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Rural Life in Louisiana, 1850-1860

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RURAL LIFE IN LOUISIANA, 1850-1860

A Dissertation

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

Raleigh Anthony Suarez, Jr.
B. S., Louisiana State University, 1948
M. A., Louisiana State University, 1949
June, 1954

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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FOREWORD

This is a study of life in Louisiana outside of New Orleans in the 1850's. No attempt has been made to compare or contrast rural Louisiana with rural areas in other Southern States because this study is applicable only to Louisiana and because there is comparatively little monographic work of a serious nature concerning the various aspects of rural life in the other states of the South.

Since no general studies have been made of Louisiana geography during the past half-century, it was considered necessary to begin this work with a chapter on the geography of the state in which the several geographical and agricultural regions are briefly described.

No studies have been made concerning the make-up of the population of ante-bellum rural Louisiana. While perhaps more sociological than historical in form and content, Chapter II gives what is thought to be a necessary analysis of the rural population. Demographic information is of vital importance when the life of any people is studied.

Louisiana has been considered rural outside of the city of New Orleans, but if this were not the accepted conclusion, any study of life in the state would strengthen the belief that New Orleans was the only truly urban center.

Several topics are not discussed at great length. These include politics, crime, free Negroes, and foreign and out-of-state travel. However, none of these aspects of rural life have been entirely overlooked. While there is no discussion of politics as such, the political atmosphere is described and its effect on the life of the people depicted. A lengthy discussion of this subject is not included in the study because it is felt that a clear picture of rural life can be presented without a minute description of the machinations of politicians. There is no discussion of crime as such. This topic, however, is, to some extent, brought out in the study. No detailed account of the life of the free Negroes is given because there were fewer than eight thousand of these people in rural Louisiana, while there were over 160,000 whites and over 220,000 slaves. Furthermore, many of the free people of color followed the same trades and occupations as did the whites. There is no detailed discussion of foreign and out-of-state travel because the planters and businessmen of ante-bellum Louisiana did much less traveling than is generally assumed.

Louisiana has too long been subject to generalizations based on legend and tradition. In this study, therefore, an attempt is made to fill in some of the gaps in ante-bellum Louisiana history. The life and problems of the common people are presented as well as that of the planter. The development of Louisiana population in the decade before the Civil War is

studied; the always neglected villages--their importance, their economic characteristics, and the life of the villagers --are presented. A proposal for a new outlook on race and class is suggested. In summary, the attempt is made to present rural Louisiana as it was, not as it was thought to have been.

ABSTRACT

Louisiana which was favored with some of the most fertile soil in the world was characterized during the 1850's outside of New Orleans, by almost complete rurality although there were a large number of villages and small towns in the state. Rural Louisiana was peopled by more Negroes than whites in 1850, and by the end of the decade, the Negro proportion of the rural population had increased.

In general ante-bellum Louisiana was regarded as the home of great planters, but the majority of the agriculturists were neither planters nor slaveholders, and many were not land owners. Some of the non-land owners were hired laborers who played a more important role in the rural economy than is generally recognized, but the majority of rural Louisianians, land owners and non-land owners, were agriculturists who dwelled on the less desirable soil of the state for the more fertile land was in the hands of the planter-class. B S

By the opening of the 1850's, the common people of Louisiana, agriculturists and hired laborers, small slaveholders and non-slaveholders, land holders and non-land owners, were faced with diminishing social and economic opportunities, for by that time their ability to purchase

good land and slaves was curtailed by the rapidly advancing prices of those two requisites of ante-bellum social and economic advancement.

All rural Louisianians were confronted with floods, fires, and fevers, and in most instances their efforts against these dreaded scourges were rewarded with little success. If these problems were not enough, the residents of the interior portions of the state were forced to rely on what at best can be termed grossly inadequate systems of transportation and communication. Furthermore many of the people of ante-bellum Louisiana had no satisfactory means of obtaining capital or credit, both of which were vital to successful commercial agriculture.

Although white manhood suffrage had been extended in 1845, until the Civil War, the reins of government were held by a political alliance of New Orleans merchants and Black Belt planters. The lack of true democracy on the state level hindered the development of an adequate public education system as well as the adoption of other measures favored by many of the plain citizens.

The villages of ante-bellum Louisiana were primarily trade centers, but they were also important as centers of religion, education, communication, recreation, and justice; and village life was much the same throughout the state. In general, the villagers all dreaded, desired, and enjoyed the same things.

Contrary to common belief, the common people of ante-bellum Louisiana were not content in their inferior social, economic, and political positions, and there was some friction among the classes. The reason that there was so little overt class conflict was not due solely to race prejudice but was due to lack of democracy, education, and adequate systems of transportation and communication.

CHAPTER I

Louisiana, which is one of the states lying within the area of the Gulf Coastal Plain, is located between 89° and 94° meridians of West longitude and $28^{\circ}56'$ and 33° North latitude.¹ Favored by proximity to the Gulf of Mexico and its prevailing southeasterly winds, the state has prolonged but usually unoppressive summers and mild winters with the hottest months of the year being June, July, and August and the coldest December, January, and February. However, Louisiana is sometimes subject to severe cold waves caused by northwesterly storms, and temperature readings in the lower 20° 's are not unusual during these periods. The mean summer temperature is near 81° in both the northern and southern regions with the northern sector having a 7° lower average winter temperature (52.8° to 45.4°). With a more than sufficient average rainfall, there is seldom any widespread danger from drought as the rainfall is heaviest during the hottest months of the year.²

¹Louisiana Department of Public Works, Report, 1940-1941, 81. Hereafter cited as Report, Louisiana Department Public Works.

²E. W. Hilgard, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of Louisiana, with a Discussion of the General Agricultural Features of the State," U. S. Census, 1880, Report on Cotton Production, I, 9. Hereafter cited as Hilgard, "Louisiana."

Slightly less than one-half of the 48,506 square mile total area of the state is lowland which is composed of the alluvium of the rivers and streams and the marshes of the coast. The remaining portion of the area is upland of varying characteristics.³ Following the Mississippi River northward, the delta proper reaches its maximum elevation of about thirty-four feet at its head, Baton Rouge, and continuing upstream the elevation is nearly fifty feet at the mouth of the Red River, sixty-six feet near Vidalia, and about 130 feet at the Arkansas boundary.⁴ From the highest point of elevation in the state, around five hundred feet in the uplands near the Arkansas line, the dip toward the Gulf is a gentle southward slope to the desolate coastal marshes;⁵ however, ridges of three hundred feet elevation are not unknown in the Louisiana Uplands.⁶

Louisiana has been divided by geographers into several agricultural areas: the Alluvial Region, Prairie Region, Pine Flat Region, Marsh Region, Bluff Region, Pine Hill Region, and the Oak Hill Region.⁷ The soil of

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Daniel Dennett, Louisiana As It Is. . . . (New Orleans, 1876), 33. Roger W. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana. . . . (University, Louisiana, 1939), 3. Hilgard, "Louisiana," 11.

⁶Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 33.

