents a classic study of the ravaging of a contested area. The struggle left the cane country stricken, for the "winds of destruction" had blown from friend as well as foe.

⁹⁷ New Orleans Price-Current, September 1, 1866. The editor did not include the cost of freed slaves, unharvested crops and land depreciation in the \$50,000,000 estimate.

CHAPTER VII

BARREN HARVEST

The stupendous destructiveness of war crippled but did not kill the Louisiana sugar industry. Numerous cane growers possessed the flexibility to adapt themselves to hostile military occupation and the tenacity to cope with the nearly crushing handicaps that faced them. General Butler's sequestration order of November 9, 1862, permitted landowners to keep their property.¹ Many proprietors choked back their pride and accepted the conqueror's terms, but those who stayed on their estates had to contend with almost impossible conditions in attempting to make a crop.

The first of these handicaps was a severe mule shortage. To a cane grower of the 1860's this was a catastrophe, for a plantation of that day without livestock was comparable to a factory of today deprived of power. In March of 1864 M. W. Minor wrote from Waterloo Plantation to his father, William J. Minor, "There is no use to try and make a crop with our teams" ² In July A. Franklin Pugh noted with alarm, "The army

¹ New Orleans Daily True Delta, November 11, 1862.

² M.W. Minor to William J. Minor, March 21, 1864 (MS. in the William J. Minor and Family Papers).

commenced pressing horses again today at Painscourt/ville/l
 . . ."³ Alfred C. Weeks wrote from New Iberia to his
 kinsman, John Moore, "Yankees took all the corn . . . and
 all the horses . . . /and/ I fear manny /sic/ now will
 have to move from fear of starvation."⁴ The New Orleans
Daily True Delta reflected the state of mind of the sugar
 growers, saying, "Though on some plantations the cane is
 doing well, grave fear is entertained that . . . mules will
 be inadequate to secure the cane from the effects of an
 early frost."⁵ An observer who traveled the Mississippi
 River coast in 1863 caught the significance of the live-
 stock shortage when he declared, "The planters' horses
 have all been confiscated Uncle Sam, with more
 than his usual foresight and severity, has pressed into
 the service of his soldiers the whole mule-force of the
 department."⁶

Sugar producers realized fully the hopelessness of
 attempting to grow cane without mules and plunged into an
 all out effort to round up sufficient animals to keep their
 establishments going. Mrs. A. Franklin Pugh journeyed on

³ Pugh Plantation Diary, July 1, 1864.

⁴ Alfred C. Weeks to John Moore, January 13, 1864
 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

⁵ New Orleans Daily True Delta, August 26, 1864.

⁶ Hepworth, Whip, Hoe, and Sword, 92.

numerous occasions to Thibodaux in an attempt to retrieve mules and carts taken from the Pugh places by fleeing Negroes, but she had only moderate success in her endeavors.⁷ William T. Palfrey of the Teche area was successful in 1863 in recovering a number of mules that had been seized by Federals. Palfrey gained this concession by producing a "safeguard" that he had been able to wangle from a local provost marshal. The Union authorities turned over to Palfrey twelve mules out of thirty-two that had been impressed. The proprietor had to be content with a receipt for the other twenty animals.⁸

The meticulous William J. Minor of Terrebonne Parish adopted stern measures to conserve the mule force left on his estates. He issued an order in April of 1863 that all livestock must be counted by overseers once a week. Formerly these countings and reports had been required but once a month. On June 12 Minor attempted to draw his regulations tighter, issuing to his overseers the order, "The Negroes must not use carts and wagons except by Special permission for each time used."⁹ In October of 1864 Minor placed all of his teams under the

⁷ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 234.

⁸ Palfrey Plantation Diary, September 10, 1863.

⁹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, June 12, 1863.

supervision of assigned cartmen. These were held strictly accountable for mules and carts. In order to sharpen their sense of responsibility, Minor permitted them to charge other Negroes fifty cents a load for hauling moss into Houma.¹⁰

Cane cultivators sometimes substituted oxen for mules. On May 26, 1863, Manager John H. Ransdell wrote to Governor Thomas O. Moore that the cane on Moore's Rapides Parish plantation was being plowed with oxen. "Everything that is possible will be done to save it," Ransdell assured Moore.¹¹ And in November of 1864 William T. Palfrey stated that he was using oxen to haul cane to the sugar-house for grinding.¹²

Sugar producers were able to borrow mules from each other and thus to make the maximum use of the scant resources at their disposal. William T. Palfrey and F. D. Richardson, St. Mary Parish neighbors, frequently borrowed from each other. The following statements from Palfrey's diary illustrate that this planter depended upon his friends for mules during the 1864-1865 grinding season:

¹⁰ Ibid., October 8, 1864.

¹¹ Whittington, "Concerning the Loyalty of Slaves in Louisiana in 1863," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 494.

¹² Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 17, 1864.

November 23, 1864

Commenced cutting cane at Cypre Mort.--Mr. Kemper sent me 4 mules & 2 pair of oxen to help me in sugar making.

November 24

Procured from Mr. F. D. Richardson /of Bayside Plantation/, 10 mules to help me in grinding my cane.

November 28

Procured from Mr. Edward Sejin 4 mules.

December 3

Mr. Richardson sent me 3 more mules.¹³

On December 7 F. D. Richardson noted in his Bayside Plantation Journal, "Judge Palfrey returned the 13 mules he had borrowed to make sugar--."¹⁴

Late in the war, shipments of mules from Tennessee, Kentucky and Missouri commenced to arrive in the cane country. These animals were expensive, but to owners who could pay the price mules were invaluable. In April of 1864 William J. Minor purchased ten mules at over \$200 each.¹⁵ Advertisements in the New Orleans newspapers marked the arrival of these much wanted draft animals from states farther north. Throughout 1864 and the early months of 1865 the Varieties Stables of New Orleans received numerous

¹³ Ibid., November 23, 24, 28; December 3, 1864.

¹⁴ Bayside Plantation Journal, December 7, 1864.

¹⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, April 24, 1864.

shipments of mules destined for the canefields. For example, in March of 1864 these stables announced in the New Orleans Times that they had just received 200 good mules from Missouri and Kentucky.¹⁶ On December 28 Dr. P. Halpin of New Orleans advertised for sale fifty young Kentucky mules "with a good title."¹⁷

Animals were sometimes stolen from the United States army and sold to planters. In October of 1865 an agent listed in the New Orleans Times 400 Kentucky mules for sale. He added that they were "green and broke" and that no government stock was among them.¹⁸

Though proprietors were able to replenish in some measure their mule resources, the supply was meager and unpredictable. Lack of capital and credit often made it impossible for landowners to pay the high prices demanded for imported livestock, and the mule shortage on cane estates remained acute long after the war.

The exigencies of war forced many cane cultivators to diversify their planting. These men fell back on cotton, corn and, sometimes, tobacco; crops that could be produced with less laborers, mules and capital than could

¹⁶ New Orleans Times, March 13, 1864.

¹⁷ Ibid., December 28, 1864.

¹⁸ Ibid., October 1, 1865.

sugar. The editor of the New Orleans Era on April 11, 1863, explained the actions of sugar growers, saying, "Because of the lack of mules and labor, many planters have turned to the production of cotton and tobacco [which] require less labor, and the market is fair."¹⁹

The war brought a tremendous increase in the production of corn on sugar plantations. Federal soldiers tramping through the cane country frequently commented on the abundance of grain. A Union lieutenant stated in 1863 that the effect of the conflict on estates near Opelousas "had been to cover the fields with corn instead of . . . sugar cane" ²⁰ Another Northerner who traversed the western part of the cane land in 1863 wrote:

The greater portion of the land was now planted with corn Marching for miles through these immense fields of corn, growing rapidly under the Louisiana sun, the men of the Thirty Eighth Massachusetts Volunteers were amused at the ponderous articles which occasionally reached them in some of the Northern journals, demonstrating how easy it would be to starve the South into submission.²¹

Many sugar growers turned enthusiastically to cotton. Spring of 1864 witnessed a marked shift in this

¹⁹ New Orleans Era, April 11, 1863.

²⁰ L. Carroll Root (ed.), "Private Journal of William H. Root, Second Lieutenant, Seventy-fifth New York Volunteers, April 1-June 14, 1863," introduction by Walter Prichard, Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIX (1936), 651.

²¹ George W. Powers, The Story of the Thirty-eighth Massachusetts Volunteers (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1866), 83.

direction. The reason for the change varied from plantation to plantation. The dearth of mules and labor has been mentioned; and in 1864 a severe seed cane shortage appeared, adding to the numerous vexations of the cane planters.

An article in the New Orleans Daily True Delta on June 11 asserted that most places of lower Louisiana were planted in one-third sugar, one-third corn and one-third cotton.²²

In August a Plaquemines Parish correspondent of the New Orleans Daily True Delta wrote: "The sugar cane generally looks well. Unfortunately the greater parts of our lands have been this year planted in cotton."²³

Deprivations of the times forced planters to improvise equipment to grow cotton. A scarcity of bagging material impelled F. D. Richardson of Bayside Plantation on the Teche to attempt to compress his cotton into sugar hogsheads. Richardson's journal told the story: "Spent all the day . . . trying the experiment of packing cotton in Hhds.-- Found that not over 300 lbs. could be put in a Hhd. & relinquished the attempt for the present."²⁴ Apparently William J. Minor lacked the cloth to make sacks in which to pick cotton. On May 25, 1864, some of his hands were making baskets for this purpose.²⁵

²² New Orleans Daily True Delta, June 11, 1864.

²³ Ibid., August 27, 1864.

²⁴ Bayside Plantation Journal, April 8, 1863.

²⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, May 25, 1864.

The desperate attempt to prosper by turning to cotton came to naught. Lower Louisiana had never been a favored cotton area, and decades before the Civil War, cotton had been abandoned for cane. In May William J. Minor lamented, "The cotton is wretched-- very little up & none of it a tolerable stand even." In October Minor's laborers brought in a miserable harvest. The landowner wrote: "Cotton-- is nearly all picked & was all gined in one day. Can't Say exactly, but Suppose there is some 5 or 6 bales-- Have not pressed any yet"26

The dismal failure of the cotton crop on the Pugh places was representative of the general misfortune. A. Franklin Pugh's terse diary revealed the situation. In July he noted: "I heard yesterday that the caterpillar has made its appearance near Donaldsonville & is ruining the cotton. If they become general the cotton crop is gone."²⁷ Caterpillars became general, and Pugh's worst fears were realized. In September he stated: "The cotton has been picked over twice and I suppose we have about 12,000 pounds of seed cotton gathered and may be as much more to gather-- and this from over 600 acres of cotton. A miserable yield, I shall not pay expenses."²⁸ The

²⁶ Ibid., May 23; October 22, 1864.

²⁷ Pugh Plantation Diary, July 14, 1864.

²⁸ Ibid., September 23, 1864.

disaster that overcame Pugh's cotton struck that of all proprietors in lower Louisiana in the fall of 1864. On October 29 Pugh asserted: "The cotton crop in Lafourche is a complete failure. Some places have made neither corn nor cotton."²⁹ Unfavorable weather and caterpillars were the twin forces that wrecked the cane growers' efforts to substitute cotton for sugar.³⁰

The stresses of conflict sometimes created problems between owners and overseers. In April of 1862 the Confederate States Congress passed an act conscripting into the army all white men, with certain exceptions, between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. Later, aware of the danger of stripping the black belts of all whites, the Congress allowed one white man per twenty Negroes to remain on each plantation. But this measure did not relieve the shortage of overseers. Perhaps many of them volunteered into the Confederate army. In 1862 it was necessary for many landowners to release overseers to allow them to go into the service; and proprietors often supervised estates in person.³¹

The upsets and vexations of trying to deal with excited Negroes under Federal military occupation were too

²⁹ Ibid., October 29, 1864.

³⁰ New Orleans Daily True Delta, October 1, 1864.

³¹ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 176.

much for fiery Overseer Randall of Magnolia Plantation below New Orleans. In the fall of 1862 Randall temporarily forsook his employer. On September 3 Effingham Lawrence, Magnolia Plantation owner, noted: "Settled with Mr. J. A. Randall-- He being too delicate to Remain in charge of the Plantation. Offered Him a Home here as long as He choose [sic] to accept it-- Paid Him in full."³²

William T. Palfrey had trouble with his overseer. In September of 1862 Palfrey asserted, "Dismissed my overseer, Mr. Sheridan, on yesterday-- No use to me for the last two months--." ³³ This Bayou Teche planter apparently did his own overseeing for a month or two. Possibly overseers were hard to find at the time, but Palfrey succeeded in obtaining a replacement in November. On the eleventh, Palfrey recorded, "Employed Mr. Jno. Neames to assist me on the plantation & in taking care of my property, at the rate of \$100,00 p. month."³⁴

William J. Minor sought an overseer capable of maintaining discipline among his unruly workers. In order to find such a man, Minor resorted to the expedient of hiring a Federal soldier. In a memorandum of June 12, 1863, Minor wrote: "Endeavour to get a Soldier to come here as a guard

³² Magnolia Plantation Journal, September 3, 1862.

³³ Palfrey Plantation Diary, September 12, 1862.

³⁴ Ibid., November 11, 1862.

& overseer-- He must make the hands turn out at day-light, & he must See that they do a reasonable days work-- He must compell [sic] those who are Sick or pretend to be Sick to remain in the Hospital night & day."³⁵

Minor had serious trouble with overseers. He learned in January of 1863 that Overseer Clarke of South-down Plantation was attempting to trick him out of several months' rent. The owner and overseer originally had contracted that the overseer should pay \$100 a month rent if he remained a year. The tricky Clarke confided to a friend that he planned to stay almost a year, then move off without paying any rent. On January 3 the indignant owner, having learned of the cheat, stated that he had settled with Clarke.³⁶

Minor's greatest altercation was with Overseer Ewing Chapman of Hollywood Plantation. In the fall of 1863 the employer angrily discharged Chapman, for the two men had irritated each other for a long while. In April of 1863 when Minor changed certain regulations concerning plantation procedure, he declared, "Mr. Chapman does not approve of this way of working, but as he is a crack overseer I don't expect he will approve of any thing that he does not suggest

³⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, June 12, 1863.

³⁶ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, January 3.

himself."³⁷ In August Minor changed his mind about Chapman's being a crack overseer. On the eleventh the producer complained that the overseer had had but little fodder pulled, though unmistakable orders had been issued that this be done. Chapman then built a bridge, against Minor's wishes, across a small bayou on the plantation. And Chapman did not care for the Negroes as the owner thought he should.³⁸

On October 5 Minor summarized his complaints against Chapman. The overseer, according to the employer, had sent sugar and molasses to his family in New Orleans, without paying for it. Chapman had demoralized the Negroes by telling them that they were free and should act as they pleased. And Minor believed that Chapman had been responsible for getting the Confederate army to hang one of his plantation blacks.

What infuriated Minor most of all was Chapman's tattling to both Federal and Confederate troops. When the Yankees overran the plantation, the overseer told them that Minor was a rebel. The planter fumed, "He did what he could to prejudice them against me." In the summer of 1863, when General Richard Taylor's army surged back into the lower sugar parishes, the offending overseer told Confederates

³⁷ Ibid., April 25.

³⁸ Ibid., August 11.

that his employer was a "d-n Yankee." Chapman said that Minor was "stuck up with the Yankees in N. O." When the Federals moved back into Terrebonne Parish after Tayler's withdrawal, Chapman again ran to the Northerners with his stories. Minor railed:

He told two officers I would not let him manage the negroes so as to encourage them to work-- He wished to let them get moss & cut hay & sell it in Houma; but that I would not let them do it. This is utterly false-- I never objected to the negroes getting moss-- & told them that as soon as I got what hay I wanted they might cut as much hay as they could.³⁹

A few days after Minor dismissed this employee from his premises, the planter gave vent to his feelings against the entire Chapman family. He charged that they had demoralized his Negroes "as much as an abolitionist." "These Chapmans, Ewing the father, T. J. the elder son & Charles the second son," stormed Minor, "are three of the most unprincipled men I ever met with."⁴⁰

A. Franklin Pugh met with overseer trouble from a different quarter. In the fall of 1864 the Federal authorities required all males between eighteen and forty-five in the Department of the Gulf to enroll for militia service. The overseer of Whitmell Plantation on the Lafourche refused to do this. In November he wrote Pugh: "I heard this

³⁹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, October 5, 1863.

⁴⁰ Ibid., October 8, 1863.

morning that the militia was certain to be raised in this parish very soon. I fear it very much. I have resolved to go over the Confederate lines. I shall want to see you to-day or to-morrow, as I wish to get prepared to go as soon as possible."⁴¹

In December of 1864 Pugh engaged a new manager for Augustin Plantation. The planter departed from the customary procedure of paying a salary to his overseer. On December 29 he declared: "Bargained with Sharp to manage the Augustin Plantation next year for one eighth of the profits. He to remain on the place most of the time, and to have a good assistant to be paid by him"⁴² Probably the lack of money forced Pugh to resort to sharing his crop.

Interesting sidelights frequently appeared in the planters' search for overseers and sugar makers. In April of 1864 a cane producer advertised in the New Orleans Times for a sober, honest overseer. The proprietor offered a salary of twelve dollars a month plus house and rations; the employee to receive an extra eight dollars a month if his wife were a good gardener.⁴³ In May a sugar grower called for a "middle aged" man to manage an estate below New

⁴¹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 366.

⁴² Ibid., 379.

⁴³ New Orleans Times, April 19, 1864.

Orleans.⁴⁴ The change of emphasis to free labor was reflected in a notice of December 9 by an owner who desired an overseer "who could show successful experience in culture of sugar cane, and who could adapt himself to the labor system."⁴⁵ An overseer from the West Indies recognized the labor problem by announcing that he had had seven years of experience with free labor.⁴⁶

The presence of the Yankee army of occupation was often a nuisance to people of the cane land. Proprietors frequently complained of interference by the Federals in one form or another. A Union soldier who was stationed in New Orleans in 1862 asserted that General Butler established an espionage system, whereby certain blacks and lower class whites reported violations of Butler's orders by planters.⁴⁷

William T. Palfrey had minor brushes with the Federals from time to time. In the winter of 1864 Palfrey was forbidden by Union authorities to visit his Bayou Cypre Mort plantation in St. Mary Parish. This determined proprietor refused to abide by the order. On February 27 Palfrey followed a long train of Northern army wagons out

⁴⁴ New Orleans Bee, May 10, 1864.

⁴⁵ New Orleans Times, December 9, 1864.

⁴⁶ Ibid., March 26, 1865.

⁴⁷ C. Barney, Recollections of Field Service with the Twentieth Iowa Infantry Volunteers (Davenport, Iowa, 1865), 232.

of Franklin in the direction of his Cypre Mort place. He thought that the Yankees were headed for his estate to forage for corn. The enemy cavalry spied the planter as he rode at a distance behind their column and drove him away. Palfrey took to the bypaths and outdistanced the Yankees by a "circuitous route." He inspected his place and returned to Franklin, having ridden about fifty-one miles during the day.⁴⁸

Local provost marshals played a role similar to that of military government officials in Germany after World War II. Sometimes they exercised judicial functions in plantation affairs. For example, on December 20, 1863, the provost marshal of St. James Parish wrote to Sugar Planter Andrew E. Crane that the Honorable Peter J. Curley had sworn that forty hogsheads of sugar on Crane's place had been purchased by Curley. The provost marshal ordered: "You will retain said sugar . . . subject to the order of said Peter J. Curley . . . or show proof that said Peter J. Curley . . . has no claim thereon."⁴⁹ On May 3, 1865, the provost marshal sent a peremptory order to Crane to pay a certain man and woman a debt owed them. "If you owe this man and woman anything you will at once pay them in full

⁴⁸ Palfrey Plantation Diary, February 27, 1864.

⁴⁹ Henry D. Pope to Andrew E. Crane, December 20, 1863 (MS. in the Andrew E. Crane Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

. . . .," snapped the provost marshal; "otherwise you will report to this office on Wednesday next and settle the matter."⁵⁰

Union soldiers frequently invaded plantation homes in searching for spies and guerrillas. A Northern campaigner at Donaldsonville in the fall of 1862 described graphically one of these searches. A detachment of Federals, said the writer, visited the plantation of Mr. B. Molare in an effort to capture the owner, who was alleged to be the leader of a guerrilla band. The troops arrived at their destination late at night. Soldiers were stationed about the premises so that no one might escape the trap. Three women and a boy were the only persons at home. "One of the ladies, a buxom widow of about 25, seemed to be spokesman for all," stated the soldier-observer. The buxom widow spoke well. She informed the Yankees that Molare, her cousin, was not at home and that he was not a guerrilla. She then told the leader of the party that he might search the house for any firearms. "Not finding any arms," recorded the writer, "the leader sent for the overseer and told him he might consider himself a prisoner and must go with us."⁵¹

⁵⁰ J.D. Rich to Andrew E. Crane, May 3, 1865 (MS. in the Andrew E. Crane Papers).

⁵¹ George G. Smith, Leaves from a Soldier's Diary; the Personal Record of Lieutenant George G. Smith, First Louisiana Regiment Infantry Volunteers (Putnam, Connecticut, 1906), 32-33. Cited hereafter as Smith, Leaves from a Soldier's Diary.

William J. Minor summarized in a terse statement the woes visited upon sugar planters by occupation authorities. This cane grower lamented: "I really know not what to do & must amid so many interests neglect some & commit many blunders. But for my wife & children I believe I would be tempted to let everything take its course & go off till the war is over." Minor asserted that he was "terribly annoyed at the troubles & difficulties that met him daily, that no sooner was one overcome than a new one arose." "I do not feel competent to contend successfully against them all," he said; "I act for the best, but I act blindly-- I am in the dark."⁵²

Cane growers sometimes turned to white labor as a substitute for unpredictable Negroes. In the fall of 1862 Effingham Lawrence of Magnolia Plantation noted: "Many crops are now Being taken off by the Federals who have come out Here with the army . . . Other places where the negroes have left have employed white Labor to take off the crop-- But find it very Difficult to get along."⁵³ Proprietors often hired as overseers entrepreneurs who brought contract Negro laborers from New Orleans. The newspapers were full of advertisements by men who possessed labor for hire, and by planters who desired to employ these men. For example,

⁵² Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, February 26.

⁵³ Magnolia Plantation Journal, November 17, 1862.

on November 29, 1864, the New Orleans Times contained a notice to the effect that an "energetic and thorough" cane and cotton cultivator wished employment on an estate within fifty or sixty miles of the city. The significant portion of the announcement stated that the employment seeker had under his control almost 100 hands, "No. 1 workers, . . . under excellent discipline."⁵⁴

By 1864 the sugar industry was threatened with extinction owing to an extreme shortage of seed cane. In their despondency, planters had ground cane that ordinarily would have been saved for planting. "What use to save cane for next year," owners asked themselves, "when for our plantations there may be no next year?" General Banks was alert to this danger. Fearing that proprietors might send all of the meager 1864-1865 harvest to the mill, Banks issued orders to prevent this catastrophe. General Order Number 138, issued on September 22, 1864, provided that all owners, lessees and managers of sugar plantations should reserve one-fourth of the year's yield as seed cane. In event of sale or transfer of plantations, sellers should be given credit for all seed cane at market value.⁵⁵

The effect of General Banks's order is indeterminable. The New Orleans Daily True Delta on February 11, 1865,

⁵⁴ New Orleans Times, November 29, 1864.

⁵⁵ New Orleans Daily True Delta, September 18, 1864.

asserted that the regulation requiring a saving of seed cane was simply in accord with the usage of all cane cultivators, when working their land. The editor scoffed at the idea that Banks's policy was an innovation.⁵⁶ Possibly sugar growers would have saved seed cane without any prodding from occupation authorities. Be that as it may, a good amount of cane was saved, and producers turned from grinding to selling seed cane in order to profit from their 1864 crop. Notices appeared in the New Orleans Times announcing cane for sale. A typical advertisement of January 12, 1865, called attention to the availability of enough cane "in mattresses" on a nearby place to plant 100 arpents of land.⁵⁷ And William J. Minor, in an effort to save as much seed cane as possible, put down eighty out of 100 acres of his crop for this purpose.⁵⁸

By February of 1865 the seed cane situation was much brighter. The editor of the New Orleans Daily True Delta wrote that the bulk of the 1864 cane had been saved as seed. Some planters had reserved all of their cane for planting purposes, and no longer was there any danger of the disappearance of sugar for lack of cane. This optimistic editorial ended, "It only requires planting and care to ripen

⁵⁶ Ibid., February 11, 1865.

⁵⁷ New Orleans Times, January 12, 1865.

⁵⁸ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, October 25, 1864.

into the fullness of a heavy crop, and crown the hopes of the trusting agriculturalist with a bounteous harvest⁵⁹

Lack of credit greatly plagued sugar growers. It has been outlined in a previous chapter how the sugar industry traditionally operated on borrowed capital. The impact of conflict upon lower Louisiana smashed the sources of credit-- commission merchants and banks. A destructive cycle developed between plantations and credit agencies; ruin of the cane estates brought ruin to the money-lenders, who, in turn, were unable to provide capital needed to rehabilitate the industry. The New Orleans Daily True Delta caught the significance of this situation, saying that the annihilation of cane crops was reflected in every bank in the city.⁶⁰

The afflictions of cane cultivators were increased by crushing Federal taxes on their produce. In June of 1864 the United States Congress levied an internal revenue tax of three and one half cents a pound on refined sugar, two cents a pound on brown sugar and five cents a gallon on cane molasses.⁶¹ In addition to this tax load, planters paid a "hospital tax" of one dollar a hogshead for the support of Negro rehabilitation colonies. And on February 6,

⁵⁹ New Orleans Daily True Delta, February 10, 1865.

⁶⁰ Ibid., December 8, 1864.

⁶¹ Ibid., August 13, 1864.

1865, General E. R. S. Canby, commander of all Union troops in Louisiana, levied a "military tax" of two dollars a hogshead on sugar.⁶² The power to tax is the power to destroy!

Deterioration of levees was to cultivators on the Mississippi River coast a disaster of the first magnitude. Before the war each landowner had maintained that section of the levee upon which his plantation abutted. The war rendered this impossible. A passage in the novel, The Earl of Mayfield, reveals the situation clearly. The author wrote that in 1862, crevasses in the levee were left wholly unrepaired owing to the complete demoralization of the owners.⁶³ On June 14, 1862, William J. Minor received information that his Waterloo Plantation was in danger of inundation. His son wrote that the water had backed up to the point that it covered all of the rear of the place. Temporary shanties had to be constructed for the Negroes, because the flood had driven them from their cabins.⁶⁴

Confederate and guerrilla forces increased the problem of flood control, often cutting the levees, either to hamper Union military operations or to drive out Government

⁶² Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 398.

⁶³ May, The Earl of Mayfield, 34.

⁶⁴ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, June 14, 1862.

lessees and collaborating planters.⁶⁵ After the Federal invasion, Northern authorities took over the repair of the Mississippi River levees.⁶⁶ Orders were issued that proprietors should comply with existent parish laws regarding levee upkeep.⁶⁷ But these measures availed little. By the end of the war large portions of the best land in the parishes of West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, Iberville, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne and St. Martin were unproductive because of overflow water.⁶⁸

The cane country did not escape the austerities that accompany war. Shortages of food, clothing, medicine and equipment drove the prices of these articles high. As early as the spring of 1862 Andrew McCollam complained that his Ellendale Plantation in Terrebonne Parish was in a critical condition for want of pork, shoes and clothing.⁶⁹ An English traveler in Louisiana in 1862 recorded the skyrocketing prices of commodities purchased by Southerners in clandestine trade with the enemy. A sack of salt brought \$130 in Confederate money; bacon, hams and shoulders seventy-

⁶⁵ Nathaniel P. Banks, Emancipated Labor in Louisiana (New York, 1864), 12.

⁶⁶ New Orleans Daily True Delta, January 30, 1863.

⁶⁷ Ibid., October 24, 1862.

⁶⁸ DeBow's Review, After the War Series, III (1867), 469-473, passim.

⁶⁹ J. Carlyle Sitterson, "The McCollams; a Planter Family of the Old and New South," Journal of Southern History, VI (1940), 359.

five cents a pound; and quinine twenty dollars an ounce.⁷⁰ As time passed, rare items grew more expensive, if not unobtainable. In August of 1862 A. Franklin Pugh, a hitherto inveterate smoker, enjoyed his last cigar.⁷¹ In April of 1864 the price of quinine in New Iberia was quoted at \$100 an ounce.⁷²

Women were perhaps more sensitive to war shortages than men. Mrs. Caroline Merrick bemoaned the lack of books, new gowns, coffee, loaf sugar and lemons. The girls of Mrs. Merrick's household made cake from bolted cornmeal. The abundance of open-kettle brown sugar enabled the people of the cane country to prepare crude cakes and candy in ample quantities.⁷³ Sarah Morgan, a refugee from Baton Rouge, longed for the many delicacies that she had once considered necessities. Her hunger for ice caused her to eat hailstones picked up in the lawn of Linwood Plantation. "Bread I believed necessary to life; vegetables, senseless," wrote Sarah; "The former I never see, and I have been forced into cultivating at least a toleration for the latter." She continued that she had learned to swallow snap

⁷⁰ W.C. Corsan, Two Months in the Confederate States; Including a Visit to New Orleans under the Domination of General Butler (London, 1863), 65.

⁷¹ Pugh Plantation Diary, August 1, 1862.

⁷² John A. Smith to John Moore, April 24, 1864 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

⁷³ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 59.

beans, but that tomatoes were too much for her.⁷⁴

Clothing was dearer than food in the cane country, for people were able to grow the latter. Cloth was so scarce that in some cases the customary proprieties of mourning had to be foregone. A young widow, whose husband died at Port Hudson, could wear no mourning clothes, owing to the lack of crepe.⁷⁵

The word "Confederate" took on a new connotation in the vocabulary of austerity. "Confederate" as an adjective came to mean crude, unfashionable, or worn-out. Confederate dresses were old, out-of-style garments. A Confederate bridle was a rope halter. Confederate silver consisted of tin cups and spoons. Confederate flour was bolted cornmeal. The girls of Linwood Plantation rode to a dress parade at nearby Port Hudson in a Confederate carriage-- a "Jersey wagon with four seats, a top of hickory slats covered with leather, and the whole drawn by mules."⁷⁶

Proprietors were forced to combat disease among their families and Negroes without adequate medical supplies. Quinine shortages made malaria a graver menace than usual. Scanty clothing, fuel and shoes invited colds and pneumonia.

⁷⁴ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 224.

⁷⁵ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 59.

⁷⁶ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 233.

Measles, whooping cough and typhoid fever struck many plantations. In October of 1862 John Moore received word that work on his St. Martin place virtually had stopped because of fever among the hands.⁷⁷ William T. Palfrey's Negroes were ravaged by typhoid fever during the summer of 1864. Several died of it, and on October 15 Palfrey recorded that he was recovering from a severe attack of the dread disease.⁷⁸

The exigencies of the times caused at least one cane grower to convert his sugar into rum in an effort to market his crop for a profit. In March of 1863 P. F. Keary, the owner of Catalpa Plantation in Rapides Parish, sold a large quantity of rum for \$17,000. He had in storage in Alexandria another 100 barrels of the fiery liquid which he calculated to be worth \$40,000.⁷⁹

William J. Minor discovered, to his disgust, that one of his Negroes was diverting sugar from what the planter considered to be its natural purpose. On January 14, 1865, Minor found that this worker had set up a still at Hollywood Plantation and was converting sugar into rum.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ I.A. Johnson to John Moore, October 14, 1862 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

⁷⁸ Palfrey Plantation Diary, October 15, 1864.

⁷⁹ Robert Newell to Mrs. Robert Newell, March 1, 1863 (MS. in the Robert Newell Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

⁸⁰ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, January 14, 1865.

One fastidious Yankee found the wartime sugar making process revolting. On December 22, 1863, a Federal soldier wrote from Plaquemine the following description, which was perhaps exaggerated:

. . . I think the process just about the nastiest affair I have anywhere witnessed. I will never again be able to take a spoonful of sugar-house molasses without thinking "rat" and having visions of extract of the filthy creatures floating through my memory, as I found them floating through the sweet mass; the living, struggling and crawling over the dead and dying animals. You may charge me with bad taste in trying to deprive you of a pleasure in the future. . . . If, however, you want to "lick 'lasses and swing on a gate," go it whilst you are young, but if you live . . . to see just such sights as I have seen you will "look twice before you leap."⁸¹

The war had given this young Northern campaigner an opportunity to look behind the curtain into the interior of the food industry, decades before the Pure Food Act was passed. Had he possessed the imagination and talent, this soldier might have written a Civil War version of The Jungle, exposing the horrors of food manufacture.

Sugar cultivators attempted two avenues of escape, neither of which was effective, from the woes brought on by military occupation. These were: fraternization with Federal provost marshals and other army officials; and the leasing of estates to men of influence, usually Northerners, who were able to procure the necessary labor and supplies to

⁸¹ Benjamin Franklin Stevenson, Letters from the Army (Cincinnati, 1884), 282-283.

make a crop.

Northern soldiers frequently assisted landowners in keeping rebellious Negroes at work on the plantations. In July of 1862 the blacks on a place near Donaldsonville refused to go into the canefields. A steamboat load of Union troops landed at the plantation wharf and marched in formation to the Negro quarter, where the hands were assembled. The officer in command informed the workers that he was there to maintain order, not to redress grievances. He then placed the ringleaders in stocks. These unfortunate blacks were heard to say, as they were led off, "Dis is more worser dan Jeff. Davis!"⁸² The owner of this place probably was a friend of a Federal provost marshal.

From time to time when laborers on Waterloo Plantation grew rebellious, William J. Minor called upon Northern soldiers to intimidate them into working.⁸³ In the fall of 1863 a number of Federal officers who dined with Minor told him of disciplinary action that they had taken that day with Negroes on the Duncan Kenner place. The officers had searched the quarter for stolen sugar, and having found fifteen barrels hidden away, they had

⁸² Watson, Life in the Confederate Army, 398.

⁸³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, August 18.

seized the laborers' corn as payment for the goods.⁸⁴ In November Minor reported to the local provost marshal the theft of a cart and team by one of his blacks. This official called in the Negro, tried him and sentenced him to confinement in jail at night on bread and water; and during the daytime the culprit was to work under guard on the levee.⁸⁵

Planter R. L. Gibson of Terrebonne Parish was representative of producers in their effort to cement relations with Federal officers and men. He was nominally loyal to the Union, though one of his sons was in the Confederate army. Gibson was a frequent visitor in the nearby Northern encampment. He persuaded the commander to station on his place a small detachment of troops to act as referees between the overseer and the hands. This plan kept the blacks at work, while the soldiers lived in Gibson's house, hunted, fished and "had a jolly time."⁸⁶

Sometimes proprietors were able to influence provost marshals either with money or favors. In February of 1863 Mrs. A. Franklin Pugh wrote to her husband, ". . . I made a p[ro]position [to the provost marshal] about sharing

⁸⁴ Ibid., September 7.

⁸⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, November 24, 1863.

⁸⁶ Marshall, Army Life; from a Soldier's Journal, 337.

whatever [the Negroes] make"87 And one observer in Louisiana declared that Federal officials dealing with Negroes had been bought or bribed, and that instead of protecting the blacks, they had become tyrants.88

The following burst of sarcasm, penned by a Union officer, neatly summarizes the liaison between many occupation officials and landowners:

My courteous Captain [previously a violent abolitionist] presently takes unto himself pleasant relationships with much-abused planters, and with widowed proprietresses of elegant mansions and sugar estates, and with ladies whose husbands and brothers are rebel generals, colonels, and the like; whereafter all awkward Northern prejudices concerning Southern institutions are gracefully waived in deference to that "good society" into which our provost-captain is post-prandially inducted, and the quondam "abolitionist" becomes "votre tres humble serviteur" to all the Creole barons and baronesses who choose to smile on him.89

The difficulties of cultivating a crop forced many owners to lease their estates to men who by political or military affiliation were in position to procure adequate labor, mules and implements to produce sugar. One of the first proprietors to hit upon this expedient was Effingham Lawrence of Plaquemines Parish. In September of 1862 he leased Magnolia Plantation to a Mr. Cusenare.90 Throughout

87 Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 257-258.

88 Charles Kassel, The Labor System of General Banks; a Lost Episode of Civil War History (n.p., n.d.), 45. Cited hereafter as Kassel, The Labor System of General Banks.

89 Duganne, Camps and Prisons, 43.

90 Magnolia Plantation Journal, January 25, 1863.

the war the New Orleans newspapers carried notices of establishments for rent or lease. The following announcement from the New Orleans Times of November 14, 1864, is typical:

Two large sugar plantations near the city.
For lease-- Plantation in Lafourche Parish containing 122 acres cleared land, 75 of which is now being planted in cane, with all the necessary utensils for working same-- mules, carts, hay, etc. Sugar house in running order.

For rent or lease-- Sugar estate known as F Gossett & Co. Plantation in the Parish of Jefferson, containing 700 acres of land or thereabouts, 220 acres in cane, 75 acres of plant cane to be sold.⁹¹

In February of 1863 A. Franklin Pugh was compelled to lease Augustin and Whitmell plantations on Bayou Lafourche to Dr. Benjamin F. Smith. The lessee agreed to provide sixty mules and all necessary tools and equipment. Pugh was to receive \$2,000 for the use of the two places for one year. Should the 1863-1864 crop exceed 200 hogsheads, Smith was to pay Pugh \$4,000.⁹²

On January 4, 1864, Emily J. Randolph, wife of John Hampden Randolph of Iberville Parish, found it necessary to engage W. I. Brown as manager of Forest Home Plantation. Brown was to provide one-third of the capital required to run the plantation. In return, he should receive one-third of the net proceeds of the year's crop. The running expenses of maintaining the place were to be paid out of the

⁹¹ New Orleans Times, November 14, 1864.

⁹² Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 250-252.

profits on the crop.⁹³

Sugar Cultivator Andrew E. Crane of St. James Parish formed a partnership with an investor named C. R. Kunemann in order to get money to make a crop. The contract required Crane to provide the land, buildings, stables, Negro cabins, machinery, tools and wood with which to produce sugar. Kunemann was to put up the capital to pay the hands' wages and to furnish seventeen pounds of pork per worker per month. Losses of equipment as the result of fire, disease or war were to be paid out of the proceeds of the crop. Crane and Kunemann were to share equally the anticipated profits.⁹⁴

Cane Producer John J. Shaffer of Terrebonne Parish agreed to let two businessmen, Moore and Lemon, have an interest in his Crescent Plantation. The two entrepreneurs were to provide the labor force and to receive half the profits of the year's output.⁹⁵

⁹³ Contract between Emily J. Randolph and W. I. Brown, January 4, 1864 (MS. in the John Hampden Randolph and Family Papers in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University).

⁹⁴ Contract between Andrew E. Crane and C.R. Kunemann, January 26, 1864 (MS. in the Andrew E. Crane Papers).

⁹⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, October 29, 1864.

A letter of March 21, 1864, from M. W. Minor to his father, William J. Minor, reveals the desperation that drove proprietors to lease, rent and form partnerships. The son recounted to his father the hardships of running Waterloo Plantation without adequate teams, with indolent Negroes, poor seed cane and guerrilla raids. Young Minor then implored, "Authorize me to rent and I will take in a partner who has and will continue to have influence over the hands (and in other places) and I will take care of the outside affairs"96

The wartime trials of planting sugar were almost insurmountable, and the number of places in operation decreased by hundreds from year to year. By 1865 over 1,000 of these once magnificent estates lay idle and forlorn. Less than 200 owners possessed the combination of determination, craft and luck necessary to weather the storm.