⁷Hilgard, "Louisiana," 11.

the Alluvial Region gives to the state its greatest agricultural advantage, and although irregularly scattered throughout the state, the largest concentrations are along the banks of the Mississippi and Red rivers.⁸ William Darby thought that these two rivers gave to Louisiana most of its alluvial soil and also its richest alluvium; he explained that it should not be thought that because all bottom land was generally rich, that it was all equally fertile. It was his opinion that the bottoms of the Mississippi and Red rivers and their connecting bayous were more productive than those of the streams to the west of them and between them and the Sabine River.⁹ Timothy Flint, although agreeing with the general opinion as to differences in the degree of fertility, maintained that the land west toward the Sabine River was excellent and "suitable . . . for every comfort or luxury capable of being produced in the latitude."¹⁰ The general consensus of

⁸William Darby, A Geographical Description of the State of Louisiana . . . (New York, 1818), 516. Hereafter cited as Darby, Geographical Description. Timothy Flint, A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley (Cincinnati, 1828), 517-518. Hereafter cited as Flint, Geography and History. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 24. Hilgard, "Louisiana," 11. Report, Louisiana Department of Public Works, 83-85.

⁹Darby, Geographical Description, 516.

¹⁰Quoted in Walter Prichard, ed. "Some Interesting Glimpses of Louisiana a Century Ago," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIV (1941), 38. Hereafter cited as Prichard, "Some Interesting Glimpses."

writers and travelers of the nineteenth century was that the bottoms of the two great rivers and their bayous were unequalled by any other regions in the state.¹¹

Generally speaking there are two types of bottom land. The lands nearest the streams, front lands, are moderately sandy and easily cultivated¹² while the back lands, those further from the streams, are usually sticky and more difficult to work;¹³ so, even if there were no other reasons, the front lands would be preferred. The land along the important streams of Louisiana slopes away from the streams;¹⁴ and when the back lands dip to or below the water table, swamps are found which serve as catch-basins for overflow waters draining into the Mississippi River.¹⁵ All soils formed directly by the Mississippi River are dark and often nearly black while those formed by the Red River and its confluent are of a

¹¹Opelousas Patriot, April 28, 1855. Frederick L. Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States. . . . (New York, 1856), 281-282. Hereafter cited as Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States. Flint, Geography and History, 517-518. Darby, Geographical Description, 516. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 25. Hilgard, "Louisiana," 12.

¹²Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 25.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Louisiana, A Guide to the State Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana (New York, 1945), 10. Hereafter cited as Louisiana, A Guide.

¹⁵Ibid.

reddish tinge,¹⁶ but along the courses of some streams the soil is red in some places and dark in others.¹⁷ This alluvium then is the soil that in the 1850's yielded more cotton and sugar than any other Southern soil.¹⁸ Furthermore, this soil was virtually inexhaustible due to its great depth.¹⁹ The fertility of the alluvial region which consisted mainly of a series of ridges, flats, swamps, sloughs, and bayous was "sufficiently attested by the prodigious growth of timber [mainly hardwood], the luxuriance, size and rankness of the cane, and cotton, the tangle of vines and creepers, the astonishing size of the weeds, and the strength of vegetation in general."²⁰

This alluvial soil maintained the great production of the two important staples of Louisiana, sugar and cotton. Roughly the area of sugar production was below the traditional boundary between North and South Louisiana, the mouth of the Red River, and the largest portion of the cotton grown in Louisiana was north of that imaginary

¹⁶Flint, Geography and History, 533. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 26. Opelousas Patriot, April 28, 1855.

¹⁷Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 26. Opelousas Patriot, April 28, 1855.

¹⁸Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 26. Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census, 1860. . . . (Washington, 1862), 200-201. Hereafter cited as Preliminary Report, 1860.

¹⁹Hilgard, "Louisiana," 13.

²⁰Darby, Geographical Description, 516.

boundary. Sugar cane will not thrive in North Louisiana due to the early and late frosts which shorten the growing season, but the reason for the predominance of cotton culture in the northern part of the state is not so easily explained. The seemingly sound conclusion is that where climate and land were suitable, the Louisianian felt he could profit more from cane culture.²¹

The Prairie Region of Louisiana comprises the following parishes and parts of parishes: the southwestern portions of St. Mary and St. Martin, all of Lafayette, northern Vermillion, all the upland portion of St. Landry, and Calcasieu east of the Calcasieu River.²² Generally then the Prairie lies almost entirely west of Bayou Teche and south of Bayou Cocodrie and is bordered on the south by impassable swamps and on the west by the Sabine River. This area is what was known as the old Opelousas and Attakapas Region.²³

The Prairie has three types of soil of which the best is a black soil found in the area bordering the marshes and in the eastern reaches of the region. A brown soil found in the north and west of the black is excellent for pasturage and easily supports cotton, while the gray

²¹Hilgard, "Louisiana," 32-33.

²²Ibid., 22.

²³Dennett, Louisiana As It Is. 23.

silt soil of the western sector of the region was left mainly for the production of pine.²⁴ As one moves to the westward he encounters less fertile soil.²⁵ Prior to 1880, except in the East, even the best soil of the Prairie attracted relatively few people, and although the eastern section produced cotton and sugar, the majority of the inhabitants were occupied with herds of horses and cattle of a poor quality.²⁶

This area is not a treeless expanse for coulees and bayous run through it, usually in a north and south direction, and where streams flow, there is fertile soil and fine timber. A good indication of the fertility of the soil was the timber, for the most fertile soil was found where the land was well timbered with oaks, hickory, and elms.²⁷ Though generally level, the Prairie is not perfectly so but is gently rolling "like billows of the deep sea."²⁸

²⁴Hilgard, "Louisiana," 23.

²⁵Flint, Geography and History, 545. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 23.

²⁶Flint, Geography and History, 545. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 23. Hilgard, "Louisiana," 22.

²⁷Frederick L. Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas (New York, 1857), 391. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 22. Hilgard, "Louisiana," 25.

²⁸Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 22.

Located in two such widely separated areas as Livingston and St. Tammany parishes on the east and Calcasieu on the west, the Pine Flats cover about eight per cent of the total area of the state. Neither of the two types of soil in the areas is very fertile, but the less fertile of the two is a white "crawfishy" soil, while the superior soil is a pale yellow silty loam.²⁹ Due to the soil quality the chief interests were lumbering and herding.³⁰ The forests are usually long-leaf pine, but sometimes there are short-leaf pine, and along the better streams, particularly the Amite River, there are belts of oak, beech, gum, and magnolia.³¹

The marshes of Louisiana are of two types, and the coastal marshes of the Mississippi Alluvial Valley are separated from those of Southwest Louisiana by Vermillion Bay.³² Substantial portions of Orleans, St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. Charles, Lafourche, Terrebonne,

²⁹Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 29. Hilgard, "Louisiana," 26. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 12.

³⁰Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 12.

³¹Hilgard, "Louisiana," 26.

³²R. W. Harrison and W. M. Kollmorgen, "Drainage Reclamation in the Coastal Marshlands of the Mississippi River Delta," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXX (1947), 656. Hereafter cited as Harrison and Kollmorgen, "Drainage Reclamation," The western marshes were formed by no action of the Mississippi River.

and St. Mary parishes are classed as coastal marsh. Smaller areas are also found in St. Tammany, Livingston, and St. John the Baptist parishes.³³ The soils of the coastal marshes are like those of the rest of the delta, and along the natural levees of the streams running through these marshes grow many of the typical alluvial hardwoods;³⁴ however, in the marshland proper no tree vegetation is found with the exception of a few chenieres or oak islands.³⁵ The undrained Coastal Marshes were of little importance prior to the Civil War.³⁶

The Bluff Region of Louisiana includes a narrow strip of country adjacent to the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and the Mississippi state line. This region includes about 650 square miles and constitutes nearly all of East Baton Rouge, western East Feliciana, and nearly all of West Feliciana parishes. In northern West Feliciana the terrain is hilly and broken, but to the south it flattens out and its elevation is only from forty to forty-five feet above high water at Baton Rouge. The soil of this region is fertile and was timbered with post oak, hickory,

³³Hilgard, "Louisiana," 19.

³⁴Harrison and Kollmorgen, "Drainage Reclamation," 661.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 669.

beech, magnolia, locust, and a heavy undergrowth of cane. It was easily adaptable to cotton culture.³⁷

The pine hills covered all of Rapides Parish except the Red River bottom, parts of Natchitoches and Sabine, all of Winn, southern Bienville, nearly all of southern Jackson; a considerable part of the upland portion of Ouachita, Caldwell, and Catahoula; and parts of Livingston, St. Helena, and East Feliciana.³⁸ The hills are topped by a sandy, pale yellow earth that is usually exhausted after a few years growth of cotton or corn,³⁹ but throughout the area are the usual streams with alluvial soil along their courses.⁴⁰ Peculiar to the pine hills is the "hog-wallow" land, a stiff, sticky soil which becomes difficult to cultivate in wet weather.⁴¹

The rolling pine hills were relatively free of underbrush, and travel by wagon was not difficult in dry weather. The light shade offered by the pines not only kept down the undergrowth, but also permitted the growth of excellent pasturage,⁴² and therefore along with cotton and potatoes, beef cattle were produced.

³⁷Based on Hilgard, "Louisiana," 21.

³⁸Ibid., 25.

³⁹Ibid., 27. Flint, Geography and History, 516.

⁴⁰Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 30.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 281-282. Ibid.

The best uplands in the state were the Oak Uplands,⁴³ and along with the Red River bottoms and the pine hills they formed an outstanding characteristic of northwestern Louisiana. These lands covered the greater portions of Caddo, DeSoto, Sabine, Claiborne, Bienville, Union, Jackson, Morehouse, Ouachita parishes, and a small part of Caldwell Parish. Similar tracts were found in the eastern part of the Felicianas and in the northeastern corner of East Baton Rouge Parish.⁴⁴

The surface of the Oak Uplands is frequently quite broken and rough with elevations of three hundred feet not uncommon. The forest growth was one of mixed timber: red, white, black, and post oak; dogwood, beech, hickory, maple, and short-leaf pine.⁴⁵

There are four types of soil in the Oak Uplands. Of the four one is very good; one is good; one is third rate but better than that of the pine hills; and one is similar to that of the pine flats. The best soil is the "blood red" soil found in portions of Sabine, Webster, Claiborne, Union, and Jackson parishes, while not quite so fertile is the brown loam found in parts of Sabine,

⁴³Hilgard, "Louisiana," 29.

⁴⁴Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 32.

⁴⁵Hilgard, "Louisiana," 29-32. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 34.

DeSoto, and Caddo. The yellow sandy soil, which ranks third, generally predominates in the area. The most valued soils of the Oak Uplands often show little decline in productiveness after over a quarter of a century of cultivation.⁴⁶

The streams of Louisiana helped her prosper in both agriculture and trade. The most important stream in the state is the Mississippi River, but also of great significance is the Red River which runs from the northwest corner of the state to a junction with the Mississippi some eighty miles above Baton Rouge. It is from these two streams that Louisiana has profited most. Furthermore, almost all of the streams of the Alluvial Region diverge from one of these two rivers.⁴⁷

The Mississippi River is of little importance as a drainage channel for the state because the river runs on a higher elevation than its flood plain and the bayous are not tributaries but distributaries.⁴⁸ The bayous then, serve as the drainage network for much of the state although many of them run on a higher elevation than their own flood

⁴⁶Based on Hilgard, "Louisiana," 30; Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 33.

⁴⁷Hilgard, "Louisiana," 29-32. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 34.

⁴⁸Louisiana, A Guide, 9-10.

plains.⁴⁹ For these reasons at least one-eighth of the state was constantly under water, and two-fifths of it was saved from inundation only by the levees.⁵⁰

Other streams of importance to ante-bellum Louisiana were Bayou Lafourche, a distributary from the Mississippi at Donaldsonville; Bayou Plaquemine, a distributary which formed a transportation link with the Attakapas and Opelousas area through connecting bayous and lakes to the Atchafalaya River; the Atchafalaya River, which runs through the Attakapas on its way to the Gulf of Mexico; Bayou Teche, which rises in Rapides and flows through St. Landry, St. Martin, and St. Mary parishes on its way to a junction with the Atchafalaya; the Cane River and its tributaries in Natchitoches, Catahoula, and Winn parishes; and the tributaries of the Red River--Little River, Black River, Tensas River, Ouachita River, Boeuf River and many others. Other rivers of significance were the Pearl on the east and the Sabine on the west. Of the two, Pearl River was more important in the nineteenth century.⁵¹

The three classes of lakes in Louisiana are the coastal lagoons such as lakes Ponchartrain and Maurepas,

661. ⁴⁹Harrison and Kollmorgen, "Drainage Reclamation,"

⁵⁰Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 3-4.

⁵¹Hilgard, "Louisiana," 11.

the oxbow lakes such as lakes Bruin and St. John, and those formed by the Great Raft of the Red River such as lakes Caddo and Bistineau. The first are arms of the sea behind barrier beaches or deltaic ridges; the second class are those that were formed by the meanderings of the Mississippi River as it changed its course, and the third were formed by overflows of the Red River caused by the Great Raft.⁵²

It has become obvious in the preceding general description of the physiographical and topographical features of Louisiana that the state is a land of widely varying characteristics and that many parishes contain soils as well as surface structures of widely different types. Thus, within one parish, it is not unusual to find soil types similar to those found in the Alluvial, Pine Flat, Pine Hill, and Oak Upland regions.⁵³ In the Alluvial Region north of the Red River, for example, can be found all the varieties of Louisiana soils. The alluvium in this area is separated by three peninsulas of upland which have varying degrees of fertility. The westernmost is the least fertile and is comparable to the poorest of Pine Flat soil;

⁵²Based on Louisiana, A Guide, 10.

⁵³Hilgard, "Louisiana," 9-73. Flint, Geography and History, 516. Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 18-34. Harrison and Kollmergen, "Drainage Reclamation," 656-671.

the central is the richest having some red land but predominately brown loam which is generally fertile; the easternmost has land comparable to the general soil type found in the Pine Hills; and spread unevenly among these soil types are prairies of irregular shapes and varying acreages.⁵⁴ Thus, Louisiana cannot be so easily typed as to topography and physiography as can some states of the Great Plains or even the North Central areas.

⁵⁴Hilgard, "Louisiana," 12-13.