⁹⁶ M.W. Minor to William J. Minor, March 21, 1864 (MS. in the William J. Minor and Family Papers).

CHAPTER VIII

EMANCIPATED LABOR

Planters effectively held in line the 139,000 slaves on Louisiana sugar establishments before Union troops invaded the cane land. Rigid pass laws and alert patrols insured decorum on the part of the blacks. No attempt to rebel or flee the plantations in large numbers occurred.

But the coming of the Yankee army destroyed overnight this docility. Many of the laborers felt a deep longing for freedom, and they had known for months that a war was being waged that would affect their future. Sensing that the blue-clad soldiers were liberators, slaves flocked to the Federal encampments. The invaders first attracted the Negroes of plantations along the Mississippi below New Orleans. Throughout late April and early May of 1862 Overseer J. A. Randall scrawled into the Magnolia Plantation Journal entries like the following: "Frank Polete Antony & Olenzo Ranaway Last night and went To The Lincolnits at fort Jackson-- There is a good many negroes Leving and going to the Enemy."¹

¹ Magnolia Plantation Journal, May 7, 1862.

Childlike curiosity was a contributing motive in the departure of the Negroes from their cabins. They wished to see what manner of men these much-heralded Yankees were. On May 30 Randall recorded an incident that points up this psychology among the laborers: "Ralph Moses Eldridg and Jack Hubared Returned from the forts Jackson and St. Philip This morning-- Say they Have Seen the Eliphant and are glad to get Home."² Apparently the Federals did not impress greatly the Magnolia Plantation Negroes.

Planters below New Orleans frequently were able, during the early stages of the invasion, to retrieve runaway slaves. On June 14 Overseer Randall and numerous other managers applied to authorities at the forts for permission to take their hands home. Randall was successful, as probably were the other applicants.³

During the summer of 1862 the Negroes of the parishes below New Orleans grew increasingly restive. Owners were unable to discipline their charges because of the presence of the protecting Federal army, and the blacks were alive to this advantage. They wandered back and forth from plantations to New Orleans and Union camps almost at will. New Orleans newspapers abound in accounts of these invasions of

² Ibid., May 30, 1862.

³ Ibid., June 14, 1862.

the city by gangs of unruly Negroes. The following notice in the New Orleans Daily True Delta is typical: "This morning, about five o'clock, another gang of contrabands came up to the city from the lower coast, and succeeded in reaching the Customs-house or some other place of refuge."⁴ By the fall of 1862 New Orleans was host to about 10,000 vagrant blacks, and multitudes of others were accumulated at Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip below the city, and at Camp Parapet above.⁵

As Federal authority spread northward along the Mississippi, the problem of runaway Negroes spread with it. Mrs. Eliza McHatton stated that after the battle of Baton Rouge, blacks from every direction flocked to the Union forces. "Some went from Arlington [The McHatton place near the capital city], too," she said; "Several women, in their eagerness, and desiring to be unencumbered, left their sleeping babies in the cabin beds." At least temporarily, the maternal instinct of these women was overcome by their desire for freedom and by excitement. In acknowledgment of the loyalty of the Negroes, the Yankees

⁴ New Orleans Daily True Delta, August 6, 1862.

⁵ James Parton, General Butler in New Orleans; Being a History of the Administration of the Department of the Gulf in the Year 1862 (New York, 1864), 522. Cited hereafter as Parton, General Butler in New Orleans.

took them to New Orleans, wrote Mrs. McHatton.⁶ "The only thing that is low at Baton Rouge is the 'Contrabands,' these are plenty at a low figure," observed a Federal soldier; "They swarm in, whole plantations at a time."⁷

In October General Godfrey Weitzel's invasion of the Bayou Lafourche section opened the way for additional thousands of blacks to flee their masters. Mrs. Josephine Nicholls Pugh of Madewood Plantation described the abrupt change wrought in the behavior of the slaves by the presence of the enemy. After Yankee troops pushed past her plantation, Mrs. Pugh assembled her hands for an admonitory talk. She recorded:

They came slowly and reluctantly-- I see before me now those dark stolid faces in which I read nothing-- I was among a strange people, and was unprepared for a change so great-- I looked vainly in familiar faces for the old expression-- they listened attentively, there was no response, not a sound-- it was ominous in so excitable a people.⁸

The next morning this mistress awakened to a plantation deserted by the freedom-seeking blacks. Only a few old or sick ones remained.

During the fall A. Franklin Pugh recorded methodically the melting away of his plantation labor force. On October 28 the blacks were restive and "in a bad way."

⁶ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 46.

⁷ Lloyd (ed.), A Memorial, 48.

⁸ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 209.

Two days later they were "completely demoralized," as Pugh expressed it, and leaving the place in carts. By November 1 nearly all were gone from Augustin and Whitmell plantations, and on the third of the month only thirty-one out of 100 Negroes remained on Boatner Plantation.⁹ The great exodus from the Lafourche was under way.

General Weitzel was greatly plagued by the herds of Negroes that gathered to his brigade. His correspondence with General Butler on the matter indicates wholesale abandonment of places along the bayou. Weitzel wrote:

What shall I do about the negroes? You can form no idea of the vicinity of my camp, nor can you form an idea of the appearance of my brigade as it marched down the bayou. My train was larger than any army train for 25,000 men. Every soldier had a negro marching in the flanks, carrying his knapsack. Plantation carts filled with negro women and children, with their effects; and of course compelled to pillage for their subsistence, as I have no rations to issue them. I have a great many more negroes in my camp now than I have whites. . . . These negroes are a perfect nuisance.¹⁰

The Northern sweep up the Teche in the winter of 1862 and spring of 1863 released the bonds of additional thousands of Negroes. On November 3, 1862, William T. Palfrey hurried his slaves into the swamp behind the canefields, because he feared that shot from Federal gunboats might fall among the laborers.¹¹ A few days later Palfrey moved his

⁹ Pugh Plantation Diary, November 3, 1862.

¹⁰ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 209.

¹¹ Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 3, 1862.

blacks and their "things" to his Bayou Cypre Mort plantation where he thought they would be safer from the invaders.¹²

In May of 1863 Palfrey penned a note that demonstrated the scope of desertion by workers in the western rim of the sugar land. This Bayou Teche sugar grower recorded, "An enormous train of about 8000 negroes in carts & waggons [sic] escorted by about 2000 of the enemy's troops passed through our Parish this day, bound for Berwick's Bay." Palfrey indignantly charged that this host of slaves had been "stolen & enticed away from the planters of this Parish and the Parishes of St. Martin, Lafayette, & St. Landry."¹³

When in 1863 the Union spearhead drove into the Red River Valley, it gathered great numbers of blacks. "The Federals," accused the Alexandria Democrat, "sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction and insurrection among the servants." The editor asserted that between three and four thousand Negroes fled Rapides Parish. "Almost every planter has lost some [slaves] and a few lost all," he continued; "The deluded wretches were hurried off and a thousand stories poured into their bewildering ears" ¹⁴

¹² Ibid., November 12, 1862.

¹³ Ibid., May 25, 1863.

¹⁴ Whittington (ed.), "Concerning the Loyalty of Slaves in Louisiana in 1863," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 488.

John H. Ransdell, manager of Mooreland Plantation near Alexandria, described to Governor Thomas O. Moore, the owner, the wholesale desertion of many Rapides Parish places by their slave forces. Ransdell followed the Federal column as it withdrew to the south. He learned at Simsport on the Red River that great numbers of Negroes taken from the northern margin of the cane land had been marched to the junction of the Red with the Mississippi, whence they had been led south along the Mississippi to camps in the lower sugar parishes.¹⁵

This habit of the blacks of running away from plantations to the Yankee army continued to the end of the war. Often many workers returned to their masters, but their stay was always precarious. They might at any moment leave for the nearest camp. The following fragments are selected at random to illustrate the state of flux in which labor affairs remained during the conflict. On September 1, 1863, the New Orleans Daily True Delta referred to the situation around Baton Rouge as that of "an irrepressible rush of plantation negroes for their paradise of freedom."¹⁶ William T. Palfrey of St. Mary Parish recorded on November 6, 1863, "Negro man Joe . . . took the Yankee fever & absconded;" and two days later, "Negress Mary Ann . . . took

¹⁵ Ibid., 495.

¹⁶ New Orleans Daily True Delta, September 1, 1863.

the same fever and absconded."¹⁷ And in January of 1864 F. D. Richardson made frequent entries in the Bayside Plantation Journal similar to, "Families of Negroes going into Yankee lines."¹⁸ "Yankee fever" remained virulent among the blacks throughout the conflict.

In general, the conduct of cane country Negroes toward whites was civil. The pattern of departure from plantations was simply that of slipping away during the night. Few instances of violence occurred, in view of the vast numbers of blacks in the region and the defenseless condition of the whites.

But this exemplary behavior was not universal, and outbreaks occasionally flared. Plantation folk lived in fear of servile insurrection during much of the war. Gangs of Negroes that strayed into New Orleans from places below the city, frequently were riotous. Newspapers reflected these chaotic conditions. A sample episode demonstrates the situation. The New Orleans Daily True Delta of August 5, 1862, recorded a clash between city police and blacks from the T. A. Morgan plantation below the city. One hundred and fifty unruly workers, complaining of overwork and short rations, armed themselves with cane knives, scythe blades and clubs and marched upon New Orleans. The police

¹⁷ Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 6, 8, 1863.

¹⁸ Bayside Plantation Journal, January 8, 1864.

intercepted this mob in the outskirts of the city, and in a pitched battle that followed, one Negro was killed and several wounded. The remainder were captured.¹⁹

Early in August of 1862 two policemen who brought a Negro back to the A. Dunford plantation below New Orleans were attacked by angry blacks. Overseer J. A. Randall of Magnolia Plantation wrote, "As they started to Return home Just after Leving Dunfords House They were fierd on from the cane field Two of them woned and the other retreated to the city the supposition is that they was fierd on by negroes which is no deut the fact."²⁰

Plantation slaves along the Mississippi above New Orleans were encouraged to flee by General Butler's subordinate, General J. W. Phelps, commander of Camp Parapet at Carrollton. A Federal officer reported: "If on any of the plantations here a negro is punished when he most deserves it, the fact becoming known at General Phelps' camp, a party of soldiers are sent immediately to liberate them [sic]" This officer claimed that Phelps freed from the stocks a plantation Negro who had been convicted of barn-burning. These acts by Phelps, concluded the officer, were utterly demoralizing to the Negroes, "as they say they have only to go to the fort to be free."²¹

¹⁹ New Orleans Daily True Delta, August 5, 1862.

²⁰ Magnolia Plantation Journal, August 13, 1862.

²¹ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XV, 446.

So ominous was the menace of black rebellion, so sinister the signs, that General Weitzel, conqueror of the Lafourche zone, took alarm. On November 5, 1862, General Butler received from Weitzel the following warning concerning affairs on the Lafourche:

Symptoms of servile insurrection are becoming apparent. . . . The moral effect in this community /Thibodaux/, which is stripped of nearly all its able-bodied men and will be stripped of a great many of its arms, is terrible. Women and children, and even men, are in terror. It is heart-rending, and I cannot make myself responsible for it.²²

That afternoon Weitzel again wrote to Butler, reaffirming his fear of the blacks:

Relative to servile insurrection, I have the honor to inform you that on the plantation of Mr. David Pugh, a short distance from here, the Negroes who have returned . . . without provocation or cause of any kind refused this morning to work, and assaulted the overseer and Mr. Pugh, injuring them severely, also a gentleman who came to the assistance of Mr. Pugh. Upon the plantation also of Mr. W. J. Minor, on the Terre Bonne road, about sixteen miles from here, an outbreak has already occurred, and the entire community thereabout are in hourly expectation and terror of a general rising.²³

DeForest recorded one of the rare cases of rape that was committed by plantation Negroes. In the fall of 1862, on the Lafourche, this Federal officer served as recorder to a court martial which convicted the culprit. De Forest wrote laconically, "A stolid plantation hand (with

²² Butler, Autobiography, 496.

²³ Ibid., 497.

less intellect than a learned pig) who had criminally assaulted a white girl was condemned and hung."²⁴

General Banks's advance to the Red River in 1863 threw the Negroes of that area into delirium. The best eye-witness account of this furor was written by Manager Ransdell to Governor Moore:

. . . The arrival of the advance of the Yankees alone turned the negroes crazy. They became utterly demoralized at once and everything like subordination and restraint was at an end. Your boy Wallace and two others . . . forcibly put a Confederate soldier in the stocks at your place on Saturday night a week ago. They abused him too, very much. . . . The drivers everywhere have proved the worst negroes. . . .²⁵

These sudden outbursts of violence by Negroes occurred in scattered parts of the cane country for the duration of the conflict. William J. Minor stated in June of 1863 that one of his blacks threatened to knock the overseer in the head with a hoe.²⁶ In November Minor recorded a fight between one of his drivers and another Negro. The driver was stabbed during the fracas.²⁷

Negroes took advantage of the confusion in the vicinity of Opelousas to prey upon plantation folk near the town. Some of the gangs of desperadoes who terrorized

²⁴ DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 75.

²⁵ Whittington (ed.), "Concerning the Loyalty of Slaves in Louisiana in 1863," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 492.

²⁶ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, June 8.

²⁷ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, November 3, 1863.

the countryside in this disputed area were free Negroes; others fugitive slaves.²⁸

When from time to time the Confederate army pierced Federal positions and recovered territory previously lost, Negroes fled in panic before the Southerners. And well they might, for often returning Confederates dealt out summary justice to blacks who had acted up when Yankees approached. In the summer of 1863, as General Richard Taylor's army struck the Lafourche, workers were terrified. DeForest described them as "in a state of exquisite alarm." He said that the entire black population of the Lafourche section made for the swamps in order to escape the wrath of counterattacking Rebels.²⁹ On June 29 the manager of New Hope Plantation on the Lafourche declared that all of his blacks had taken flight.³⁰

A Union soldier stationed at Baton Rouge recorded that the Negroes looked upon the Federal army's preparations for departure from that place with great solemnity. "They fear the return of the rebels," asserted this observer.³¹

²⁸ Opelousas Courier, November 12, 1864.

²⁹ DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, 272.

³⁰ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 293.

³¹ Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers, 162.

John H. Ransdell wrote to Governor Moore in May of 1863 that Negroes near Alexandria were retreating with the last of the Yankee trains. The blacks were frightened because of mischief they had done when the Federals had approached, and their fears were kindled by a report "that the 'rebel' soldiers were coming on down and killing negroes as they came. . . ."32

A terse narrative in the plantation diary of William J. Minor reveals that the Negroes' terror of Confederates was well-founded. On August 10, 1863, Minor recorded that in May, while Southerners had temporary possession of the region near Houma, they hanged one of his Negroes. "It is said," wrote Minor, "that at the same time, a negro . . . belonging to Mr. John Bisland was hung." He continued, "It is said they were hung [by Texans] in the night in the woods near the corner of Dr. Wade's fence . . . [and] buried in the same grave."33

Negroes converted abandonment of plantations into a jubilee-- an immense revel of freedom. They flocked in gay mood to the levee as liberating Yankee steamboats paraded up the Mississippi to New Orleans. A Federal soldier who came up the river on a transport observed, "The Negroes

³² Whittington (ed.), "Concerning the Loyalty of Slaves in Louisiana in 1863," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIV (1931), 493.

³³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, August 10.

. . . gave us a good welcome from the levee, especially the colored girls, who threw kisses at us!"³⁴

Negro camps sprang up at various places in the cane country. These shanty villages, in which thousands of "freedom's children" accumulated, were located near Union army posts. The penniless creatures depended upon soldiers for rations. And, in turn, many of the troops looked to the fugitives for entertainment. General Phelps, commander of Camp Parapet above New Orleans, tried futilely to prevent these accumulations of runaways at his picket stations. In vain did he order his soldiers to break up these concentrations.³⁵

The proximity of blacks to army camps resulted in the debauch of the Negroes. The availability of slave women to Yankee soldiers resulted in a frolic of miscegenation.³⁶ Effingham Lawrence of Magnolia Plantation below New Orleans succinctly described appalling conditions prevalent among the blacks who congregated in great numbers at Algiers, across the river from New Orleans. Lawrence wrote with pity, "There [~~they~~] lived in the most abject misery Degredation [~~Sic~~] & Filth." He said that

³⁴ Gould, History of the First- Tenth- Twenty-ninth Maine Regiment, 399.

³⁵ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XV, 491.

³⁶ Kassel, The Labor System of General Banks, 41.

they died by hundreds and were buried under the floors of salt warehouses in which they lived. This great planter declared, "[They] present a scene Revolting to the sight and Repugnant to every sense of Humanity." Lawrence concluded, "They were huddled together and Remained there Living in the most Loathsome manner and committing the most Dreadful excesses of Depravity & Lechery in connexion with the soldiers of the camps-- Presenting a spectacle of the most Revolting nature."³⁷

A Union soldier who campaigned on the Lafourche in the fall of 1862 observed and recorded the behavior of Negroes who followed the army. Their manners and customs, he said, gave an infinite variety of amusements to both officers and enlisted men. At night in camp the banjo and fiddle sounded. "The sable virgins of Africa could be seen 'tripping the light fantastic toe' with the soldiers," declared this witness. "Not infrequently," he continued, "these sable nymphs would be led off by a partner in uniform."³⁸

An onlooker in the Baton Rouge area stated that swarms of blacks who gathered there were more concerned with eating bacon, sleeping and dancing than with working.³⁹

³⁷ Magnolia Plantation Journal, January 25, 1863.

³⁸ Smith, Leaves from a Soldier's Diary, 34.

³⁹ Lloyd (ed.), A Memorial, 57.

Another observer described the seductive dress of Negro girls as low-necked, "half revealing dim charms" to the troops.⁴⁰

William J. Minor wrote in disgust of the carryings-on of invading stalwarts with his laborers. On one occasion he recorded: "Soldiers & officers come on the place & go into the Quarters at all hours day & night. . . One soldier yesterday fastened his horse to a tree in the Quarter & remained in one of the houses for an hour."⁴¹

One Yankee soldier was shocked to discover that his comrades were indulging in the fleshpots. "I wish," said this disillusioned lad, "that it could be said that amalgamation is confined to the Southerners." He admitted that it was not. Seeing an old Negro woman on the levee, the soldier asked her how she supported herself since leaving the plantation. Her reply astonished him. She said that she was a midwife at camp. "Midwife at camp!" gasped the naive Yankee; "What on earth do soldiers in camp need midwives for?" "Oh!" she came back airily; "The darkey women fall in love with the Yankee soldiers, and I have to take care of the little mules."⁴²

⁴⁰ Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers, 149.

⁴¹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, September 1, 1868.

⁴² Johns, Life with the Forty-ninth Massachusetts Volunteers, 126.

Freed of restraint in matters of the spirit, Negroes frequently indulged themselves without let in exhortations and prayer meetings. Blacks on plantations along the river above New Orleans reveled in preaching and singing from sundown on Saturdays until midnight on Sundays. Federal soldiers stood on the levee and listened to the plaintive wail of the laborers. "The effect on the ears," thought one listener, "was like the effect of the great southern stream on our vision-- powerful but not sweet."⁴³

Along the Lafourche in the fall of 1862 the Negroes engaged in various forms of religious expression. "Before one group," said an onlooker, "some old gray-headed patriarch would hold forth in a religious discourse, while another assembly of fugitives nearby were enthralled in a prayer meeting."⁴⁴

The following description of the behavior of plantation hands on the Teche gives insight into the spirit of jubilee:

That night [The Negroes] built a big bonfire, and hundreds upon hundreds were dancing about it. . . . They have some good fiddlers among them, and many more that are not so good. . . . They finally got to singing, "Glory to God," and "Abe Linkum," and wound up with a prayer meeting, in which Massa Linkum and the Linkum Sogers were the names most often heard.⁴⁵

⁴³ Calvert, Reminiscences of a Boy in Blue, 196.

⁴⁴ Smith, Leaves from a Soldier's Diary, 34.

⁴⁵ Van Alstyne, Diary of an Enlisted Man, 193-194.

Dancing and praying together were an emotional outlet for the exuberant blacks.

The gravest problem confronting planters who remained on their land after the invasion was procuring sufficient labor. The great exodus that occurred when the Yankee army approached practically stripped most plantations of workers. The editor of the New Orleans Daily True Delta caught the true significance of the impact of the Federal invasion. Analyzing the plight of sugar planters, he said, "The difficulty of the Louisiana sugar planter will not be found in the imposition of a tax upon his product, but in depriving him of his labor. . . ." The analyst chose Jefferson Parish as an example. "There," said he, "many of the most valuable plantations are rapidly going to destruction because of the inducements or protection extended to the slaves to come within the camp lines of the United States soldiers."⁴⁶

In September this editor pled for Federal action to put unemployed Negroes to work. He warned of the threat of levee crevasses and destructive overflows, saying, "The swarms of idle, insolent and lazy negroes to be seen at Algiers and other camps, might be better employed. . . ."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ New Orleans Daily True Delta, July 27, 1862.

⁴⁷ Ibid., September 28, 1862.

Federal authorities, on the other hand, found themselves embarrassed by thousands of vagrant Negroes who appealed to them for rations and protection. How was this vexing problem of caring for herds of blacks seeking the dubious joys of freedom to be solved? General Butler was in a quandary. The emergency was such that on November 28, 1862, Butler wrote to President Lincoln:

Many of the planters here, while professing loyalty, and I doubt not feeling it, if the "institution" can be spared to them, have agreed together not to make any provision this autumn for another crop of sugar next season, hoping thereby to throw upon us this winter an immense number of blacks, without employment and without any means of support for the future. Thus-- the government will be obliged to come to their terms for the future employment of the negroes, or to be at the enormous expenses to support them.⁴⁸

The issue was clearly drawn. Apparently either the United States army must feed the fugitives, or they must be sent back to the plantations. Ultimately a combination of the two solutions resulted. General Butler deemed it inadvisable to declare the blacks free, thereby saddling himself with their upkeep, but he was impelled not to re-enslave them. The final decision was to hire as many as possible to planters who remained on their estates. Other Negroes were to be hired to government agents and lessees who operated abandoned plantations. And the army continued to provide subsistence for great numbers of these unfortunate

⁴⁸ Parton, General Butler in New Orleans, 527.

creatures.

Late in the summer of 1862 Butler took the first step designed to relieve the pressure of the Negroes. He authorized loyal planters of St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes to employ blacks at set wages; males to get ten dollars a month, females and children lesser sums. Planters were to provide food, shelter and medical care. In return, Negroes were to work ten hours a day, twenty-six days a month. Butler prohibited corporal punishment, but allowed proprietors to report hands to local provost marshals for disciplinary purposes. Negroes of disloyal planters might hire themselves to loyal landowners.⁴⁹

The inception of the Government policy of hiring vagrant Negroes and working abandoned and confiscated plantations came in the fall of 1862. On October 20 General Butler issued Special Order Number 441, authorizing one Charles A. Weed to take over two abandoned places on the river below New Orleans. Weed might also take possession of any other deserted estates between the city and Fort Jackson. He was to requisition labor from Negro camps and supplies from the Quartermaster Department. Weed was to receive a salary for his services. Receipts from the plantations were to go to the United States army.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid., 523.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The experiment appeared successful to Union authorities. In November of 1862 Butler issued General Order Number 91, expanding to all Federal territory in Louisiana the plan for hiring Negroes, which he had devised for the two lower sugar parishes. The order contained the following provisions:

VI. The /sequestration/ commission is authorized to employ in working the plantation of any person who has remained quietly at home . . . the negroes who may be found in the said District. . . .

VIII. The commissioners are authorized to work for the account of the United States such plantations as are deserted by their owners or are held by disloyal owners, as may seem to be expedient, for the purpose of saving the crops.⁵¹

A supplement to General Order Number 91 brought forward the provisions outlined for Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes regarding wages, planter responsibility and discipline of laborers.⁵²

These measures adopted by Federal authorities afforded little relief to stricken planters. Negroes who had stayed on the plantations after the Yankee invasion continued to work little and play much. From time to time they grew surly and rebellious. Those on Woodland Plantation below New Orleans were in August of 1862 ". . . rather in a state of munity /sic/," said Overseer Randall of Magnolia

⁵¹ New Orleans Daily True Delta, November 11, 1862.

⁵² Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XV, 592-594.

Plantation. A few days later Randall reported that hands on Oaklands Plantation near Magnolia "had refused to do a days work, Stating that they was Half fed and half clothed and they was not a going to do Eny moore work Per day than they had Don."⁵³

During the fall, conditions grew worse for proprietors. The Union army commenced its policy of taking possession of abandoned places along the river. Effingham Lawrence of Magnolia Plantation opined that the Yankees were agitating his laborers to drive him from his establishment in order that it might be seized. Lawrence declared, "We have a Terrible state of affairs here negroes Refusing to work and women all in their Houses." The blacks erected a gallows on Magnolia Plantation, saying that Federal officers had told them to hang or drive away their master and overseer, and that they then would be free. Lawrence charged that Northerners incited Negroes on Pointe Celeste Plantation near Magnolia to drive the overseer off the place.⁵⁴

Lawrence apparently possessed unusual ability in managing his Negroes. He quieted them on November 1 with the promise of a "Handsome Present" if they would continue to work faithfully. Magnolia Plantation laborers remained

⁵³ Magnolia Plantation Journal, August 16, 1862.

⁵⁴ Ibid., October 21, 1862.

at work, but Lawrence's production dropped from over 1,800 hogsheads in 1862 to 500 the next season. Lawrence was pleased with the conduct of his workers, considering the state of affairs throughout the cane country. He felt that his discretion in handling them was a vindication of slavery over free Negro labor. "But there is one thing very certain," he stated: "On none of these places where Negroes were paid wages have the slaves done as well . . . as they have on Magnolia Plantation." The Magnolia Plantation owner continued, ". . . Gross attempts were made to Deprive me of the services of my negroes . . . by accusing me of Being a Rebel Registered Enemy-- attempts made on every side But the negroes have Remained so Far Faithful and obedient and are now going on with Planting a new Crop."⁵⁵

Lawrence accused Federal agents who worked abandoned plantations with enticing Negroes away from their masters. This great planter declared that although loyal owners were authorized by authorities to arrest and bring home their runaways, actually these proprietors were bankrupt and unable to support their labor forces. "Their sugar & equipment have been taken," he asserted, "& they can get no credit." Despite the adverse circumstances

⁵⁵ Ibid., January 25, 1863.

brought on by hostile occupation, Lawrence was faithful to his promise of a present to the Negroes. On January 25, 1863, he wrote, "I came down yesterday for the Purpose of distributing \$2500 in money among the negroes as a Present For there good conduct in Remaining on the Plantation in obedience to my wishes."⁵⁶

General Butler quite naturally wished to report favorably on the outcome of his free labor experiment. Butler and Effingham Lawrence represented opposite poles of opinion on the effectiveness of hired Negro labor. On November 28, 1862, Butler wrote to President Lincoln, "Our experiment in attempting the cultivation of sugar by free labor, I am happy to report is succeeding admirably." The general boasted that on one plantation, a government agent had turned out more hogsheads of sugar in a day than ever had been done on the same place by slave labor. Butler concluded smugly, "Your friend, Colonel Shaffer, has had put by, to be forwarded to you, a barrel of the finest sugar ever made by free black labor in Louisiana; and the fact that it will have no flavor of the degrading whip, will not, I know, render it less sweet to your taste."⁵⁷

Federal liberators sought miracles in the performance

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Parton, General Butler in New Orleans, 525.

of free Negro laborers. They conveniently found their miracles. Actually, Butler did not remain in command of the Department of the Gulf long enough to test his system. Time would give the answer.

Louisiana produced 87,231 hogsheads of sugar during the 1862-1863 season.⁵⁸ This figure, which is less than one-fifth that of the previous season, is not an accurate index to the efficacy of free Negro labor. Reflected therein are all of the wartime handicaps-- destruction, abandonment of plantations and general demoralization of the people. But certainly one great factor in the precipitate drop of sugar production was lack of dependable labor.

In December of 1862 General Butler bequeathed to General Nathaniel P. Banks the thankless chore of providing for about 150,000 Negroes within the lines of the Department of the Gulf. Many of these blacks were at the time employed in pursuance of General Order Number 91, on establishments within the department. Some were on government plantations, but most employed workers were hired to "old planters"-- owners who had weathered invasion and remained on their places.

Banks desired to know the condition of the masses of workers. Wishing to see the situation through the eyes

⁵⁸ DeBow's Review, After the War Series, IV (1867), 240.

of Negroes, he dispatched a commission of about twenty intelligent blacks to visit the estates and investigate needs of the laborers. The sequestration commission was ordered to confer with planters and set up a labor system based upon its findings and those of the Negro investigating commission.

On January 12, 1863, a committee of prominent sugar planters, including William J. Minor, called upon General Banks to give him their views of steps necessary to revive the industry. Banks met them with the righteous arrogance of a sublimely ignorant theorist. He bluntly told the planters that he was not interested in their ideas regarding the management of Negroes; that the owners were full of "theories, & opinions based on the old system." "We must look to the new state of things," Banks announced smugly; "To the future and not to the past." The Yankee general then turned prophet, saying, "In three years La. would produce four (4) times as much sugar as she ever did."⁵⁹ The supreme folly of these hopeful words would be demonstrated shortly.

Banks instructed the sequestration commission to organize a labor system on a yearly contract basis; planters to provide suitable wages, food and clothing. A

⁵⁹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, January 8.

lien on proprietors' crops was to cover the Negroes' annual wages. Banks authorized the commission to pick up all idle blacks and place them on abandoned lands, where the army would employ them.⁶⁰

The sequestration commission implemented Banks's instructions with an order authorizing owners and laborers to draw up contracts for the following year. The Negroes, read the order, were "to work faithfully and industriously, and maintain a respectful and subordinate deportment toward their employers." Planters should respect scrupulously the terms of contracts. All workers who refused to enter into these contracts were to be employed on public works or abandoned plantations.⁶¹

The order set a wage scale for laborers. Mechanics, sugar makers and drivers were to receive three dollars a month; male field hands two dollars; and female field hands, house servants and nurses one dollar. In addition to these wages, sugar producers were to provide food, lodging, medical care and support for dependents. If cane growers and laborers agreed, one twentieth of the profit of the year's crop might be paid the hands in lieu of monthly wages. Two great differences between this system and slavery were:

⁶⁰ Banks, Emancipated Labor in Louisiana, 33.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Negroes might contract with planters of their choice; and discipline lay with Federal provost marshals rather than owners. Wages were more than masters had been wont to give slaves, but proprietors under slavery had usually handed out money from time to time in the form of presents and bonuses.⁶²

Landowners went about during the winter and spring of 1863 making contracts with as many Negroes as they could round up. B. F. Smith-- lessee on three of the Pugh places on the Lafourche-- worked out an elaborate contract whereby workers might receive either wage payments or a fraction of the crop, as they preferred. The blacks agreed to work from daylight until dark, obey the manager and go to their cabins at the tap of the night bell. Laborers were held responsible for loss or damage of equipment. Liquor was banned, except for use in the plantation hospital. Workers should not leave the place without a written pass. All disputes among hands were to be settled by the manager, and small fines were established as punishment for misdemeanors. Each Negro family received a garden plot of one-half acre of land. And the manager agreed to pay extra wages in grinding season and to give bonuses to superior workers, if the crop exceeded five hogsheads per hand.⁶³

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 270-271.

William J. Minor drew up a contract similar to Smith's, but with variations. His Negroes agreed to receive one twentieth of the year's crop. Minor's plan was to mark one hogshead of sugar out of twenty with the letters "N.S." When the sugar was sold, money from these marked hogsheads was to be distributed to workers on a share basis. Mechanics should get three shares each, field hands two each, and women, nurses and "half hands"-- boys and girls-- one each. Minor took steps to maintain discipline among his laborers. This Terrebonne planter decreed that no Negro should leave the place without a pass, but cautioned his overseer that the lash not be used "at present" in enforcing the order.⁶⁴ Minor feared that his laborers would desert him at the slightest provocation. In April of 1863 he instructed his overseer to allow Negroes to haul moss to Houma. The overseer was to refrain from using harsh language and to obey meticulously orders of the local provost marshal. Negroes were permitted religious services, "So long as the religious ones behave d well."⁶⁵

Negroes of the cane country worked desultorily during the spring and summer of 1863. In the absence of

⁶⁴ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1868, February 12, 1863.

⁶⁵ Ibid., February 12.

the old type of discipline, they were prone to trifle. Though Manager Dwyer of Augustin Plantation on Bayou Lafourche wrote A. Franklin Pugh that in general the blacks were "adoning as wel as the y did under the ole Sistem," he added that they could not be pushed as fast as under the slavery regime.⁶⁶ W. W. Pugh recorded that the men on his plantation on the Lafourche worked well, but that the women were idle and impudent.⁶⁷

Planter Andrew McCollam stated in March that laborers on his Ellendale Plantation in Terrebonne Parish were acting "villainously." So refractory were they, he said, that he had hopes only of making enough seed cane for the next season.⁶⁸

The grinding season of 1863 brought increased pressure upon plantation workers and put to the test the Federal scheme of free labor. In October a letter to the editor of the New Orleans Bee predicted a meager crop in Plaquemines Parish as the result of scarce labor.⁶⁹ The New Orleans Daily True Delta reproduced an article from the Thibodaux Sentinel to the effect that workers were hard to

⁶⁶ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 267.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sitterson, "The McCollams; a Planter Family of the Old and New South," Journal of Southern History, VI (1940), 359-360.

⁶⁹ New Orleans Bee, October 14, 1863.

find; and once found they were lazy and inefficient.⁷⁰

The editor of the New Orleans Bee on October 19 warned that from 10,000 to 15,000 hogsheads of sugar were in danger of being lost from lack of labor. He reiterated the plea that Federal authorities force thousands of idle blacks in New Orleans to work in the harvest.⁷¹

William J. Minor's plantation diaries painted a dismal picture of free Negro labor. In September Minor lamented, "[The Negroes] steal everything they can lay their hands on."⁷² A few days later he asserted that workers spent most of their time hauling moss to Houma in plantation carts. "To get the moss," the owner mourned, "they cut down the finest trees on the estate, not even sparing the Cypress trees, which are so valuable." Minor concluded the entry, saying, "It seems to me the [overseers] have lost all control over the negroes & are consequently of no worth to me. . . ."⁷³

In October Minor learned that his laborers were hiring out, for their profit, his carts and teams to citizens of Houma. Sadly he commented: "Oliver had a hand

⁷⁰ New Orleans Daily True Delta, October 15, 1863.

⁷¹ New Orleans Bee, October 19, 1863.

⁷² Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, September 5.

⁷³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, September 29, 1863.

in this. . . . Yet he is one of the religious ones--
 Their religion does not prevent them from Stealing, lying
 & other vices."⁷⁴ Miner's hands worked poorly in the har-
 vest. In November he recorded that they refused to go to
 the field before breakfast, allowed the kettles to boil
 out of juice, and fed the rollers too slowly.⁷⁵ Through-
 out the fall, they malingered. They refused to get up in
 the morning because the weather was too cold. They left
 the sugarhouse in order to gather their corn. The sick
 rate was tremendous. Suddenly, in the middle of the after-
 noon, a Negro would walk out of the canefield; all of the
 others would follow, and work was over for the day.⁷⁶
 This Terrebonne Parish cane planter claimed that some
 Negroes refused to work at night. This meant that during
 the grinding season, fires would go out under the boiler,
 thus creating a tremendous waste in time and fuel. Minor
 lamented, "The wish of the negro is now the white man's
 law," and concluded, "A man had as well be in pergatory
 [Sic] as attempt to work a sugar plantation, under existing
 circumstances."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid., October 12, 1863.

⁷⁵ Ibid., November 11, 1863.

⁷⁶ Ibid., November 16, 1863.

⁷⁷ Ibid., November 14, 1863.

Negro women were the worst offenders of all. With exaggerated independence they refused to put in a full day of work. "The sucklers," said Minor, "are the most lazy insolent and worthless." He declared that they usually got to the field at about nine thirty in the morning; worked until eleven thirty; returned to work at three in the afternoon; and quit at five. One black woman, Kitty Johnson, led this sit-down movement. She was insolent if told that she did not work enough to support herself.⁷⁸

Minor's feelings toward his laborers may be gauged by an interesting list of names in the back of his 1863-1868 diary. Under the provocative heading, "Faithful among the Faithless-- Faithful only they," Minor wrote the names of twenty-eight Negroes. From time to time the faithful wavered. Beside many names, the owner jotted, "Fell from grace." In front of numerous names are the words, "Fight," "Threats," and "Knife." By Kitty Johnson's name, Minor wrote the distinctive comment, "The insolence & lies of this woman exceed belief." The names of five Negro families were placed in a separate column under the caption, "Worthless or Insolent & not worth Keeping." On the other hand, some of the blacks remained faithful. By the name of one worker, Kitty Perkins, Minor penned, "Has worked all the morning in a cold rain putting up hay." And beside the

⁷⁸ Ibid., November 27, 1863.

names of several Negroes, Minor noted produce he had given them as bonuses for diligent service. For example, the proprietor scrawled, "Peter Williams & Hany Taylor must be remembered."⁷⁹

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued his famous emancipation proclamation which freed slaves of owners in states in rebellion. Lincoln exempted from this action the thirteen sugar parishes in Federal hands.⁸⁰ The document applied to only ten northernmost cane parishes. Quite naturally, proprietors in the favored zone were happy. What was the reaction of masters in sugar parishes not exempted?

An observer who was in the vicinity of Baton Rouge-- where emancipation applied-- early in 1863 declared that owners made no attempt to conceal the proclamation from their slaves. One sugar producer had the document read to his Negroes. He explained the terms of President Lincoln's pronouncement and told his hands that if they desired freedom they need not rebel to get it. "[You] need not endanger [your] own lives or stain [your] hands with bloodshed," said the master, "for [you] are now at liberty to go if [you] please." The Negroes realized that merely walking

⁷⁹ Ibid., in back of diary.

⁸⁰ John Rose Ficklen, History of Reconstruction in Louisiana through 1868 (Baltimore, 1910), 124.

off the plantation would not benefit them in any way. They replied that they had no desire to leave. When asked why the blacks did not seize this opportunity to break their bonds, an intelligent slave replied: "I see no use of us going and getting ourselves into trouble. If so be it we are to get free, we get it anyhow We think it betterer [sic] to stay home on the plantation, and get our food and our clothes." This Negro continued: "If we are to get freedom, dare we are! But, if we run away, and go to New Orleans, like dem crazy niggers, where is we?"⁸¹

Another sugar cultivator read the proclamation to his slaves and interpreted it in such a manner as to make it ridiculous in their eyes. He pointed out that the decree applied only to areas not in Federal hands; that Negroes in sections held by the Union army were yet slaves. This crafty master then explained:

This place [West Baton Rouge Parish] is uncertain. Both parties claim it, and we don't know which Government it is under. If it is under Lincoln's Government, then he says in that proclamation that you are to be slaves; but if it is under Jefferson Davis's Government, then he (Lincoln) says in that proclamation that you are to be free. So I can't tell you what you are to be until we see which government we are going to be under. But there is one thing that I can tell you, that is, if you are within Jefferson Davis's country Mr. Lincoln says you

⁸¹ Watson, Life in the Confederate Army, 429-430.

are to be free, though I doubt it very much, because he has not the power there to make you free. But if you are in New Orleans or any place within the lines held by Mr. Lincoln's armies, then Mr. Lincoln says you are to be slaves, and there is no doubt about that, because he has there the power to make and keep you slaves.⁸²

Apparently slaveowners in the cane country realized the futility of trying to conceal the proclamation from their wards. Therefore, masters read the document to the blacks and risked the outcome. Lincoln's action had little or no discernible effect on the Negroes.