CHAPTER II

The residents of Louisiana were classified as white, free colored, or slave in the censuses taken before the Civil War. The majority of the population of Louisiana in 1850 was Negro; of the 517,762 residents 47.3 per cent were Negro slaves, 3.4 per cent were free persons of color, and 49.3 per cent were white. Most of the whites and slaves lived in rural Louisiana; the free colored preferred urban life, 57.1 per cent of them living in New Orleans.¹

In rural Louisiana were 164,060 whites, 7,501 free persons of color, and 226,741 slaves, with the preponderance of this rural population in the Alluvial Region where a majority of the people in each of the classifications dwelled. Next in total inhabitants was the Oak Region followed in order by the Bluff, Prairie, and Pine regions.²

Only 37 per cent of the 236,077 people in the Alluvial Region were white. Of the 148,619 Negroes in the region, 144,545 were slaves who accounted for 61.2 per cent of the total population. When these figures are compared with those of the other agricultural regions, the

¹Compiled from The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850 (Washington, 1853), 473. Hereafter cited as Seventh Census.

²Ibid.

Alluvial Region ranks fourth in the percentage of its white population, third in free colored, and second in slave.³

At the opening of the decade of the 1850's the Oak Region was predominantly white by a small margin; 33,162 of the 69,391 inhabitants were slave, and since there were only 970 free colored residents, the whites constituted 50.8 per cent of the total population. The large number of slaves in the region gave to it second position among the agricultural regions in total slaves although third rank in proportion of slave population. With 35,259 white inhabitants, this region followed the Alluvial in total number of whites, but ranked after the Pine Region in proportion of population white and after the Pine and Prairie regions in proportion of free inhabitants.⁴

Although the Bluff Region was the smallest agricultural region in the state, it ranked third in total slave population. Its 26,531 slaves amounted to 68.3 per cent of the population, and in no other region was slavery so predominant in the population composition. In all, only 31.7 per cent of the population was free, for in a total population of 38,820 only 11,880 (30.6 per cent) were white

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

and 409 (1.1 per cent) were free colored. This region ranked last in both number and proportion of white and free colored.⁵

In 1850, 46.7 per cent of the 32,382 residents of the Prairie Region were slaves, and along with 1,416 free persons of color embodied 51.1 per cent of the inhabitants. Among the agricultural regions, the Prairie ranked third in number and proportion of whites, second in number while first in proportion of free colored (4.4 per cent), and fourth in number and proportion of slaves.⁶

By far the most prevalent in the population of the Pine Region was the white element, which made up 62.9 per cent of the total. These 13,605 whites, with the 632 (2.9 per cent) free persons of color, made the pine hills and flats a habitation predominantly of free men and since only 34.2 per cent of the people were slave, this region had a smaller proportion of its population slave than any other agricultural region.⁷

By the end of the 1850's rural Louisiana had become more colored than it had been at the beginning of the decade; from 1850 to 1860, the white segment of the rural population had declined from 41.2 per cent to 38.8 per cent;

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

and the free colored portion had decreased from 1.9 per cent to 1.5 per cent. Thus, the proportion of the free people in the rural population dropped 2.8 per cent. This figure is significant when it is observed that the free population of the entire state had increased from a proportion of 52.7 per cent in 1850 to 53.1 per cent in 1860 and that the increase in the total was entirely accounted for by the whites; actually there was an .8 per cent decline in the proportion of the free colored in the total population.⁸

In 1850, two agricultural regions of the state were predominantly white, the Oak Hills (50.8 per cent) and the Pine Region (62.9 per cent). But by 1860, only the Pine Region had the largest part of its population white, and this proportion had increased to 65.6 per cent. In this region there was a decline in the proportion of slaves from 34.2 per cent to 32.1 per cent and of free colored from 2.9 per cent to 2.3 per cent.⁹

Though still predominantly colored in 1860, the Prairie Region showed an increase in the proportion of its white population from 48.9 to 49.4 per cent and in the proportion of the slave population from 46.7 to 47.3 per cent; the free colored portion declined from 4.4 to 3.3 per cent.

⁸Compiled from Seventh Census, 473; Population of the United States in 1860 (Washington, 1864), 194. Hereafter cited as Eighth Census.

⁹Ibid.

In the Bluff Region, where there was still the largest proportion of slaves, 1860 marked increases in the proportion of the whites from 30.6 to 30.9 per cent and the free colored from 1.1 to 1.5 per cent, and a decline in the slaves from 68.3 to 67.6 per cent.¹⁰

In both the Alluvial and Oak regions, the proportion of the white population declined. By 1860, the colored portion of the population of the Oak Region had increased to 53.9 per cent from 49.2 per cent in 1850; the increase was entirely among the slaves as the free colored declined from 1.4 to 1.1 per cent. The whites had declined from 50.8 to 46.1 per cent of the total. In the Alluvial Region the slaves had increased from 61.2 to 65.4 per cent of the population, while the whites had declined from 37 to 33.4 per cent; at the same time, the proportion of the free colored had decreased from 1.8 to 1.2 per cent.¹¹

During the decade of the 1850's every agricultural region in the state showed a population increase. Along with the total increase went increases in every census classification of the population except the free colored living in the Oak and Prairie regions. However, the proportional increase of the slave population was greater in

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

every region except the Pine Region and the Bluff Region, where it declined. The decrease in the percentage of the white population was most marked in the Oak Region, followed closely by the Alluvial Region. Even in the Bluff Region, where there was a .3 per cent increase in the white proportion, there was also a .4 per cent increase in the free colored proportion. In the Prairie Region, where the whites gained .5 per cent, the slaves gained .6 per cent. There was a 1.1 per cent proportional decline among the free Negroes, which allowed the whites a percentage gain of .5 over the total colored population while not gaining on the slave population.¹²

Age composition is another important factor that must be considered when analyzing Louisiana population statistics. In 1850, of the total white population of the state, 47.5 per cent of the people were under twenty years of age, but in rural Louisiana 54.2 per cent were under twenty. Among the various agricultural regions, the Prairie Region had the largest portion of its population under twenty (58.3 per cent), while the Bluff Region had the smallest portion within the same age group (50.1 per cent).¹³

Although in 1850, 48.2 per cent of the free colored

¹²Ibid.

¹³Compiled from Seventh Census, 466, 473.

in the state were under twenty, in rural Louisiana 53.5 per cent were below this age. In only the Bluff Region was less than 50 per cent of the free colored under twenty (43.5 per cent), and in only the Prairie Region were over 57 per cent (57.1) of the colored under twenty years of age.¹⁴

However, there is a difference when one inspects the age composition of the slave population of the state for in this group in 1850, only 46.5 per cent were under twenty, and in rural Louisiana 47.3 per cent were under that age. Outside of New Orleans, the area with the smallest proportion of its slave population under twenty was the Alluvial Region with 44.1 per cent. The Pine Region led with 56.3 per cent of its population under twenty.¹⁵

By 1860, 50.2 per cent of the total white inhabitants of the state were under twenty years of age, but in all of the agricultural regions, the percentage of the population under twenty was higher. The Prairie Region which still had 58.3 per cent of its white population under twenty at the eve of the Civil War, also still had the largest proportion in that age group. For rural Louisiana there was an overall increase of one per cent in the proportion of the whites under twenty, but showing

¹⁴Ibid., 468-469, 473.