Conscription of Negro men into the Federal army greatly annoyed sugar planters. During the summer of 1863 the Yankees commenced this practice. In August William J. Minor asserted that a Union soldier was going about Terrebonne Parish taking down names of all proprietors and the number of Negro men on each estate. Minor surmised, "This I presume is preparatory to a draft of the negro men."⁸³ On August 17 the Union authorities took a total of ten men from Minor's Hollywood and Southdown plantations.⁸⁴ From time to time throughout the summer and fall additional Negro men were taken from the Minor places. When on September 19 fourteen blacks were seized, Minor stated that their families were in "deep distress." One

⁸² Ibid., 430.

⁸³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, August 17.

⁸⁴ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, August 17, 1863.

of the Negro men requested Minor to take care of his family. The planter recorded in his diary, "I will do all I can for them."⁸⁵

The Lafourche area felt keenly the effect of Federal conscription of laborers. On August 8, 1864, A. Franklin Pugh noted that he had attended a meeting of planters, held for the purpose of sending a committee to General Banks to protest the proposed taking of hands from plantations. "We hope to gain time, which may enable us to save our crop," he explained; "If they execute the orders out, we shall be ruined." A week later Pugh wrote resignedly, "They have commenced conscripting negroes in the parish, and are taking them by the dozens."⁸⁶

Federal seizure of Negroes on the Teche was sometimes without warning. On November 9, 1863, William T. Palfrey recorded, "A squad of federal soldiers this Day rushed suddenly into my corn field at Bayou Cypre Mort where the hands were gathering corn & forced off without the opportunity of taking leave of their families thirteen of the negro men." Two days later Palfrey added, "Another squad came today & took away in the same manner three more."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ibid., September 19, 1863.

⁸⁶ Pugh Plantation Diary, August 8, 15, 1864.

⁸⁷ Palfrey Plantation Diary, November 9, 1863.

Conscription of plantation Negroes continued to harass sugar producers throughout the war. On August 18, 1864, a Union soldier stationed in St. Mary Parish left this picture of the reaction of the blacks to Federal impressment: ". . . Some conscripting officers came up from New Orleans and conscripted some of the colored men. . . . Some of the colored women appeared nearly frantic when they were parted from their men."⁸⁸

The handicaps of inefficient labor, interference by military authorities, and activities of Union conscription officers hindered but did not stop planters from making a crop. Producers struggled to maintain plantation routine, and sugar making with hired Negro labor proceeded during the fall and winter of 1863. Yankees on junkets to sugar establishments discovered a variety of opinions among proprietors regarding the value of free labor. Northern observers and most agents and lessees of government plantations looked with far greater approval upon the experiment than did "old planters."

On December 3 a Federal investigating commission visited plantations along the river below New Orleans. The visitors observed conditions on Pointe Celeste, Sarah, Oaklands and Star plantations. Pointe Celeste and Sarah were in the hands of government agents; Oaklands and Star were

⁸⁸ Marshall, Army Life; from a Soldier's Journal, 398.

leased from the Union authorities by a loyal woman. All of these places had been abandoned by their owners and taken over by the Union army. The commission found what it sought, and the free labor system was declared an overwhelming success.⁸⁹

On December 15 a large group of observers, including Military Governor G. F. Shepley and Mrs. Nathaniel P. Banks, journeyed down the river to Magnolia and Woodlands plantations to witness the progress of free labor. They were disappointed in their findings. The manager of the two estates reported that he supplemented his Negro labor force with whites, who could do four times as much work per man.⁹⁰

A party of New Yorkers and Bostonians journeyed on December 25 to the Rost plantation below New Orleans. This establishment was operated by a Yankee firm that leased from the government numerous abandoned places. The Northerners inspected the sugarhouse and watched the process of sugar making. They then went to the dwelling house where they enjoyed a fine dinner and were entertained by Negro singers and dancers. Thus, sumptuously wined and dined, these Yankee sight-seers, who probably knew nothing about sugar making, pompously pronounced free Negro labor a great success.⁹¹

⁸⁹ New Orleans Era, December 3, 1863.

⁹⁰ Ibid., December 25, 1863.

⁹¹ Ibid., December 25, 1863.

By the end of 1863 the deteriorating sugar industry exposed the error of Banks's hasty and ill-advised promise of a year before. At that time the general had rashly predicted a sensational recovery of sugar growing as the result of free labor. Instead, the picture was more discouraging than ever. The total sugar production of the 1863-1864 season was 76,801 hogsheads. The yield had dropped more than 10,000 hogsheads since the previous season and would have been much smaller but for the fact that much of the crop had been made from stubble cane.⁹²

The problem of dealing with vagrant Negroes and abandoned and confiscated plantations continued throughout the war to vex commanders of the Department of the Gulf. Late in 1863 James E. Yeatman, president of the Western Sanitary Commission, investigated conditions of Negroes in the lower Mississippi Valley. On December 17 Yeatman made a report in which he outlined in detail a plan for free Negro labor. Many of his suggestions were similar to measures already in effect under General Banks. In addition to a wage scale for blacks, Yeatman called for abandoned plantations to be leased to Negroes by the government. He also recommended that a number of places be set aside as colonies, under government agents, for

⁹² DeBow's Review, After the War Series, IV (1867), 240.

destitute Negroes.⁹³ These colonies were comparable to displaced persons' camps of World War II. On July 2, 1864, Congress passed an act placing the Treasury Department in charge of Negro affairs and abandoned lands. The Secretary of the Treasury appointed W. P. Mellen supervising agent in the lower Mississippi Valley, with Yeatman as assistant agent.⁹⁴

In the meantime, General Banks was confronted with the actual emergency of caring for thousands of idle and lazy Negroes. Plantations continued to deteriorate for lack of labor. On February 3, 1864, Banks attempted to deal with the problem by issuing new regulations covering Negro affairs. His General Order Number 23 reiterated most of the provisions of the sequestration commission's instructions of a year earlier. Planters were to grade laborers into four classes according to merit. Wages ranged from three dollars a month for the lowest class to eight dollars for the highest. The penalty for crime or indolence was forfeiture of pay. Proprietors might also dock wages for sickness. Provost marshals remained judges in disciplinary cases. And planters were to provide workers with cabins, food, clothes, medical care and a garden plot for each family.⁹⁵

⁹³ James E. Yeatman, Suggestions of a Plan of Organization for Freed Labor (St. Louis, 1864), 3.

⁹⁴ Paul S. Peirce, The Freedmen's Bureau (Iowa City, 1904), 23-24.

⁹⁵ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XXXIV, Pt. II, 227-231.

During the summer of 1864 General Banks created a bureau of free labor, with Chaplain Thomas W. Conway in charge. The establishment of this organization caused a confusing overlap of authority in Negro affairs in the cane country, for both Chaplain Conway and Treasury Department Agent Mellen claimed jurisdiction.⁹⁶

While armies contended for supremacy, and planters strove to harvest crops, events everywhere moved inexorably toward emancipation of the slaves. General Butler at Fort Monroe, Virginia, before the invasion of Louisiana had refused to return "contrabands" to owners-- an initial step in the liberation process. And though the premature freeing of slaves by General John C. Fremont in Missouri in 1861 and General David Hunter in Georgia, Florida and South Carolina in 1862 had been repudiated by the Lincoln government, these were part of the trend toward freedom. On July 17, 1862, Congress had seized the initiative, enacting that slaves of masters supporting the rebellion, and United States soldier-slaves were free. But lack of coordination between Congress and President had made these acts ineffective.⁹⁷

The orders of generals Banks and Butler relative to

⁹⁶ Peirce, The Freedmen's Bureau, 18.

⁹⁷ Randall, The Civil War and Reconstruction, 478-482, passim.

Negro labor in Louisiana waived the question of emancipation, taking for granted the obvious de facto freedom of all blacks within Union authority. President Lincoln's emancipation proclamation of January 1, 1863, freed no slaves in Union Louisiana, and Lincoln had no power actually to set free anyone in Confederate Louisiana. Therefore, the situation at the end of 1863 was: Negroes of that portion of the state within Federal lines were in fact free and were receiving wages for their labor, though no authority had manumitted them; while those within the Confederate sphere were in fact slaves, though the President of the United States had declared them free.⁹⁸

In January of 1864 Banks proclaimed all laws in Louisiana recognizing and regulating slavery inoperative. Presumably this legally set free all Negroes in Union Louisiana, though the courts were confused as to the efficacy of the action. This confusion was ended when in September the Louisiana constitutional convention declared all slaves in the state free.⁹⁹

Proprietors commenced in the winter of 1864 to contract with Negroes for the coming year under the terms of Banks's General Order Number 23. Landowners of the Bayou Lafourche section met and adopted a resolution to pay blacks

⁹⁸ Wiley, Southern Negroes, 211-216, passim.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 217.

one fourteenth of the crop for their services.¹⁰⁰ William J. Minor contracted with his laborers, agreeing to pay wages rather than a portion of the crop. Minor stated: "They must be required to work-- That is Nine hours a day-- the winter months & ten hours a day in the other months." "All lost time no matter from what cause must be deducted & they must be credited only with the time they do actually work," continued Minor; "If the forfeiture of wages does not make them work, their rations of all Kinds must be Stopped [sic] & if that does not make them work they must be put off the place."¹⁰¹

Free Negro labor remained unpredictable and on many places unsatisfactory. In March William T. Palfrey wrote that the blacks on Bayou Teche were "insolent and refractory."¹⁰² William J. Minor had trouble keeping his laborers on the job. In May he put into effect a policy of deducting from one quarter of a day's to a week's wages for the disobedience of an order.¹⁰³ In July the overseer on Whitmell Plantation on the Lafourche gave a Negro "a good punishment."¹⁰⁴ This action exceeded the power granted to

¹⁰⁰ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 327.

¹⁰¹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, February 22, 1864.

¹⁰² Palfrey Plantation Diary, March 16, 1864.

¹⁰³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1865, May 23, 1864.

¹⁰⁴ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 343.

overseers by General Order Number 23, which required that disciplinary cases be submitted to the local provost marshal for settlement.

Plantation affairs grew so chaotic during the fall that General Banks was forced to admit defeat to the sugar growers. This man, who two years before had lectured cane planters on the virtues of free Negro labor and predicted a fourfold increase in sugar output, was obliged to concede tacitly the failure of his system. He invited the same men whom he had rebuffed previously to write letters of advice regarding the resuscitation of the sugar culture. Cane producers showered the New Orleans newspapers with replies.

On October 13 "A Planter" delivered the opening salvo against the new labor system. He scathingly reminded Banks of his wild prophesy of two years earlier. "Two years have passed," declared the sugar grower. Instead of an increase in production, many planters had no corn, and the parish in which the writer lived did not possess enough seed cane to plant one-fourth of the land formerly in cane. This irate proprietor said that his male workers had wasted during the previous grinding season one-sixth of the working time; his female hands one-third. The writer scoffed at the idea of starving laborers into working, saying that it was cheaper to feed them from the

storeroom than drive them to steal livestock. The sugar producer then took a dig at government plantations, declaring that if it were possible to starve Negroes, they would have died on places run by Federal agents. "Some call this [government plantation] the model farm," he sneered, "but I know not for what reason, unless it be that its occupants live without work."

The scornful planter claimed that he could not get laborers to repair fences, buildings or ditches. They insisted on doing nothing but working in the cane crop. Sanitary conditions in the cabins were deplorable. "High wages," concluded the writer, "will not make a lazy negro, industrious."¹⁰⁵

On October 21 another sugar grower launched a condemnation at the free labor plan. He said that 1863 was a good year for cane, except for poor labor. His plantation should have produced 800 hogsheads. Instead, by hiring forty white workers, in addition to Negroes, and buying \$2,000 worth of wood, the owner managed to put up 400 hogsheads. He expected to make only about fifty hogsheads during the 1864-1865 season. The cultivator's misadventure ended, "Stealing is the order of the day."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ New Orleans Times, October 13, 1864.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., October 21, 1864.

On November 2 an "Old Planter" joined the hue and cry against free Negro labor. He attacked the pilfering and thieving that blacks carried on. In twelve months his laborers had stolen more than \$1,000 worth of copper from his sugarhouse, sending it out in bales of moss. Harrows, hoes, plows, axes and saws had disappeared. So many hogs, sheep and poultry had been stolen, according to the sugar producer, that he had to buy this produce back from the workers.

The "Old Planter" asserted, "Demoralization of the sexes is shocking." He accused that Negroes congregated at night in order to spread news on how to escape work. "They work less, have less respect, are less orderly than ever," charged this dissatisfied proprietor.¹⁰⁷

On December 28 another "Old Planter" gave his views of the labor situation. This cane grower was more sympathetic toward Union authorities than other critics had been. He felt that the government was sincere in its efforts to revive sugar culture, but had failed because of ignorance. According to him, Federal authorities should be more concerned with the welfare of planters than that of Negroes. If planters prospered, laborers would prosper; if planters failed, workers must fail.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., November 2, 1864.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., December 28, 1864.

In November of 1864 William J. Minor recorded that a number of Terrebonne Parish planters met at his estate to discuss sugar possibilities for the next year. They agreed that free labor had proved a complete failure.¹⁰⁹

In the fall of 1864 Benjamin F. Flanders replaced Mellen as supervising special agent of Negro affairs for the Treasury Department. On October 26 Flanders announced that he was ready to take charge of freedmen in the Department of the Gulf.¹¹⁰ For a few months landowners were subject to Flanders's regulations regarding labor. In March of 1865 General Stephen A. Hurlbut, successor to General Banks, issued General Order Number 23.¹¹¹ This order superseded Treasury Department instructions and brought Negro affairs and abandoned lands back under the authority of the army. On March 3, 1865, Congress passed an act establishing a Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. This new agency-- commonly known as the Freedmen's Bureau-- soon took over management of Negro labor in the cane country.¹¹²

While administrative changes occurred, and confusion

¹⁰⁹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, November 17, 1864.

¹¹⁰ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XLVIII, Pt. I, 492-493.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1146-1148. On September 23, 1864, General Hurlbut replaced General Banks as commander of the Department of the Gulf.

¹¹² Peirce, The Freedmen's Bureau, 129.

became worse confounded, the sugar industry continued to dissolve. In November of 1864 Benjamin F. Flanders assembled the leading planters of lower Louisiana for a conference. Once again cane growers were able to air their grievances. The proprietors told Flanders that the Negroes were lazy, dishonest and insolent; that they would work only in the presence of a provost marshal. When the provost marshal left the plantation, laborers lapsed into old habits. Punishing Negroes by withholding rations was a farce. The blacks were past masters at foraging. The cane growers desired laws making workers responsible for teams. Blacks should be prohibited from owning livestock, thought the sugar producers, because of the tendency to steal the owners' corn. Negroes should be required to have passes in order to leave the plantation. And the planters requested Flanders to set a nine o'clock curfew on workers. In essence, the cane growers desired to return as nearly as possible to the slave discipline. But Flanders refused to go along with the landowners, and no effective action resulted from the meeting.¹¹³

On February 5, 1865, Flanders published new instructions regarding Negro labor. Wages were set at twenty-five, twenty and fifteen dollars a month for various classes of male workers and at eighteen, fourteen and ten dollars

¹¹³ New Orleans Times, November 22, 1864.

for female laborers. Negroes were to buy their own food and clothing; proprietors to furnish cabins and other necessities. Discipline was to be supervised by local Treasury Department agents. And all deductions from and forfeitures of wages were to be made with the approval of a Treasury Department official.¹¹⁴

Hardly was the ink dry on these Treasury Department regulations, when General Hurlbut issued General Order Number 23, superseding all other instructions concerning the blacks. The terms of Hurlbut's order were similar to those of Banks's order of the same number a year before. Wages were different. Male workers were to receive from six to ten dollars a month; women from five to eight dollars. Boys under fourteen years of age were to be paid three dollars a month; girls two dollars. Landowners were to provide cabins, food, clothing and medical care; and Negro families were to be given garden plots. Hurlbut made one concession to cane growers; blacks were prohibited from owning livestock.¹¹⁵

The sugar crop of 1864-1865 dropped to less than 10,000 hogsheads. This was under three per cent of the 1861-1862 yield. The inefficiency of free Negro labor

¹¹⁴ Ibid., February 5, 1865.

¹¹⁵ Official Records, Ser. I, Vol. XLVIII, Pt. I, 492-493.

during those troubled war years was a great factor in this plummeting of sugar production.¹¹⁶

In justice to the Negro, it must be said that his "insolence," "indolence" and "demoralization"-- to borrow the sugar planters' terms-- were natural reactions to the situation. No race or group could suddenly have the bonds of slavery loosed without indulging in a period of jubilation. Nor could the unschooled black know that freedom meant freedom to work, not freedom from work. And besides the exuberance that accompanied liberation, the Negroes were filled with a desire to possess their own land-- a wish stimulated by vague promises of "forty acres and a mule" to each freedman.

On the other hand, most Louisiana sugar growers firmly believed that without slave labor their plantations would be worthless. Bred in this conviction, they could see no good in hired labor. This a priori condemnation made it almost impossible for producers to find any value in the new order, just as Northern preconceptions caused Yankees to exaggerate its virtues. And the combination of planter prejudice, Negro unpredictability and official intransigence resulted in chaos on the plantations.

¹¹⁶ DeBow's Review, After the War Series, IV (1867), 240.

CHAPTER IX

ALL IS DARKNESS

War delivered a stunning shock to the minds of cane planters. They saw homes overrun and often ruined. Sons rode away to battle, many never to return. The conflict tore numerous proprietors from their families, and lack of communications rendered these separations more galling than otherwise they would have been. The varying reactions of planters to the impact of invasion and occupation were a blend of their strength and weakness.

The mind of the cane country oscillated violently between despondency and exultation during the conflict. On May 1, 1862, one great proprietor felt surrounded by sadness and gloom. The knowledge that New Orleans was in enemy hands, and that a great battle had raged near Corinth, Mississippi, shrouded the countryside in sorrow. William J. Minor of Terrebonne Parish feared that thousands of Confederate youths had been killed or wounded in the struggle on the banks of the faraway Tennessee-- the Battle of Shiloh-- and that no adequate preparations had been made for casualties. "I bot.," said he, "a lot of jellies to day to be taken up to Corinth. . . ." ¹

¹ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, May 1, 1862.

Confederate success fired the hearts of planters with joy. They reveled in reports of great victories in Virginia. News reached the sugar land in May of 1862 that a superior force of Federals had been routed near Richmond. According to the report, generals Joseph E. Johnston and Robert E. Lee had been killed, but President Jefferson Davis had led the troops to victory. "Too good to be true," cried one planter.² General Richard Taylor's counterattack along the Lafourche in the summer of 1862 brought unbridled joy to the cane country. "Another glorious victory yesterday," penned a jubilant Bayou Teche landowner; "It is supposed they [The Confederates] will now march on N. Orleans."³

Rumors of crucial events flooded the bayou land during the entire course of the struggle. Planters sought war news avidly and speculated on the military situation. In November of 1862 the news spread that Donaldsonville had been destroyed. Planters realized that injudicious firing by guerrillas upon Federal boats had caused the raid on the Bayou Lafourche town. "These attacks should not have been made till we were ready to repel [sic] an attack from the enemy," one proprietor sagaciously remarked; "I

² Ibid., May 4, 1862.

³ Palfrey Plantation Diary, June 25, 1863.

expect to be ruined by the stupidity of others before this war is over."⁴

The extravagant rumors that reached planters' ears in 1862 may be gauged by the jettings of a lower Louisiana girl:

News comes pouring in. Note we a few items, to see how many will prove false. First, we have taken Baltimore without firing a gun; Maryland has risen en masse to join our troops; Longstreet and Lee are marching on Washington from the rear; the Louisiana troops are ordered home to defend their own state--thank God! if it will only bring the boys back!⁵

During July of 1863 all sorts of military information seeped into the sugar land. Cane growers were aware of Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania and awaited the outcome in great anticipation. Word circulated that Vicksburg and Port Hudson had surrendered to the Federals. William J. Minor considered the fall of these Mississippi River fortresses and the repulse of Lee at Gettysburg the beginning of the end for the Confederacy. New Orleans buzzed with reports that France and Spain were to intervene in the war. But planters suspected that brokers and money lenders had filled the town with these lies in order to keep it in a state of excitement. "They should be hung," snarled Minor.⁶

⁴ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, November 1, 1862.

⁵ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 226.

⁶ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, July 6, 12.

Northern success in the cane parishes made it possible for the Unionist element to come to the fore in plantation affairs. The number of Unionist planters is indeterminable. By 1865 only 174 sugar plantations out of 1,291 were in operation. The proprietors of all of these active establishments were nominal Unionists, for they could not have remained on their places without taking the oath of allegiance to the United States. Many of them, however, were pseudo-Unionists; at heart they were yet Confederates. Out of self-interest they collaborated with invaders. Planters in the vicinity of Baton Rouge explained their change of face by saying, "Self-preservation is the first law of nature."⁷

The case of William J. Minor exemplifies perfectly this metamorphosis from Confederate to Unionist. In 1862 he prayed for Southern victory on the battlefield and sent food to gray-clad troops at Shiloh. His sons fought in the Confederate ranks. By 1863 Minor was calling secession a stupendous act of folly. "I foresaw (or thought I did) the terrible woes that would inevitably result from it & opposed it most strenuously," said he; "would have prevented it by force if I had the power."⁸ A few days later this planter

⁷ Watson, Life in the Confederate Army, 424.

⁸ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, December 20, 1863.

anathematized Confederate leaders: "What kind of hearts must those men have who are carrying on this war for Selfish purposes. Is there any punishment here or hereafter adiquate [sic] to their deserts [sic]-- I fear not."⁹

Minor filed claims against the United States for property seized or damaged by the Federal army. He did this as a loyal Unionist. In January of 1865 Minor discussed his claims-- \$30,000 worth-- with General Hurlbut, who encouraged him to think that the government might remunerate him.¹⁰ In 1869 the Southern Claims Commission awarded Minor's widow about one-third of the amount claimed.¹¹

Sugar growers who stayed in operation after Federal invasion formed the conservative wing of the Unionist group that attempted to restore Louisiana to the Union. They desired two things in the restored state government: retention of slavery and maintenance of the constitution of 1852. This constitution based representation upon total population, thus giving a preponderance of political power in the state to black belt parishes dominated by great planters. The most determined effort of the planters to gain their political ends came in November of 1863. Though General Banks refused to authorize an election of state and Federal officials, sugar producers held the election

⁹ Ibid., January 2, 1864.

¹⁰ Ibid., January 12, 1865.

¹¹ Frank W. Klingberg, "The Case of the Minors; a Unionist Family within the Confederacy," Journal of Southern History, XIII (1947), 42.

without approval. This attempt by conservatives to restore Louisiana to the Union and at the same time revert to the status quo ante bellum came to naught. For Congress denied seats to the members elected. And the state constitutional convention of 1864 dashed all hopes of proprietors for the survival of slavery by writing a new constitution, basing representation upon the number of qualified voters and emancipating Louisiana slaves.¹²

The hospitality of some planters survived the war. One landowner took in a group of enemy soldiers, fed them and put them up for the night. One of the guests asserted: "In books and other ways I had heard of southern hospitality and I now know it was all true. I wonder if it was ever put to a severer test." The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, the ungrateful Federals steamed away on a boat loaded with sugar confiscated from their host's estate.¹³

One sugar proprietor played the role of a recruiting officer for the Confederate army. When General Breckenridge was on his way to attack Baton Rouge in August of 1862 he sent word to James McHatton of Arlington Plantation that he needed reinforcements. The McHattons sat on the lawn, "under the calm radiance of an August moon," and laid their plans. The next morning the planter rode out in quest

¹² Caskey, Secession and Restoration of Louisiana, 86.

¹³ Van Alstyne, Diary of an Enlisted Man, 203.

of fighters and found a dozen. Before dawn of the day of the assault on the capital city this "stalwart set of men" assembled at Arlington, ate breakfast and slogged away to join the Confederates.¹⁴

Cane growers pursued no "scorched earth" course in the accepted sense of the term. They did not put the torch to their homes and sugarhouses. When New Orleans fell, planters talked of "war to the knife" and declared that the Crescent City, like Moscow, should have been consumed in patriotic flames.¹⁵ Some producers destroyed sugar. Thomas May stated that many hogsheads of sugar were thrown into the Mississippi.¹⁶ And the decision of planters, as described in a previous chapter, to suffer their establishments to fall into ruin as a consequence of abandonment, might be considered a modified scorched earth policy.

Most plantation folk steadfastly retained their theories regarding the righteousness and necessity of Negro slavery. Plantation daughters exclaimed: "And to think Old Abe wants to deprive us of all that fun! No more cotton, sugar-cane, or rice! No more old black aunties or uncles! No more rides in mule teams, no more songs in the cane-field, no more steaming kettles, no more black

¹⁴ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 32.

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶ May, The Earl of Mayfield, 67.

faces and shining teeth around the furnace fires." One spirited girl described a sugarhouse scene where Negroes were gay though deferential. She scoffed that perhaps some "good old Abolitionist" was needed to tell the slaves how miserable they were; that perhaps Lincoln could spare a few abolitionists to enlighten "his brethren."¹⁷ Cane country people could not visualize making sugar without slaves.

Relations between invading soldiers and plantation folk were usually less galling than was to be expected under those trying circumstances. Physical violence against civilians was rare. DeForest wrote that plantation owners were humbly thankful for guards put on their premises to drive away Negroes, deserters and jayhawkers.¹⁸ Northern soldiers almost without exception kept their distance from plantation women. A mistress demonstrated this respect for her sex with a story about a guard-- a young German-American-- once assigned to her premises. As this Federal entered the yard he plucked a rose. "See," cried one of the plantation girls indignantly, "that mean Yankee is taking our flowers!" "It is a good sign," replied the older woman, "that he will never do us any

¹⁷ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 278.

¹⁸ DeForest, A Volunteer's Adventures, 76.

greater harm." She was right. It is recorded that when the young German left, he was a friend of the entire household.¹⁹

The Union detachment that first appeared at Arlington Plantation near Baton Rouge in the summer of 1862 refrained from entering the house when informed that the mistress was pregnant. So decorous were the soldiers that one of the household slaves was impelled to say, "I don't believe them men would 'underscend to steal spoons."²⁰

Some of the unpleasant contacts with the enemy contained elements of interest that give insight into the spirit of the times. A few days after the fall of New Orleans a planter's wife wrote anonymously to General Butler:

But Yankee, proud Yankee! dressed in a little brief authority, when our gallant Beauregard comes to deliver us from the inflated myrmidon of the tyrannical Buffon [sic] at Washington, we shall see with intense joy the noble Picayune Butler flying from the Vatican, in finished Bull Run or Bethel style, with all the Yankee rabble infesting our city at his heels.²¹

Effingham Lawrence of Magnolia Plantation wrote in high dudgeon of a raid by Yankee soldiers in the summer of

¹⁹ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 36.

²⁰ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 23.

²¹ Benjamin F. Butler, Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin F. Butler during the Period of the Civil War, 5 vols. (Norwood, Massachusetts, 1917), I, 448. Cited hereafter as Butler, Correspondence.

1862 on a plantation below New Orleans. Lawrence said that troops commanded by General Neal Dow pillaged the estate, took the owner prisoner and broke into his daughters' bedrooms in the middle of the night. "The conduct towards his daughters who were in Bed when the officers and negroes Broke into the Rooms," declared the Magnolia Plantation proprietor, "was an act upon a peaceable Family unparalleled in the history of the world."²²

In May a detachment of Union troops was fired on near Houma in Terrebonne Parish. Two men were killed and two wounded. The dead and wounded were taken into Houma where citizens refused to lend aid. The dead were treated with great indignity; people of the town stamped in their faces with boot heels. In retaliation, Colonel John A. Keith seized hostages and uttered threats of executions.²³

In the summer of 1862 Duncan Kenner narrowly escaped a Federal raid. This great Mississippi River planter was riding over the fields of Ashland Plantation above New Orleans when he spied a steamboat landing at his wharf. Kenner did not await the debarkation of Yankee troops, but gave hurried instructions to his manager and rode away through the back country.²⁴

²² Magnolia Plantation Journal, August 9, 1862.

²³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1861-1862, May 28, 1862.

²⁴ New Orleans States, January 25, 1925.

In March of 1863 Stephen Minor was arrested by the Federals for cutting telegraph lines near Waterloo Plantation in Terrebonne Parish. A short time later he was taken to New Orleans by the Union army. His father, William J. Minor, was told that the captain of the steamboat chained his son, Stephen, on the upper deck where he might be exposed to guerrilla fire from the banks of the stream.²⁵

In September of 1863 Northern soldiers took from William T. Palfrey his revolver. The planter protested vigorously, "It was an arm needed for the protection of my house & family, against stragglers & marauders, but my remonstrances were without effect."²⁶

The approach of General Weitzel's troops down the Lafourche in the fall of 1862 induced fifteen-year-old Welman F. Pugh, nephew of A. Franklin Pugh, to pen a statement bristling with determination. On October this plantation stripling recorded:

Early this morning the Yan/kees/ came by here six thousand in number and they insulted Mother, and carried and coaxed off all the negroes. We were once wealthy now poor but we have brave hearts and strong wills and by the aid of God we will rise in the world.

On November 8 young Pugh wrote that Yankees had carried off all of the plantation's horses, mules, carts, saddles and

²⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, March 24.

²⁶ Palfrey Plantation Diary, September 23, 1863.

bridles. "So we have to foot it," said he; "no doubt it will make us men . . . I cannot say what sort."²⁷

Plantation inhabitants occasionally seized an opportunity to vent their wrath upon the invaders. Girls near New Iberia in 1863 taunted Federal prisoners who were being escorted to camps in Texas. A Union soldier who was among the captives described the scene, saying: "A couple of pretty Louisiana 'young ladies' stopped their carriage, and greatly refreshed me by expressing the hope that we should be hung at the end of the lane, and the opinion that hanging was quite as good treatment as nigger-thieves deserved."²⁸

DeForest found nothing refreshing about the venom of plantation women. He painted the following grim picture of the behavior of a planter's wife and daughters at their home near Port Hudson:

[They were] full of scorn and hatred; so unwomanly, so unimaginably savage in conversation and soul that no novelist would dare to invent such characters; nothing but real life could justify him in painting them. They seemed to be intoxicated with the strength of a malice, passionate enough to dethrone the reason of any being not aboriginally brutal. They laughed to see the wounds and hear the groans of the sufferers. They jeered them because the assault had failed. The Yankees never could take Port Hudson; they were the meanest, the most dastardly people on earth. Joe Johnston would soon kill the rest of them, and have

²⁷ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 203.

²⁸ Nott, Sketches of the War, 66.

Banks a prisoner, and shut him up in a cage. "I hope to see you all dead," laughed one of these female hyenas. "I will dance with joy on your graves. My brother makes beautiful rings out of Yankee bones." . . . At the end of the siege they were left unmolested, to gloat in their jackal fashion over patriot graves.²⁹

Had Louisiana troops been storming a town in DeForest's New England and despoiling neighboring farms, perhaps he would have seen his own countrymen "intoxicated with the strength of a malice."

Anglo-Americans and Creoles responded similarly in most respects to Northern invasion. One discernible difference, however, was the Creoles' refusal to abandon their estates. Most of them preferred to remain in Louisiana and suffer the consequences of war.³⁰ A Federal chaplain recorded an incident that pointed up the obstinate courage of one of these French-blooded proprietors. The observer witnessed the stripping of a magnificent Creole plantation above New Orleans. The owner might have saved his property by taking Butler's required oath of allegiance, but he would not. The work of depredation commenced, but the victim bore it without a murmur. The Yankees took his wagons, harness, mules and horses. The planter said nothing. They seized his entire crop, ground it in his sugarhouse, used his barrels for molasses and hogsheads for sugar,

²⁹ DeForest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, 261.

³⁰ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 198.

marking the head of each "U. S." Not a sound escaped the grim cane planter's lips. Finally, his 300 slaves deserted to the enemy. "The Creole was most completely stripped," declared the witnessing chaplain; "still he stood in the midst of the ruins, damning Abe Lincoln, and wishing he had eight instead of four sons in the rebel army."³¹

Frequently women were left to manage plantations when planters fled to Texas with Negroes or marched off with the armies. The cases of Mrs. W. W. Pugh of Woodlawn Plantation on the Lafourche, Mrs. Andrew McCollam of Terrebonne Parish, Mrs. John Hampden Randolph of Iberville Parish and Mrs. Caroline Merrick of Pointe Coupee Parish are representative. Mistresses left to run estates faced a twofold task: keeping establishments going, and dealing with the enemy. In addition, many of them in areas free of Union control contributed food, clothing and services to the Confederate army. General Banks put on record his opinion of the spirited role played by these women in the war. Once when a lady applied to Banks for a guard, he refused on the ground that women had brought on the war and that they continued to encourage it. The petitioner replied that she merely wished to be protected from hearing

³¹ Hepworth, Whip, Hoe, and Sword, 99-100.

such frightful profanity as Yankee troops were wont to put out. To which the general retorted: "Madam, this war is enough to make any man swear. I swear myself."³²

At times plantation wives exhibited the most fervent patriotism for the Confederacy. The unshakeable spirit of Mrs. John Moore of St. Martin Parish was revealed in her refusal to take the oath of allegiance to the United States. When friends urged her to do so in order to spare herself many petty indignities, she replied, "No . . . my husband & children shall never know that mortification."³³

When it became apparent that the cane country would be invaded, many women and girls, as in other parts of the South, armed themselves for protection against the "hordes of hirelings" from the North. Miriam Morgan of Baton Rouge almost lost her life at Linwood Plantation near Port Hudson when a suitor playfully aimed her weapon at her and accidentally fired.³⁴

Plantation women referred the case of the South to the court of heaven. Early in the war one Louisiana woman opined:

³² Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 39.

³³ Alfred C. Weeks to John Moore, January 13, 1864 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

³⁴ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 276.

I do believe the Lord is on our side. If we fail, God have mercy on the world-- for the semblance of human liberty will have fled. The enemy has men, money, horses and chariots; they are strong and boastful. Our sins may be flagrant, and we may need to be scourged with scorpions; but will God permit us to be overwhelmed?³⁵

Possibly these women were unaware that their enemies also appealed to the God of Battles for support in the struggle. Left without men to defend them, women of the bayou country drew comfort from religious faith. "These were anxious days," reminisced a plantation woman; "yet we were marvelously comforted, drawing nearer day by day to the Almighty Father, and sleeping the sleep of the just."³⁶

Most women bore the trials of war with admirable fortitude. The steadfastness of Mrs. William T. Palfrey of the Teche was exemplary. Late in 1862 Palfrey sent his wife and family into Franklin for safekeeping. The Federal army on the bayou threatened to overrun his plantation, and Confederate troops were encamped on his land. But on January 22, 1863, the wife and children returned to the beleaguered estate, resolved to share the husband's lot for good or bad. "Bad enough at present-- God Knows," sighed the planter.³⁷

³⁵ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 34.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Palfrey Plantation Diary, January 22, 1863.

Women who remained behind did all within their power to provide food, clothing and bandages for men in the ranks of the Confederate army. An observer concisely summarized their services, "No more important branch of the military service existed during the civil war, than that which the women . . . controlled." Ladies supervised the growing of crops, spun and wove cloth and made clothes for "Ragged Rebels;" their knitting needles were busy until "the great surrender."³⁸

Making lint for bandages was a favorite activity of women of the sugar land. They engaged in this patriotic service at every available moment. If a lady paid a call on some friend, she might take rags with her and make lint during the entire visit. Women moving from place to place by carriage occupied themselves in this way. And young girls chatting about their beaux kept fingers occupied making lint.³⁹

Bayou country women at times possessed as strong a lust for Yankee blood as did the men. The youthful Sarah Morgan once was disappointed that a battle did not materialize near Port Hudson, because she "did want to see the Yankees soundly thrashed!" Upon hearing that a Federal steamboat on the Mississippi had been burned, this fiery

³⁸ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 47.

³⁹ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 147.

young Confederate wrote with apparent relish, "They say the shrieks of the men when our hot shells fell among them, and after they were left by their companions to burn, were perfectly appalling."⁴⁰

Hysteria surged momentarily through the hearts of lower Louisiana women at the enemy's approach. This sensation was accurately described by one girl, "I write, touch my guitar, talk, pick lint, and pray so rapidly that it is hard to say which is my occupation."⁴¹

The behavior of cane land girls during the war belied assertions that they were timid and shrinking. Frequently they sought excitement at the risk of placing themselves in dangerous positions. While Baton Rouge and neighboring plantations were under bombardment by Federal gunboats, a number of young ladies from the Nolan plantation rode to the Mississippi in search of diversion. Driving wildly along the levee, they watched the Federal gunboat Essex and the Confederate steamer Arkansas jockey for position to shoot it out. A group of planters at the waterfront judiciously retired behind the levee, but the irresponsible girls stayed in an exposed place and looked down upon the ill-fated Arkansas burning and exploding before them.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., 340.

⁴¹ Ibid., 336-337.

⁴² Ibid., 243.

The greatest hazard undergone by women of the cane country was from deserters and guerrillas. These marauders took advantage of the absence of men to raid and despoil plantations. The most lawless area in the state was that near Opelousas, where not even the Union army was able to cope with the desperadoes. An appeal from a "Creole lady" to the men of Opelousas tells the story. She cried:

Do not reject my pen because it is held by one of the opposite sex. . . . For more than a year past, lawless men have been permitted to band themselves together, and roam at will, . . . insulting, chastising, robbing, burning houses, murdering the families of our soldiers; and in some instances despoiling in the most brutal manner, wives, daughters and sisters of that which is dearer than life itself--their honor. . . . Gentlemen, . . . shall a woman appeal in vain to your patriotism-- to your high sense of honor; or if my voice fail, will not burning houses, robberies, murders, outrages upon innocent females, be enough to cause prompt and decided action?⁴³

Death was no stranger to the land of cane in those perilous days of brotherly hate. "Every passing breeze chants the requiem of dying heroes," wrote one Southern woman.⁴⁴ On August 22, 1862, Overseer Randall of Magnolia Plantation below New Orleans commented on the return of a boy who was wounded in Tennessee: "Henry Diamond Returned This morning from The army was in the fite at Schilow he has fought Bled & Died for His cuntry."⁴⁵ In October a

⁴³ Opelousas Courier, November 12, 1864.

⁴⁴ Ibid., May 6, 1865.