¹⁵Ibid., 471, 473.

larger gains than this were the Pine and Alluvial regions with rises of 1.4 per cent.¹⁶

During the decade the proportion of the total free colored population under twenty declined from 48.2 per cent to 47.4 per cent, but in the rural section the decline was from 53.5 per cent to 52.4 per cent. The largest drop was in the Prairie Region (57.1 per cent to 53.7 per cent), while gains were made in the Pine Region (56.1 per cent to 59.8 per cent), and the Oak Region (53.5 per cent to 57.6 per cent).¹⁷

There was a one per cent increase in the proportion of slaves under twenty in the state, but only a .5 per cent increase in rural Louisiana. In the Alluvial Region, 44.4 per cent of the slaves were under twenty in 1860 compared to 44.1 per cent in 1850. There were also proportional gains in the Bluff Region (1.5 per cent), the Prairie Region (4.5 per cent), and the Pine Region (1.4 per cent), while a decline of .5 per cent occurred in the Oak Region (54.6 per cent to 54.1 per cent).¹⁸

At the opening of the decade, 49.9 per cent of the

¹⁶Compiled from Seventh Census, 466, 473; Eighth Census, 188, 194.

¹⁷Compiled from Seventh Census, 468-469, 473; Eighth Census, 188-190, 194.

¹⁸Compiled from Seventh Census, 471, 473; Eighth Census, 190-192, 194.

total white inhabitants were within the twenty to fifty-nine year age bracket. In rural Louisiana, 43.6 per cent of the white people were in the same age group, but the Alluvial and Bluff regions had higher percentages. Only 41 per cent of the residents in the Oak Region and 40.5 per cent of the inhabitants of the Pine Region and an even smaller proportion, 39.4 per cent, of the people in the Prairie Region were within these age levels.¹⁹

The free colored between twenty and fifty-nine amounted to 45.7 per cent of the free Negro population in 1850. The corresponding percentage for the rural regions of the state was 40.7, with the Prairie, Alluvial, and Pine regions reporting 38.7 per cent, 38.1 per cent, and 38.5 per cent respectively. The proportions in this category in the Oak and Bluff regions were 42 per cent and 47 per cent.²⁰

At the same time, the slaves within the same age group comprised 50.8 per cent of their total population, and in rural Louisiana 49.3 per cent were in the same bracket. This percentage was exceeded only in the Alluvial Region, where 52.3 per cent of the slaves were in this group; the Bluff Region ranked next with 46.2 per cent of its slave population between twenty and fifty-nine; and the

¹⁹Seventh Census, 466-467, 473.

²⁰Ibid., 469, 473.

Pine Region with 41.1 per cent had the smallest proportion of its slave population in this category.²¹

By 1860 in the entire state, in rural Louisiana, and in every agricultural area except the Oak Region where an .8 per cent increase was reported, a smaller proportion of the slave population between twenty and fifty-nine was recorded than had been enumerated ten years before. The decline for the entire state was 1.7 per cent and for rural Louisiana .7 per cent. The greatest percentage decrease was in the Prairie Region, where the proportion fell 4.7 per cent, and there were declines of 2.3 per cent in the Bluff Region, 1.9 per cent in the Pine Region and .7 per cent in the Alluvial Region.²²

Only 2.4 per cent of the white population in 1850 was over fifty-nine years of age. In three regions of rural Louisiana the proportion fell below that figure: the Alluvial--2.3 per cent, the Prairie--2.3 per cent, and the Oak--1.9 per cent. In the Pine Region 2.9 per cent was recorded, which was the largest portion reported in this age group. By 1860, there were increases in this category in the Oak, the Bluff, and the Prairie regions while no change was reported for the Pine Region.²³

²¹Ibid., 471-473.

²²Compiled from Ibid.; Eighth Census, 190-194.

²³Compiled from Seventh Census; 467-468, 473; Eighth Census, 189-194.

Among the free colored, the proportion of the population over fifty-nine years of age was larger. The Bluff Region with 9.3 per cent had the largest percentage, while the least significant portion of the free colored population in this age group was in the Prairie Region, where it amounted to 4.2 per cent. However, by 1860 there was a smaller percentage of the free colored over fifty-nine in every agricultural region except the Prairie Region, where 5.9 per cent of the free colored were over this age.²⁴

Of the total slave population of the state in 1850, 3.2 per cent was over fifty-nine. In the agricultural regions, this proportion was 3.4 per cent with the Alluvial Region having the largest percentage, 3.6, and the Pine Region the smallest, 2.6.²⁵ During the decade, the proportion of slaves over fifty-nine increased in every agricultural region with the exception of the Oak Region. The proportion for rural Louisiana increased from 3.4 to 3.6 per cent with the largest increases in the Alluvial and Bluff regions (.8 per cent in each). The region with the greatest proportion of aged slaves was still the Alluvial Region.²⁶

²⁴Compiled from Seventh Census, 469-470, 473; Eighth Census, 189-191, 194.

²⁵Compiled from Seventh Census, ^A472-473.

²⁶Compiled from Ibid.; Eighth Census, 191-194.

Another important factor in a discussion of population is the balance between the sexes. In 1850 among the whites there were 141,243 males and 114,248 females which gave to the state a sex ratio of 123. In rural Louisiana where there were 88,365 males and 75,695 females the sex ratio was 117. The highest sex ratio among the agricultural regions was in the Bluff Region (120) while the lowest was in the Prairie Region (107). In the Alluvial Region, where there were more whites than in any other agricultural region, the sex ratio was 115 in 1850, and in the Pine Region, whose population was predominantly white, the sex ratio was 113.²⁷

The sex ratio of the total white population of the state under 20 was 92 in 1850, but 102.2 for the rural whites. In fact, the number of males of rural Louisiana exceeded the females in all census age groups under twenty except in the fifteen and under twenty category, in which females outnumbered males 8,403 to 7,781. A study of the age composition of the population in the various agricultural regions shows that with the exception of the Pine Region the above statement applies to all regions. In the Pine Region the males outnumbered the females in the fifteen and under twenty age group. This predominance of females in the fifteen and under twenty age bracket was probably

²⁷Compiled from Seventh Census, 473.

due to the tendency for females to report themselves somewhat under their chronological ages.²⁸

The highest sex ratio of any of the agricultural regions in the under twenty age group was 106.8 in the Oak Region while the lowest, 99.1 was among the whites of the Prairie. The ratio in the Alluvial, Bluff, and Pine regions was 100.7, 101, and 100.4 respectively.²⁹

It is when the returns for the whites between twenty and forty-nine are examined that the highest ratios are found, for between these ages the sex ratio for the entire state was 151. The sex ratio in rural Louisiana was 135, with the Bluff Region having the highest ratio, 147, and the Alluvial the next, 140. Again the lowest sex ratio, 116, was in the Prairie Region. The ratio in the Oak Region was 135 and in the Pine, 127.³⁰

The greatest imbalance between the sexes in the twenty through forty-nine age group in the population of rural Louisiana was found in the thirty and under forty category. The same applies for all of the agricultural regions. The smallest differential was in the twenty and under thirty age classification.³¹

²⁸T. Lyn Smith, Population Analysis (New York, 1948), 117-119.

²⁹Compiled from Seventh Census, 466, 473.

³⁰Ibid., 466-467.

³¹Ibid.