⁴⁵ Magnolia Plantation Journal, August 22, 1862.

wounded cousin of the Mergan sisters arrived at Linwood Plantation near Port Hudson. His arrival presented the perfect tableau of "The Soldier's Return." Girls at the plantation buttered the hero's cornbread, carved his mutton, spread his preserves, and sat at his feet, rapt by stories of fighting at Sharpsburg, where he had been struck by a Minie ball.⁴⁶

Planter families paid for the Civil War with the blood of their sons as well as treasure in slaves and land. John Hampden Randolph of Iberville Parish lost his eldest son, Algernon Sidney, during the defense of Vicksburg.⁴⁷ On December 13, 1862, William T. Palfrey sadly wrote in his diary, "Received confirmation of the report of my son Edward's death at Vicksburg, in a letter from young Charly Conrad (his cousin), from that place."⁴⁸ And in June of 1863 Artillery Lieutenant David Weeks Magill, nephew of John Moore, died in the futile effort to hold Vicksburg.⁴⁹

Proprietors whose estates were overrun by the Federal onslaught sometimes became critical of Confederate officers. The diary of William T. Palfrey contains an interestingly human item of information regarding a

⁴⁶ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 252.

⁴⁷ Postell, John Hampden Randolph, 115.

⁴⁸ Palfrey Plantation Diary, December 13, 1862.

⁴⁹ John Moore to General E. Kirby Smith, June 4, 1863 (MS. in the David Weeks and Family Papers).

Southerner killed in the Teche fighting. A large part of Palfrey's original entry of April 25, 1863, is effaced, and in the margin this planter wrote the following repentant explanation:

These erasures were made to obliterate statements which justly reflected on the conduct of an officer . . . or his ill conduct as I considered it-- but having behaved gallantly afterward in other engagements, I do not wish any strictures to remain on records.-- He was killed in battle.⁵⁰

Mothers were sorrowful as teen-age boys caught the war fever and marched away with the army. In July of 1863 when General Richard Taylor's forces withdrew from the Lafourche, Welman Pugh, fifteen-year-old son of W. W. Pugh, went with them. The boy's sad mother wrote to his commanding officer, asking him to care for the lad. "Place him in the charge of some good man," she implored; "& should he fall by the way side, leave him not to die alone tend his last moments & the blessings & prayers of his Mother will follow you while life endures."⁵¹ In August Welman Pugh returned home. Soon afterward he was arrested by a Federal provost marshal and imprisoned at Thibodaux. On August 8 Ned Pugh, Welman's younger brother, wrote, "Wellie came home Quite sick with chill & fever." The next day Ned recorded: "Wellie had a congestive chill. He is very sick."

⁵⁰ Palfrey Plantation Diary, April 25, 1862.

⁵¹ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 296.

Two days later: "Willie died at $\frac{1}{4}$ past 12 o'clock. I went to see him but he did not see me."⁵²

Mothers quailed as they received their sons' death notices. One bereaved woman wrote:

But when my gifted, first-born soldier-boy, Willie-- my pride and joy-- was laid in a lonely grave, after a mortal gunshot wound, on the Atchafalaya, at Bute la Rose, that was my hardest trial. I could not get to him, yet he was decently buried; but my brother, shot in the fight in Tennessee, we only know that he was killed on the battlefield at Franklin. My son Wesley was reported missing after the fight at Chickamauga, he may be a prisoner. I have heard nothing more, and my heart stands still when I think he too may have been killed, and his body thrown in some ravine or creek, as the Texans are said sometimes to "lose" their Yankee prisoners on the march. . . . And there is Bowman, my third son; he may be dead, too, for I do not hear a word from him. I try to steady my aching heart, and go my way, and do my work with a quiet face; but often when I am alone I sink down, and waves go over me.⁵³

One desolate young widow whose husband died on the ramparts at Port Hudson screamed, "Why does anybody live when Paul is dead?-- dead, dead, forever?"⁵⁴ The sound of wailing was heard in the sugar land!

War visited upon most estates great solitude. One plantation mistress recalled the loneliness that crept over plantation women. "Lacking new books to read and mail to bring us letters, newspapers or magazines," she said, "there

⁵² Ibid., 297.

⁵³ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 69-70.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 89.

yet came into our lives an intenser interest in what was before us so constantly."⁵⁵ She referred, of course, to the war. Mrs. Eliza McHatton of Arlington Plantation near Baton Rouge recorded that it was difficult to realize how isolated the estates were. Establishments along the Mississippi had always relied for intercourse with the outside world upon packets plying the river. These facilities were suspended because of war. The Arlington Plantation mistress declared that the post office might as well have been closed, as far as they were concerned, for no mail was received or dispatched. "Near relatives sickened, died, and were buried within a day's ride of our home," she said, "of whose extremity we did not know for weeks-- receiving the information then through a casual passerby."⁵⁶

William J. Minor cried out against the maddening seclusion of his Terrebonne Parish plantations, "Solitude is not good nor proper for man." He realized that he had erred before the war in sending unmarried sons to manage sugar estates. "They must at times be very unhappy," said he, "besides the danger of getting into bad habits." This was an unmistakable hint at miscegenation, for Minor followed, saying that in the future he intended to make his

⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁶ Ripley, Flag to Flag, 44.

sons give up living on cane plantations unless they were married.⁵⁷

The desolation of war bore heavily upon the minds of great planters of the cane country. The crumbling, yellowed pages of their diaries and journals reveal lamentations poured out in the hour of extremity. In the fall of 1862 A. Franklin Pugh felt that times were gloomy and that the future promised to be worse. The Protestant Church in Napoleonville suspended services, owing to the despondency of citizens. On November 26 Pugh wrote, "I stay at home now all the time, having very little or nothing to do-- but to think over the past and speculate on the future."⁵⁸ Two years later Pugh was in complete despair. He recorded that he had lost all hope of seeing the war close. Should it end, he could foresee nothing but ruin for his class. "What is to become of the thousands like me?" he queried; "God only knows." On October 10, 1864, Pugh groaned: "I never have been so much depressed in mind since the commencement of this war. I can find no object, with which to divert my thoughts from the deep gloom which depresses me. All is darkness, with hardly a ray of hope in the future."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, February 5.

⁵⁸ Pugh Plantation Diary, November 20, 23, 26, 1862.

⁵⁹ Ibid., October 9, 10, 1864.

The lamentations of William J. Minor are a key to the inner feelings of planters of the southern sugar parishes. In March of 1863 Minor wrote, "No one who has not been similarly situated can properly understand what I am now suffering all alone here at Southdown." He stated that he had always been a "bad sleeper" and that with ruin staring him in the face "his nights . . . were terrible indeed." Seldom could he sleep more than an hour or two at a time.⁶⁰ In May Minor was so despondent that he opined: "It almost seems now that it was a blessing to Jimmy and Duncan [sons who died of typhoid fever] that they were called away when they were.-- We know not what is best for us."⁶¹

In September of 1863 Minor forecast the doom that he felt was in store for planters, saying:

If the war continues twelve months longer, all negro men of any value will be taken, the women & children will be left, for their masters to maintain, which they can not do.-- The owners of the soil will make nothing, the lands will be sold for taxes, & bot in by Northern men, & the original owners will be made beggars-- This is the result of Secession & abolitionism.⁶² Was there ever such folly since the world began.--

William T. Palfrey bemoaned his fate and cursed those whom he believed to be the architects of his misfortunes.

⁶⁰ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, March 2.

⁶¹ Ibid., May 20.

⁶² Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, September 29, 1863.

In January of 1863 he asserted that from a condition of comfort and abundance he had been reduced by war to one of hardship and want. "The Devil may take the authors & originators of this dreadful State of things-- abolitionists & fire eaters together," he snarled; "The fire eaters . . . have shewn preeminently the white feather, and with few exceptions, have run away."⁶³ In March of 1864 Palfrey wrote into his diary a passage that might be called, "The Sugar Planter's Lament:"

The days (emphatically days of darkness & gloom) succeed each other bringing nothing but despondency with regard to the future-- Our beautiful Parish is laid waste & is likely to become a desert-- Plantations abandoned fences & buildings destroyed, mules, horses & cattle driven off by the federals, the negroes conscripted into the army or wandering about without employment or support, & stealing for a living-- Those who remain are insolent & refractory, and in domestic, family arrangements the few who continue with their owners are more trouble & vexation than they are of use.-- Their laziness & impertinence is beyond belief.-- There can be no crop made in the country and of course starvation will be the dreadful consequence.-- All this is fearful to consider, and if indiscriminate plunder & massacre do not supervene we may be considered lucky.-- The Lord help us.-- Such is war, civil war.⁶⁴

William J. Minor put into words on April 19, 1865, a planter's reaction to the last and most dramatic bloodshed of the long and fearful conflict:

⁶³ Palfrey Plantation Diary, January 22, 1863.

⁶⁴ Ibid., March 16, 1864.

Stephen came out to day from the city & brot the terrible news that Mr Lincoln had been assassinated in Fords Theatre in Washington by one Wilks Booth. . . . This is one of the most extra-ordinary occurrences in the history of the world, & is in my . . . judgment one of the greatest misfortunes that could have befallen the country.-- I had, since the fall of Richmond, & the surrender of Lee . . . begun to admit the hope of an early peace. . . . At one time, I considered Mr. Seward the ablest man in Mr. Lincoln's government-- Some time since I came to the conclusion that Mr. L. Himself was the ablest & the most conservative man in the Washington Government.-- His death is therefore, in my opinion, a great loss to the whole country & especially to the South-- as from him, we had a right to expect better terms of peace than from any one else at all likely to come into power.-- Oh! my poor country-- What have you yet to Suffer.⁶⁵

Though Confederate victories early in the war sent a wave of elation through the bayou land, cane plantation inhabitants soon were sobered by death notices of their soldier-sons. Four years of slaughter and destruction brought the planters from exultation to despair.

⁶⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, April 19, 1865.

CHAPTER X

FROLICS AND FRIVOLITIES

War had a paralyzing effect on the colorful social life of many families in the sugar bowl. The dearth of young men left the girls of numerous plantations lonely. Wartime shortages greatly reduced the sumptuousness of balls and dinners. And casualty lists from fighting zones crushed the spirits of some homes. Nevertheless life and play did go on, even during the holocaust of war. Amidst the clamor of conflict and the stringencies and uncertainties of hostile occupation, many men and women who remained on sugar estates found amusements to suit their tastes and situations.

Dancing remained a favorite among plantation pastimes. Early in 1863 the inhabitants of places near Port Hudson swirled in lively dances with officers from nearby camps. Miriam Morgan, a vivacious refugee from Baton Rouge, danced giddily at Linwood Plantation with a Lieutenant Dupre, a tall, supple, young artilleryman who "put his best foot forward when he danced . . . and knew it, too." Miriam adored dancing. She flirted outrageously with her partner, who was an expert at the deux temps and polka. This mettlesome couple was sublimely oblivious to

the tragedy that roared about them. They swept gaily across the floor, the intimate position of the handsome officer's arm sanctified by a lively air dashed off on the piano.¹

Wartime parties were characterized by excitement, deprivations and sometimes danger. A dinner party held at a place near Port Hudson reflected clearly the violent days come upon the sugar country. A young widow, whose husband had died on the bloody ramparts at Port Hudson, gave this affair with the object of bringing a measure of cheer back into her blighted life. The plantation had been abandoned except for the bereaved mistress, her aunt and a few household slaves. But the remaining inhabitants prepared for the occasion.

All soldiers home on furlough, who were old friends of the family, were invited. Girls from neighboring plantations came by the best available transportation. Some rode in men's saddles; others rode double; and many were astride mules. One plantation beauty displayed a jacket cut down from the best part of an old piano cover.

The soldiers and girls romped and danced in the parlor to the noise of an untuned piano. For hours this exaggerated hilarity went on, until finally the guests realized that they were ravenous. The staff of house

¹ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 313.

servants was woefully depleted, and dinner was late. One of the guests, a Confederate captain, saved the situation by marrying one of the girls in a mock wedding that consisted of the slave custom of "jumping the broom." This device so amused the group that they temporarily forgot their hunger.²

Dinner followed the broom jumping episode. In some way the resourceful hostess had managed for plenty of food. A roasted turkey lay at one end of the table; a stuffed ham at the other. Vegetables filled the intervening space. A suitable centerpiece had been fashioned of gay flowers in a broken pitcher. The mistress served a dessert of eggnog and pound cake. The party drank toasts from a single goblet of eggnog each to friends absent at the battle front. The eggnog was sharpened with a generous portion of "crude and fiery rum" made from plantation molasses. Though the girls did not appreciate this throat-burning delicacy, the soldiers were not so fastidious. They said that often they had had occasion to repeat the remark of the Governor of South Carolina, "It is a long time between drinks." The pound cake was made of bolted cornmeal. A cup of genuine coffee concluded the meal. "Never," stated an observer,

² Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 95.

"had there been a merrier day at this plantation."

The party ended abruptly on a perfect war note. As guests lingered over their coffee, the Negro cook spied a Federal gunboat steaming along the river toward the place. Instantly all was consternation! The hostess scooped up family silver in order to hide it. Soldiers disappeared with miraculous haste. And girls bounded upon their lowly steeds-- mules-- to beat an undignified but effective retreat.³

Where plantations remained in operation, sugar-house frolics continued to be a choice form of entertainment. The presence of fun loving Southern soldiers lent glamour to these parties in areas not overrun by Northern troops. On the second night of grinding at Linwood Plantation, the owner made the suggestion that the girls and their uniformed beaux visit the sugarhouse. At ten o'clock this group of about twenty strolled through the fall moonlight to the busy grinding place.⁴

The revelers stopped to warm themselves and chat gaily at the great furnace. They found the inside of the establishment illuminated by "Confederate gas"-- pine torches-- which shed a delightful light, neither too much nor too little, over the scene. From room to room wandered

³ Ibid., 98-99.

⁴ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 272.

the happy party. At one point the girls grasped the syrup ladles from the Negroes, dipping up sugary liquid and eating it greedily. Others contented themselves with chewing sugar cane under the pine torches.

Someone suggested a game of "Puss wants a corner." "Such racing for corners!" wrote a participant. "Such scuffles among the gentlemen! Such confusion among the girls when, springing forward for a place, we would find it already occupied." Dignity retreated in the face of such merriment. The entire group responded like children. The owner enjoyed the fun as much as the young people; he encouraged them in their pranks. Some of the Confederate officers entered the game with gusto. Others disapproved and sulked. Some appeared "timidly foolish and half afraid of the wild sport." Men who a few weeks later would distinguish themselves for gallantry in the face of Federal charges at Port Hudson were unassertive in the presence of these cavorting plantation belles.

When the furious exercise of "Puss wants a corner" had sufficiently exhausted the group, the young people sat down to a more sedate form of entertainment. A game of "forfeits" provided fun, excitement and "absurdities." One lieutenant unknowingly sentenced himself to ride a barrel. A young lady was forced to make a love speech to her escort. Another had to make "a declaration" to one of the

officers. Then came more sugar cane chewing and conversation until it was announced that it was twelve o'clock and orders given to retire.⁵

The presence of Confederate troops in parts of the cane country enlivened in various ways the social life of plantations on which they stopped. Innumerable episodes of interest came out of contact of civilians with soldiers. In August of 1862 the crew of the sunken Confederate gunboat Arkansas appeared at the Nolan place near Baton Rouge. The women could not ask them in as Dr. Nolan, the owner, was on parole. But Phillie Nolan-- the daughter-- hinted that if sailors "chose to order," they might do as they pleased, "as women could not resist armed men!" The commander "chose to order." The Confederates took over the sugarhouse, commandeered food and talked gayly with the girls. Officers were appropriated by the eager young ladies, going "by the name of Miriam's, Ginnie's, Sarah's, as though they belonged to each!" These Rebels engaged in the pleasantries of planning an attack on Baton Rouge. The commander of the Arkansas would lead the fleet; a battalion of mettlesome girls would assault the despicable Yankees from the rear.

The next day the men departed, saying "God bless

⁵ Ibid., 274.

you, and good-bye." As they left, the plantation girls passed out bottles of gin, crying after the withdrawing heroes, "Fight for us."⁶

Plantation daughters flirted and played for months with officers from nearby encampments. These young Confederate soldiers-- like those of Mrs. Mary Boykin Chesnut's famous Civil War diary-- danced to the fiddle or piano at the plantations only to do the "danse macabre" in the rifle pits of Port Hudson later. In September of 1862 officers from a derailed troop train dined at Linwood Plantation.⁷ During October the place was overrun with soldiers. "Eating" sugar cane was a favorite pastime. One bashful Tennessean who had never chewed the sweet cane hung back while the crowd indulged themselves freely. Finally he was persuaded to participate. Once instructed, "he got on remarkably well, and ate it in a civilized manner, considering it was a first attempt."⁸

The appearance of soldiers at a mansion invariably put the girls to dashing wildly about. At dusk one evening the young ladies of Linwood Plantation sat in their bedroom playing cards, when a group

⁶ Ibid., 155-156.

⁷ Ibid., 231.

⁸ Ibid., 265.

of officers arrived at the house. Down went the cards! The girls were instantly in a mad scramble for their best clothes. A frantic search went on, with cries of, "Where is the comb, and the grenadine, and collar, and belt? Where . . . a buckle, . . . where the pomatum?" One belle wondered whether order could ever come out of such confusion and whether soldiers were worth all the trouble. This last question was always answered in the affirmative.⁹

Once, shortly after a spirited young lady had gone to bed feeling ill, her sweetheart was announced. Up she sprang and "flew about in the most frantic style, emptying the trunk on the floor to get her prettiest dress, and acting as though she had never heard of pains and groans."¹⁰ The therapeutic value of Confederate soldiers on Southern girls apparently was remarkable.

Christmas was celebrated as lively as possible on sugar estates. On the night of December 24, 1862, inhabitants of a plantation near Port Hudson were waiting up for midnight when suddenly a blast of music startled them into a stampede out of the parlor. A regimental band from a nearby camp had come to serenade the ladies. While the musicians performed on the front steps of the mansion, a

⁹ Ibid., 321.

¹⁰ Ibid., 331.

Jelly party went on inside by way of observing the occasion. Into the midst of festivities strode Santa Claus-- an officer disguised in an old Mexican War uniform with cocked hat and false beard. Passing from lady to lady, he paused before each and presented her with a small cake from his basket. To each gentleman he handed a glass, which was filled from a "suspicious-looking black bottle." Additional refreshments followed the drinks. Then came talk and laughter until midnight.¹¹

Planters often invited Confederate officers to dine in their homes. On August 29, 1862, Texas troopers were guests for dinner at Bayside Plantation on the Teche.¹² Lieutenant William H. Root of General Banks's army wrote from near Opelousas in 1863 of almost capturing Southern officers at a planter's table. Root told of stopping for the night at a recently deserted plantation mansion. The Negroes who remained on the place said that the owner was an officer in the Confederate army. The blacks also stated that the master and a group of fellow officers were at the table when the Federal cavalry hove into sight. "[The owner] had three cattle killed and cooked yesterday and the rebel cavalry which we just drove away had a feast at his house,"

¹¹ Ibid., 307.

¹² Bayside Plantation Journal, August 29, 1862.

asserted Root; "in fact a supper had been prepared for them tonight but we came upon them too soon. . . ."13

The conviviality of plantation inhabitants once induced a Confederate general to relax the customary discipline of his unit. In March of 1863 General Franklin Gardner-- commander of Port Hudson-- dined at Linwood Plantation. The general and the ladies soon struck up a conversation, in the course of which Sarah Morgan approached him on the subject of camp regulations. She recorded:

I am indebted to General Gardiner [sic] for a great piece of kindness, though. I was telling him of how many enemies he had made among the ladies by his strict regulations that now rendered it almost impossible for the gentlemen to obtain permission to call on them, when he told me if I would signify to my friends to mention when they applied that their visit was to be here, and not elsewhere, that he would answer for their having a pass whenever they called for one. Merci, du compliment; mais c'est trop tard, monsieur!14

A delightful association sprang up between plantation folk of Pointe Coupee Parish and personnel of General J. G. Walker's unit of the Confederate army. Frequently these military gentlemen dined in the mansions. "Every family," wrote an observer, "had stored away for times of

13 Root (ed.), "Private Journal of William H. Root, Second Lieutenant, Seventy-fifth New York Volunteers, April 1-June 14, 1863," introduction by Walter Frichard, Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XIX (1936), 644-645.