By the end of the 1850's the sex ratio of the white population had decreased in both the state and rural populations. The increase of the ratio in the Alluvial Region, 115 to 118, was more than offset by declines in the Oak, Bluff, and Prairie regions. As in 1850, the sex ratio in the Prairie Region was the lowest, but the drops from 118 to 111 and 120 to 113 in the Oak and Bluff regions were greater as the Prairie reported a fall of only 107 to 106. There was no change in the Pine Region.³²

By 1860 in rural Louisiana, there was a rise in the sex ratio for the ages under twenty. Although the ratio decreased in the Oak and Bluff regions, increases in the Pine Region (100.4 to 106.8), the Prairie Region (99.1 to 102.4) and the Alluvial Region (100.7 to 102.2) gave to the rural people a ratio of 103.1 for their population under twenty years of age.³³

At the same time the sex ratio of the whites under fifty and over twenty dropped from 135 to 133, but there was an increase in one region, the Oak, from 135 to 136. The sex ratio of the Alluvial Region remained the same (140) while that of the Bluff dropped from 147 to 136, the Prairie from 116 to 111, and the Pine from 127 to 117. The Bluff Region had been superseded by the Alluvial Region as the

³²Compiled from Ibid., 473; Eighth Census, 194.

³³Compiled from Seventh Census, 466; Eighth Census, 188.

area with the highest sex ratio.³⁴

The sex ratio of the free colored of rural Louisiana in 1850 was 88.6 and in the entire state, 74.9. In only one region was the sex ratio over 100 and that was the Prairie where it was 140.7, and in only one other, the Pine Region, was it above 90 (95). The lowest sex ratio was in the Bluff Region (74).³⁵

For the age group under twenty the sex ratio of the free colored was 97.9 in rural Louisiana as compared to 89.2 in the entire state. In two regions, the Oak and the Prairie, the sex ratio was over 100, 100.3 and 100.9 respectively. The lowest sex ratio of this age group was among the free colored of the Pine Region (93.4).³⁶

The sex ratio of the free colored between the ages twenty and forty-nine was 64.7 in the state but 73.2 in rural Louisiana. Within this age group the highest ratio was in the Pine Region where it was 98.1; the lowest was 72.8 in the Prairie Region. The Alluvial Region, where a majority of the rural free Negroes resided, had a sex ratio of 80.6, with 77.1 for the Oak Region and 72.9 for the Bluff Region.³⁷

³⁴Compiled from Seventh Census, 466-467; Eighth Census, 188-189.

³⁵Compiled from Seventh Census, 473.

³⁶Ibid., 468-469.

³⁷Ibid., 469.

By 1860, the sex ratio of the free colored of the whole state and of rural Louisiana had risen; with a ratio of 79.6 for the state and 91.9 for the rural area, the number of males was approaching closer to that of the females. In only two agricultural areas were there declines in the ratio, the Alluvial and the Prairie; however, these were more than balanced by large proportional gains by the males in the Oak, Bluff, and Pine regions, where the sex ratios rose to 96, 108.4, and 106.2 respectively. The sex ratio of the Prairie Region was at this time below 100, 86.9.³⁸

The sex ratio of the slave population of the state was 105.8 in 1850, while in rural Louisiana it was 109.4. In only two regions was it below 100: the Oak where it was 99.4, and the Bluff where it was 97.9. The region with the highest ratio was the Alluvial (114.7) followed by the Prairie with 106.3 and the Pine Region with 105.1.³⁹

However, a survey of the balance between the sexes of slaves under twenty years of age reveals that the ratio was 98 for both the entire state and for rural Louisiana. In this group only in the Alluvial Region and the Prairie Region were the ratios above 100; that is 100.4 in the Alluvial and 103.1 in the Prairie. The lowest ratio (93.9)

³⁸Compiled from Ibid., 473; Eighth Census, 194.

³⁹Compiled from Seventh Census, 473.

was in the Bluff Region. Following the Prairie and the Alluvial regions were the Pine with a sex ratio of 98.1 and the Oak where the ratio was 96.2.⁴⁰

The sex ratio of the slaves of Louisiana between twenty and forty-nine was 111.2 in 1850 while the ratio in rural Louisiana was 117.7. Between these ages the Alluvial Region showed the highest ratio with 125.5 and the Oak Region the lowest with 101.3. The Pine Region followed the Alluvial Region with 112.5 and then the Prairie with 108.5 and the Bluff with 102.6.⁴¹

During the 1850's, the sex ratio of rural Louisiana slaves within the same age bracket dropped to 116.9. The decline was to 123 in the Alluvial Region, to 105.7 in the Prairie Region, and to 104.7 in the Pine Region. Increases are noted in the ratios of the Oak and the Bluff regions (103.1 and 106) in 1860.⁴²

A very significant factor in any population is the number and sex of the people found in the employable or the wage earning ages. As stated earlier a large percentage of the rural population of Louisiana was between twenty and fifty-nine years of age.⁴³ No doubt some of the people in

⁴⁰Ibid., 471.

⁴¹Ibid., 471-472.

⁴²Compiled from Ibid.; Eighth Census, 190-192.

⁴³See statistics presented on pages 23-25.

the age group fifteen through nineteen were wage earners, but this was in all probability a minor portion of that population. When it is considered that 43.6 per cent of the rural white people fell into the wage earning bracket it appears that a fairly large portion of the people contributed to the economic sufficiency of the state. But it must be realized that in certain areas of ante-bellum Louisiana the female portion of the population contributed little to the economic existence.

A survey of age and sex distribution among the whites of the Alluvial Region in 1850 shows that 26.5 per cent of the population were males between twenty and fifty-nine. In the same area at the same time only 17.9 per cent of the free colored population was male within what can be considered the wage earning group. In the other agricultural regions the percentages of whites in this age group were 23.7 in the Oak, 28 in the Bluff, 21.3 in the Prairie, and 22.9 in the Pine, while corresponding percentages for the free colored were 23.8 in the Oak, 28.1 in the Bluff, 22 in the Prairie, and 20.1 in the Pine. In only the Bluff Region was over half the free male population between twenty and fifty-nine.⁴⁴

Males between twenty and fifty-nine constituted 26.7 per cent of the total slave population of rural

⁴⁴Compiled from Seventh Census, 466-469, 473.

Louisiana in 1850. In the Alluvial Region this group made up 29.2 per cent of the slave population, with the percentages for the remaining regions being 21.9 in the Oak, 23.3 in the Bluff, 23.9 in the Prairie, and 22 in the Pine. The Alluvial Region was the only agricultural area with over fifty per cent of its slave population in the most productive years.⁴⁵

By the end of the decade the percentage of the rural white male population between twenty and fifty-nine had declined in every agricultural region of the state. The largest declines were in the Bluff Region (1.6 per cent) and in the Pine Region (1.5 per cent), and the smallest decline was in the Oak Region (.6 per cent). It is therefore obvious that the decrease in the proportion of the male population came in the ages that are considered wage earning, for increases were made in the ages under twenty and over fifty-nine.⁴⁶

The census of 1860 revealed that the proportion of free colored males of wage earning age increased in all agricultural regions save the Pine where there was a 1.7 per cent decline. The greatest increase was one of 2 per cent in the Prairie Region. Since there was an increase in the percentage of the males in the free colored population, it

⁴⁵Ibid., 471-473.

⁴⁶Compiled from Ibid.; Eighth Census, 188-189, 194.

is clear that the largest part of this gain was in the wage earning group as there was a slight decline in the proportion of males under twenty and only a .1 per cent increase of those over fifty-nine.⁴⁷

By 1860 there was a slight proportional decline in rural Louisiana among the male slaves under fifty-nine and over twenty, and this decline was reported in all agricultural areas except the Oak where a .5 per cent increase was made. The largest decreases within these ages were in the Pine Region (1.6 per cent) and the Prairie Region (2.6 per cent).⁴⁸

During the fifties the white population of the state increased 27.3 per cent, but the rural white population did not match this rate as it increased only 19 per cent. The highest rate of increase was in the Pine Region, where the white population increased 39.8 per cent. A gain of 9 per cent was reported by the Bluff Region while increases of 20.4, 13.1, and 16.3 per cents were recorded for the Oak, Prairie, and Alluvial regions respectively.⁴⁹

In fact, the only population classification in which the rural area was able to equal the increase made by

⁴⁷Compiled from Seventh Census, 469, 473; Eighth Census, 188-191, 194.

⁴⁸Compiled from Seventh Census, 471-473; Eighth Census, 190-194.

⁴⁹Compiled from Seventh Census, 473; Eighth Census, 194.

the entire state from 1850 to 1860 was in the slave group, where the rural gain exceeded that of the state by 2.3 per cent (27.3 per cent to 25 per cent). In this category, the largest percentage gain was in the Oak Region, 34.6, and the smallest in the Bluff Region, 7. The gains made in the Alluvial Region and the Pine Region exceeded the increases in the state and rural Louisiana with rises of 29.3 and 33.2 per cents respectively, while the Prairie Region showed a smaller increase of 12.2 per cent.⁵⁰

By 1860, the free colored population had grown by 5.9 per cent in the state but only by 1.4 per cent in the rural areas, and there was an absolute decline of 3 per cent in the Alluvial Region and of 15 per cent in the Prairie Region. The largest percentage increases were in the Bluff and Pine regions, 33.9 and 19.1, while a 7.5 per cent increase was recorded for the Oak Region.⁵¹

In rural Louisiana, 7.2 per cent of the white residents were of foreign birth during the 1850's, and the majority of these inhabitants, 10,453, lived in the Alluvial Region, where they represented 10 per cent of the white population. However, in the Bluff Region where only 15 per cent of the 14,550 persons of foreign nativity lived, they comprised 12 per cent of the white population. There

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

were fewest natives of other lands in the Prairie Region (514); however, it was the Oak Region where the foreign element was the least significant part of the white population (2.5 per cent). Living on the pine lands were 895 foreigners constituting 3.9 per cent of the population.⁵²

Also in the population of Louisiana were 426 free colored persons of foreign nativity. However, only sixty-six of these people resided in rural Louisiana and outside of the Alluvial Region, where there were fifty-four free colored of foreign birth, no agricultural region had over three of these inhabitants. Obviously the free colored of foreign birth were of little significance in the population of ante-bellum Louisiana.⁵³

During the fifties the white population became a larger part of the population of Louisiana; however, in the rural regions of the state, the Negro did not just continue his numerical dominance but actually increased it. In only three areas did the proportion of the white population increase, and of these three in one, the Bluff Region, the gain was so small in comparison to the great predominance of the colored race, that the change can only be considered as the beginning of a movement or a trend. Furthermore, the free colored of the Bluff Region became proportionally

⁵²Compiled from Eighth Census, 195-196.

⁵³Ibid.

a more important segment of the population as their percentage increased from 1.1 to 1.5. Thus, the .3 per cent and .4 per cent proportional increases for the whites and the free colored might show that the institution of slavery was beginning to falter in the Bluff Region.⁵⁴

The Prairie Region, limited as it was in the amount of really suitable agricultural soil, remained predominantly colored, but the white population gained in proportional significance, although there was a definite increase in the proportion of the slave population. The larger decline in the free colored segment permitted the white accession to move the area closer to a balance between the races.⁵⁵

In only the Pine Region was the advantage of the whites so solid that the area can definitely be called the real domicile of the white man. In this region the whites were the only people gaining proportionally, although there were numerical increases in both the slave and the free colored populations.⁵⁶

In the three most fertile areas of the state, the Alluvial Region, the Bluff Region, and the Oak Region, the Negro was firmly entrenched in 1850 and during the decade

⁵⁴For the statistics, see pages 18-21.

⁵⁵Refer to pages 19-20.

⁵⁶See pages 18-21.

augmented his preponderancy in two of these areas.⁵⁷ The free population of rural Louisiana, white and free colored, seems to have been moving toward an increasing inferiority that could only be challenged by the opening of new areas of land suitable not so much to the plantation, but to farm economy, since the obvious tendency was for the slave population to gravitate toward the most suitable agricultural regions.⁵⁸

The agricultural areas of Louisiana best suited for smaller agricultural enterprise were the Oak and the Pine regions. It has already been shown that the Oak Region, while capable of supporting the plantation system, was evidently better suited for the small slave holder and non-slaveholder due to the presence of much land that was not fertile enough for staple crop economy.⁵⁹

The rather large increase of white inhabitants in the Oak Region belies this fact, as well as does the large increase of slaves, for as the better soil in the more fertile areas became less available more slaves as well as more whites came into the region.⁶⁰ On the other hand, it

⁵⁷The statistics are presented on page 18.

⁵⁸See pages 16-18.

⁵⁹Refer to pages 6-9.

⁶⁰Refer to the statistics on pages 16, 24, 18-21, 33-35.

was impossible for the plantation system to exist on the pine flats and hills of the state.

It is difficult to determine the nature of the increase of the slave population. However, where the proportion of the population in the productive ages (twenty through fifty-nine) increases, it is probable that at least a part of the population was brought in from other areas of the state or nation. A careful examination of the age composition of the slave population shows that in only the Oak Region was the proportion of the slaves within the working ages larger in 1860 than in 1850,⁶¹ and furthermore the Oak Region was one of the two agricultural regions showing an increase in the slave sex ratio in the productive years.⁶² The other was the Bluff Region, where there was an absolute decline in the number of female slaves in that age bracket. Thus, it would appear that a portion of the increase in the slave population of the Oak Region had been imported. The increase in the proportion of male slaves within the most productive years definitely points to the importation of male slaves.

It is more difficult to determine the nature of the increases for the whites, since in their migration,

⁶¹See pages 25-26.

⁶²The sex ratios are presented on pages 29-30.

the movement of families would cause more general increases and decreases. On the other hand since the preferred slaves were males in their most productive years, their movement can be more readily ascertained. However, the Oak Region was the only agricultural region that recorded an increase in the sex ratio among the whites in the productive years.⁶³

In 1850, 25.2 per cent of the white males in rural Louisiana were within their most productive years. This figure was exceeded in both the Alluvial and Bluff regions, and in both of these regions the percentage of males over twenty and under fifty-nine exceeded the proportion below twenty. This was true for none of the other agricultural regions of the state,⁶⁴ and this distribution of the male population tends to show that compared with other rural regions the plantation areas were not as congenial for family life. This conclusion becomes more obvious when it is remembered that the sex ratio was highest in the plantation regions.

The large predominance of white males of all ages, but particularly within the marriageable ages,⁶⁵ gives a definite insight into the character of rural Louisiana. It proves the generally accepted fact that agriculturally

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Refer to pages 31-33.

⁶⁵See pages 26-32.



speaking Louisiana was a new state, and it shows that the civilization and culture would in many instances not take on some of the aspects characteristic of older areas in which the "woman's touch" would be more prevalent.