14 Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 346.

illness or extra occasions little remnants of . . . former luxuries-- wine, tea, coffee." Once General Richard Taylor sat at a Pointe Coupee Parish plantation table. "I'm astonished, madam," he exclaimed while sipping champagne, "that in these times you can be living in such luxury." The mistress hastened to explain that it was her daughter's birthday, for which they had long saved the precious fluid. To honor the occasion the last bottle of wine was opened.¹⁵

Once General Charles Polignac dined with a plantation family. While eating green peas and roast lamb he inquired whether the peas had been grown under glass. "Look at my broken windows, all over the house," wittily replied the hostess, "and tell whether I can raise peas under glass when we can't keep ourselves under it!"¹⁶

Occasionally plantation inhabitants enjoyed visits to Confederate camps. In September of 1862 the people of places near Port Hudson called upon friends and relatives there. Visitors traveled in "Confederate carriages." These were rough wagons drawn by mules. The tatterdemalion troops went through their paces in review before excited parents and sweethearts. Afterward the young ladies and

¹⁵ Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 73.

¹⁶ Ibid., 74.

their escorts inspected the long rows of tents. This inspection brought to the minds of the girls similar camps in Virginia and Tennessee in which their brothers were living. One observer commented: "Altogether it was a very pretty picture; but poor men! how can they be happy in those tents?"¹⁷

In October a "little cavalcade" of civilians journeyed to Port Hudson to inspect fortifications. They made a pleasant excursion of the affair, chatting and flirting with soldiers. Batteries that frowned from the bluffs were declared invincible by unschooled onlookers. These junketers were especially impressed by the "water battery" concealed by a cluster of trees at the river's edge. The party rode through bivouacs of gaping soldiers and along endless rows of rifle pits. The girls pronounced the inspection an overwhelming success.¹⁸

Varied social events continued despite the war. Plantation families went to Church on Sundays in most areas. Regardless of deprivations, people maintained festivities on wedding days. On May 15, 1864, F. D. Richardson of Bay-side Plantation on the Teche attended a wedding at which "[the guests] enjoyed an excellent dinner . . . and all went

¹⁷ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 235.

¹⁸ Ibid., 246-247.

off well."¹⁹ On May 16 A. Franklin Pugh described a wedding and accompanying parties: ". . . Went to Assumption church at 6 o'clock PM to see Miss Duval & Mr Berthout married-- Returned home where we all had a right merry time of it until after twelve o'clock--." Indeed they did have a right merry time of it! The next day, feeling effects of overindulgence, Pugh stated: ". . . Staid at home all day, feeling drowsy-- and generally bad-- The Brandy was a little too strong for me, and rather worsted me last night. . . ."²⁰

Plantation folk attended funerals at home while their sons played the leading roles in them on the battlefield. In June of 1862 F. D. Richardson went to a funeral which was characterized by an unusually large procession.²¹ On April 25, 1863, William J. Minor was present at the funeral of an acquaintance. The widow fainted as the tomb was closed.²² In October an amusing event occurred at a funeral where Minor presided. He stated:

Attended the funeral of Mr. Slatterby at Mr. Mc'Collams,-- as there was no clergyman present, I read the funeral service according to the

¹⁹ Bayside Plantation Journal, May 15, 1864.

²⁰ Pugh Plantation Diary, May 16, 17, 1864.

²¹ Bayside Plantation Journal, June 24, 1862.

²² Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, April 25.

Episcopal form-- I had of course no idea of being called on to perform such a service-- as it was the first time, I was quite embarrassed-- McCollams negroes said they did not see how a horse racer could be a preacher.²³

This episode demonstrated the keen sense of humor of Negroes, as well as an amazing spirit of good-natured give and take between a great planter and a group of lowly blacks.

Wartime cares did not always obliterate observance of the amenities of graceful living. Austerities did not prevent planters from drinking to the health of their friends and relatives on birthdays.²⁴ From time to time William J. Minor was able to enjoy good dinners with friends. On April 7, 1863, he and his associates feasted on fish caught at a crevasse. He noted, "We had a fine shad at dinner to day-- It is certainly an excellent fish."²⁵ In September Minor dined with friends near his estate; he thought the food delicious and wines excellent.²⁶

Plantation folk engaged in numerous little amusements that helped to make wartime life bearable. Inhabitants of sugar estates frequently read for diversion. In October of 1862 the people of Linwood Plantation read

²³ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863-1868, October 1, 1863.

²⁴ Ibid., November 5, 1863.

²⁵ Minor Plantation Diary, 1863, April 7.

²⁶ Ibid., September 13, 1863.

Abbot's Napoleon.²⁷ Another of their favorite books was Dumas's Memoires. Chewing sugar cane was a highly popular activity in the fall. One belle named one of her buckskin gloves "old sweety" because it had absorbed so much cane juice. Hand in hand with cane chewing went molasses candy pulling. Many a night was passed in this sticky but appetizing sport.²⁸

On clear days folk of cane establishments sometimes enjoyed the luxury of a walk at sunset. Sometimes they chose to ride carts, instead. A story of one of these riding expeditions illustrates the ready wit of plantation girls. One evening, as a group of young ladies was leaving for a ride, the elder women of the estate cautioned them to be wary of the mud; that soap was a dollar and a half a bar and starch a dollar a pound. The belles lifted their skirts to avoid soiling them. "You can imagine how high we lifted them," wrote a member of the party, "when I tell you my answer to one girl's question as to whether hers were in danger of touching the mud, was, 'Not unless you sit down!'"²⁹ This sally was considered quite risqué.

At times play on plantations grew hazardous. One day the inhabitants of a mansion were startled by a pistol

²⁷ Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary, 244.

²⁸ Ibid., 268.

²⁹ Ibid., 181.

shot. They learned that a young caller had playfully, but foolishly, pointed a girl's pistol at her. Before he could take accurate aim, the weapon accidentally went off; the bullet grazed the young lady's arm and passed through a chest behind her. The distraught boy swore, "I would have killed myself with the other barrel if she had been hurt."³⁰

The headstrong and irresponsible Miriam Morgan once played a heartless trick upon a suitor who was in love with her. She played a game of cards with him, putting herself up as stakes. Miriam lost. To her the whole affair was a huge joke. But the man was serious. He notified all of his friends that he was to be married and engaged a minister to perform the ceremony. Then, at the last moment, Miriam exposed the brutal joke to the incredulous minister and crowd of witnesses. The victim was desolated but could do nothing about the situation.³¹

Some folk of the sugar land fraternized socially with enemy soldiers. A young lady of Pointe Coupee Parish was furious that a girl acquaintance should ride with Yankee officers. "Shame on her!" stormed the accuser. And girls from Bayou Goula were outraged that one of their group

³⁰ Ibid., 276. Girls went armed for protection against the enemy.

³¹ Ibid., 291-294, passim.

"would ride with a Yankee in the presence of their army."³²

People in the vicinity of Baton Rouge entertained Union soldiers in their homes. A Northern trooper stationed in the capital city declared that the people there were rebel to the core, but that they were refined and pleasant. Young officers of Federal regiments soon had calling acquaintances with ladies of several Baton Rouge families.³³

Numerous girls in and around Plaquemine found the company of Northern boys to their taste. A Union campaigner who spent several months near the town during 1864 recorded freely the fraternization between young ladies and enemy soldiers. The Yankees were dined and entertained. Rebel girls who had sung the Bonnie Blue Flag and Maryland, My Maryland "hid their blushes behind the argument that 'These Ohio soldiers are not Yankees, but Western people like ourselves.'" When the regiment was transferred, "the young ladies were unconsolable, and wept and waved their handkerchiefs as their cavaliers marched away."³⁴

Planters sometimes wined and dined Federal soldiers. A. Franklin Pugh frequently invited Union officers to dinner

³² Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, 40.

³³ Clark, Life in the Middle West, 115.

³⁴ Mason, The Forty-second Ohio Infantry, 247.

on his place. On August 27, 1864, he gave a dinner party for officers stationed at Painscourtville. A few days later the local provost marshal, the post commander, and the colonel of the regiment enjoyed Pugh's hospitality.³⁵

Invading Federals sometimes got in on the fun of sugarhouse parties. In December of 1864 a Rhode Island cavalryman wrote from Napoleonville:

The sugar mills in this vicinity are in full blast and allowing for the scarcity of the cane crop, we opine there will be a sufficient margin left to write "profit" on those engaged in this "sweet operation" of "jamming cane." Mrs. Foley will close up her sugar mill about the middle of next week, and I am informed will have an old time "blow out."³⁶

Plantations of Unionist owners were sometimes the setting for dances and parties attended by Federal officers. George Washington Cable left a vivid picture of an entertainment on the estate of a man of Unionist persuasion. The Gilmer sisters-- the planter's daughters-- arranged the party for Northern officers. A few non-Unionist plantation girls attended. This was their unarmed way, explained the author, of saving house and home for brothers to come back to when the Yankees were "purged out of the land."³⁷

Cable's description of the plantation entertainment preserves the flavor of the times. While some of the guests

³⁵ Lathrop, The Pugh Plantations, 353-354.

³⁶ New Orleans Daily True Delta, December 11, 1864.

³⁷ George Washington Cable, The Cavalier (New York, 1910), 213.

ate cake and custard and sipped punch in the dining room, others swirled to the music of a black plantation fiddler. Ladies and officers counted off by two's. The Negro musician provided electrifying tunes for the reels. As he sawed his instrument, the old servant shouted directions exultantly. A "potsherd" of this plantation tune went:

O ladies ramble in,
 Whilst de beaux ramble out,
 For to quille (coil) dat golden chain.
 My Lawdy! it's a sin
 Fo' a fiddleh not to shout!
 Miss Charlotte's a-comin' down de lane!³⁸

The love of fun and play that pervaded the cane country survived invasion and destruction.

³⁸ Ibid., 214.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

War almost wiped out the Louisiana sugar industry. The output of the 1864-1865 season was below 10,000 hogsheads; less than two per cent of the great 1861-1862 yield.¹ Before the conflict 1,291 plantations were in operation. By 1865 the number had sunk to 174.² Nor did higher prices, occasioned by scarcity, compensate for the shortage of production. The 1861-1862 crop, averaging only 5½¢ a pound because of the blockade, brought \$25,095,271; better than \$19,000 per plantation. The 1864-1865 crop, selling at an average of 16½¢ a pound, totaled only \$1,994,300; less than \$12,000 for each of the few operating establishments.³

Losses of sugarhouses and equipment were more staggering than the drop in production. The closest estimate of the total value of pre-war sugar property, including slaves, is \$200,000,000. And an eminent student of the industry placed total losses-- including destruction and damage to houses and machinery, freeing of slaves and

¹ DeBow's Review, After the War Series, II (1866), 417.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., IV (1867), 204; and New Orleans Price-Current, September 1, 1864.

confiscation of livestock-- at over \$170,000,000. If the cost of growing crops destroyed-- approximately \$26,000,000-- be added, the figure of losses reaches nearly that of the entire value of the industry.⁴

The transition from slave to free labor was the greatest change wrought by war on sugar plantations. For years proprietors and freedmen floundered in a desperate effort to adjust to the new situation. Planters found it difficult to accept the new labor order; Negroes, for a long time, were shiftless and undependable. Many land-owners sought immigrant labor to replace the blacks. But attempts to bring in workers from the North, from Europe and from China met with disappointment. For owners desired peasants to replace the Negroes, and refused to break up their estates into small farms.⁵

The final solution to the problem was the hiring of free Negro labor. A study of the sources covering a ten

⁴ Latham, Black and White, 171.

⁵ Contemporary newspapers and travel accounts abound in immigration articles. For example; Opelousas Courier, December 9, 1865; New Orleans Daily Southern Star, December 29, 1865; West Baton Rouge /Port Allen/ Sugar Planter, February 10, 1866; Thibodaux Sentinel, June 1, 1867; Plaquemine Iberville South, April 13, 1867; Donaldsonville Chief, December 16, 1871; Charles W. Dilke, Greater Britain; a Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries, during 1866-67 (Philadelphia, 1869), 22; and Daniel Dennett, Louisiana As It Is; Its Topography and Material Resources (New Orleans, 1876), 36. Cited hereafter as Dennett, Louisiana As It Is.

year period after the war reveals a gradual shift in attitude on the part of proprietors, as the blacks settled down to the task of making a living. Immediately after the war the condemnation of free labor by producers was almost universal.⁶ But by the late 1860's and the 1870's many planters felt that freedmen could be depended upon to make sugar.⁷ And in 1875 Charles Nordhoff, an exceptionally observant Northerner who visited the South, wrote:

The planters, without exception, so far as I have heard them speak, are thoroughly satisfied with the colored man as a laborer. I do not mean to say that they have no fault to find; but they say that the negroes are orderly, docile, faithful to their engagements, steady laborers in the field, readily submitting to directions and instructions, and easily managed and made contented. . . . All is summed up in the phrase I most frequently heard used, "We have the best laboring class in the world."⁸

The labor pattern that emerged in the sugar area was that of hiring workers by the month. In most cases, Negroes continued to live in villages of houses owned by the planters-- the post-war counterpart of the earlier slave

⁶ Thibodaux Sentinel, August 12, 1865; New Orleans Daily Southern Star, November 16, 1865; New Orleans Daily Picayune, January 25, 1866; and West Baton Rouge /Port Allen/ Sugar Planter, May 25, 1867.

⁷ Giulio Adamoli, "New Orleans in 1867," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, VI (1923), 274; West Baton Rouge /Port Allen/ Sugar Planter, December 4, 1869; Robert Somers, The Southern States since the War (New York, 1871), 222; and Edward King, The Great South (Hartford, Connecticut, 1875), 89.

⁸ Charles Nordhoff, The Cotton States in The Spring and Summer of 1875 (New York, 1876), 56. Cited hereafter as Nordhoff, The Cotton States.

quarters. Because of the great expense of sugar making machinery and the prevailing custom that called for every producer to possess his own sugarhouse, neither renting nor share-cropping became popular.⁹

Although many Northern observers thought that the great estates were fragmenting into small farms, the plantation system survived the impact of war and emancipation.¹⁰ The same factors that prevented development of the tenant system-- high priced apparatus and the requirement that each cane grower process his own crop-- deterred the growth of a small farm economy. And even today the number of large sugar plantations in Louisiana is nearly as great as in 1862.¹¹

Though plantations generally remained intact, ownership of land shifted greatly in the years after the war. Large amounts of capital were required to heal the ravages of conflict, and few original landowners possessed sufficient money to get back into operation. Consequently, sugar land depreciated at an alarming rate. Mortgages were foreclosed every day, and by 1867 land had dropped to

⁹ Eugene V. Smalley, "Sugar-making in Louisiana," Century Magazine, XXXV (1887), 119; Harris, Louisiana Products, 108; Nordhoff, The Cotton States, 56; Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 169-170; and Whitelaw Reid, After the War; A Southern Tour (New York, 1866), 278.

¹⁰ For excellent descriptions of the cane country in the 1880's and 1890's see: Somers, The Southern States since the War, 217; Henry M. Field, Blood Is Thicker Than Water; a Few Days among Our Southern Brethren (New York, 1886), 109; and Charles Beadle, A Trip to the United States in 1887 (London, 1887), 66-67.

¹¹ Abner B. Gilmore, The Louisiana Sugar Manual, 1946-1947 (New Orleans, 1947), 204-225, passim.

less than one-third its pre-war value. DeBow's Review recorded the sale of places for \$35,000 that in normal times would have brought \$150,000.¹² And in the 1870's the Southern Land Company, a Louisiana real estate business, advertised hundreds of sugar plantations for sale at less than the original cost of their houses and equipment.¹³

This great depreciation in land prices invited men with money-- merchants and business men of both North and South-- to invest in what looked like certain prosperity. Many old sugar planters lost their estates by foreclosure, or sold them to avoid this fate. Numbers of places fell to Northern speculators and soldiers at incredibly low figures. All travelers in Louisiana commented upon this penetration of the sugar industry by outsiders.¹⁴ Roger W. Shugg, an eminent student of the Louisiana agricultural pattern after the Civil War, asserts, "At least half the planters after 1870 were either Northern men or were supported by Northern money."¹⁵

¹² DeBow's Review, After the War Series, III (1867), 308.

¹³ Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 272.

¹⁴ West Baton Rouge /Port Allen/ Sugar Planter, December 12, 1868; Nordhoff, The Cotton States, 69; and John T. Trowbridge, The South; a Tour of Its Battlefields and Ruined Cities (Hartford, Connecticut, 1866), 411.

¹⁵ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 248. Though an old Southern tradition discredits Northern planters, they became successful sugar producers, once the industry commenced to recover.

During the two decades after the Civil War the sugar industry slowly regained its vitality. The great cost of machinery prevented a rapid recovery of sugar comparable with that of cotton, which within five years was almost up to pre-war levels.¹⁶ Not until 1893 did sugar production equal that of 1862.¹⁷ Superior processing apparatus was introduced into Louisiana, and as this equipment advanced in complexity and increased in price, a gradual divorcement of agriculture and manufacture of sugar occurred. The number of sugarhouses decreased, as the less wealthy cultivators turned exclusively to planting. Many landowners were suspicious of the change, and the separation was painfully slow. As late as 1879 there were 1,130 sugarhouses in operation.¹⁸ By the twentieth century, however, the process was well under way; large planters owned the mills, and smaller growers sold their cane at the factories. Today less than seventy sugarhouses remain of the 1,291 in production in 1862.¹⁹

Ultimately the industry recovered, but the soul

¹⁶ Somers, The Southern States since the War, 199; and A. K. McClure, The South; Its Industrial, Financial, and Political Condition (Philadelphia, 1886), 198.

¹⁷ Alcee Bouchereau, Statement of the Sugar and Rice Crops Made in Louisiana, 1893-1894 (New Orleans, 1894), 44a. These statements were published annually.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1878-1879, 104.

¹⁹ Gilmore, The Louisiana Sugar Manual, 1946-1947, 84-85.

had fled the old sugar civilization. Great numbers of plantations after the war belonged to Northern entrepreneurs and in some cases to Southern banks and corporations.²⁰ Absentee ownership grew popular, with establishments run by managers. The planter ideal ceased to predominate; bankers, merchants, and business enterprisers replaced landed proprietors in the public imagination. And emancipation of the slaves reduced the sugar growers' old sense of patriarchal omnipotence. In the twentieth century three landmarks of the ante bellum cane plantations remain: the broad, canal-gridded canefields; occasional sugarhouses, infinitely more elaborate than of old; and the great, proud mansions-- ghosts along the bayous..

²⁰ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle, 248.

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VITA

Charles Pierce Roland was born in Maury City, Tennessee, on April 8, 1918. He received his elementary, high school and junior college education at Freed-Hardeman Junior College, Henderson, Tennessee. He was awarded the B. A. degree by Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, in 1938. From 1938-1940 he taught history in Alamo High School, Alamo, Tennessee. From 1940-1942 he was employed in the Historical Division of the National Park Service, Washington, D. C. He served in the United States army from 1942-1946, attending the University of Dijon, Dijon, France during the summer of 1945 for a course in French civilization. Upon being separated from the service, the author commenced graduate study at George Washington University, Washington, D. C. Transferring to Louisiana State University in 1947, he received the M. A. degree from this institution in June of 1948. In January of 1948 he married Allie Lee Aycock, and in October of 1949 became the father of a son, John Clifford Roland. After receiving the M. A. degree he continued his study as a graduate assistant in the Department of History, Louisiana State University, and in the fall of 1950 became an instructor in this department.

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Charles P. Roland

Major Field: History

Title of Thesis: Louisiana Sugar Plantations during
the Civil War

Approved:

Francis B. Burkens

Major Professor and Chairman

Richard Fred Russell.

Dean of the Graduate School

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Date of Examination:

March 20, 1951