Considering the abundance of females among the free colored at all ages, but particularly in the ages between twenty and forty-nine,⁶⁶ some explanation other than the reputed attractiveness of the free colored women must be found for at least some of the miscegenation that was taking place. There was also a better balance between the sexes in the slave population, and with the exception of the Pine and Prairie regions slave women actually outnumbered white women in the regional populations.⁶⁷

The decline in the proportion of white males in the years between twenty and fifty-nine also shows that migration into the rural regions had slowed down considerably, and that, the population, unless greatly affected by some external force, would begin to develop along more normal lines.

The decline of the proportion of males in the most productive years further shows that there were more people dependent upon fewer people for economic support as the decade wore on. This larger group of dependents was

⁶⁶See pages 30-31.

⁶⁷Computed from the Seventh Census, 473; Eighth Census, 194.

comprised primarily of females and young people, although there was a larger proportion of older people in 1860 than in 1850.⁶⁸ Another conclusion that might be reached is that the rural population was younger at the end of the decade than at the beginning, but this does not apply to the free colored who had increased the segment of their population over twenty years of age.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Refer to pages 30-36.

⁶⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER III

When the historical or quasi-historical writer describes ante-bellum Louisiana he usually emphasizes opulent planters, great plantations, and large gangs of slaves working in fields of sugar cane or cotton. The majority of these authors have, without adequate investigation or careful examination of the sources, characterized Louisiana as being preeminently a plantation state. The generalization, however, lacks the plain pedestrian virtues of accuracy and completeness, for Louisiana in the 1850's was more a state of farmers than of planters--it unquestionably was a state wherein the folk of the rural areas were predominantly non-slaveholders. In 1850, only about two out of each five agricultural holdings in the state could have been termed "plantations,"¹ and by 1860, in all the agricultural regions of the commonwealth, only a small percentage of the free families owned slaves.²

¹Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 77.

²Based on computations from the Statistics of the United States, 1860. . . . (Washington, 1866), 344; Agriculture of the United States in 1860. . . . (Washington, 1864), 230. Hereafter cited as Agriculture in 1860. Preliminary Report, 1860, 262. Table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 318.

Even on the best land, in the rich alluvium areas, only 43 per cent of the rural families owned Negroes in bondage.³

Why then has so much attention been devoted to a mode of life applicable to only a minority of the people? In reality, the answer is not difficult to determine, for number does not make size or wealth. The total acreage of farms fell far short of equalling the total acreage of the plantations, and value of farm products came nowhere near the value of plantation products. The acreage under the plantation regime exceeded by only six times that under farm culture, and, excluding the slaves, the value of the large establishments far outstripped that of the small;⁴ therefore, one must not consider Louisiana a farmer state or a planter state, but rather as a planter-farmer state.

The most important plantation areas were the Alluvial and the Bluff regions, but this does not mean that there were no plantations in any of the other agricultural sections, for in the southeastern part of the Prairie Region were some sugar and cotton plantations.⁵ There were also small cotton plantations on some of the best

³Based on computations from Preliminary Report, 1860, 262; Agriculture in 1860, 67-69, 230; Auditor of Public Accounts, Report of 1861, 3-106. Table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 315.

⁴Ibid., 78.

⁵Hilgard, "Louisiana," 34.

soil in the Oak Region, although this area was the traditional home of the yeoman farmer.⁶ From the soil of the Bluff and Alluvial regions was harvested 86 per cent of the state's sugar and 71 per cent of its cotton.⁷ The majority of the Alluvial parishes and all of the Bluff parishes were included in the Black Belt of Louisiana,⁸ and 57 per cent of the assessed property value in the state was located in these two rural areas.⁹ But over half of the free families owned no land, and of those who did, only among those living in the Alluvial parishes south of the Red River were as many as 50 per cent living on farms of between three and fifty acres.¹⁰

A plantation might be considered as an agricultural unit usually well over one hundred acres, with the labor

⁶Ibid., 30, 34-35. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 11.

⁷Based on computations from Agriculture in 1860, 67, 69, 230. Table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 317.

⁸The Black Belt is composed of parishes having a majority of their population Negro.

⁹Computed from compilations from Auditor of Public Accounts, Report of, 1861, 3-106. Table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 316.

¹⁰Based on compilations from Preliminary Report, 1860, 262; table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 317. Compilations from Agriculture in 1860, 67, 69, 230; table in Ibid., 316. In the Bluff Region, 17 per cent, and in the Alluvial Region north of the Red River, 31 per cent, of the land owners were on farms between three and fifty acres.

force primarily slave and the chief crop either cotton or sugar. Furthermore, a decisive factor in determining whether or not an agricultural holding was a sugar plantation was the presence of a sugar mill. Of a total of 13,442 agricultural properties at the opening of the decade, only 4,205 raised over five bales of cotton and only 1,558 had sugar houses.¹¹ Therefore, in 1850, by these standards, only two in five agricultural holdings could logically be called a plantation.¹²

The two great staples of Louisiana were sugar and cotton. Sugar was the staple of South Louisiana and was rarely produced for commercial purposes north of the Red River, although it was not rare to find small farmers in that region planting enough cane to produce "sweetening" for home consumption.¹³ The five most important of the sugar producing parishes were St. Mary, Assumption, Terrebonne, Ascension, and Lafourche,¹⁴ and Lafourche alone of these leading sugar producers was not a Black Belt parish.¹⁵ Other parishes producing large amounts of sugar were

¹¹Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 77.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 63.

¹⁴Agriculture in 1860, 69.

¹⁵Eighth Census, 194.

Iberville, Plaquemines, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, St. James, and West Baton Rouge, each of which produced over ten million pounds in 1860. Producing a lesser amount but over three million pounds each were Avoyelles, East Baton Rouge, St. Charles, St. John the Baptist, St. Martin, and West Feliciana.¹⁶ Every one of these parishes was predominately colored in population make-up,¹⁷ and all were Alluvial parishes save East Baton Rouge and West Feliciana which were Bluff parishes.¹⁸ The average size of the slave holdings in the leading sugar parishes was twenty-two, but almost half of the planters owned less than six slaves.¹⁹

Out of a total of two hundred and forty-two million dollars, the assessed property value of the sugar parishes included the Black Belt and producing more sugar than cotton was one hundred and three million dollars, and the value of the slaves held in these parishes was forty-three million dollars. Thus, less than half of the one hundred and twenty-one million dollar slave wealth and less than half of the 242 million dollar assessed property

¹⁶Agriculture in 1860, 69.

¹⁷Eighth Census, 194.

¹⁸Hilgard, "Louisiana," 56-57.

¹⁹Computed from Preliminary Report, 1860, 262; table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 315.

wealth of the Black Belt was in the sugar parishes.²⁰ However, the fact that the property was assessed at a value of less than half of the total should not be accepted as proof that property holdings in cotton were more valuable than those in sugar, for in some of the leading cotton parishes, a relatively large amount of sugar was produced, and the value of the sugar plantations in these parishes increased the total property value of the cotton producing areas.²¹

The cotton producing area was much more scattered as that crop could be grown equally as well north or south of the Red River;²² however, the majority of the cotton produced in the state was grown in the area north of that river.²³ It has been stated that climate caused most of this differential, but it has also been argued that neither soil nor weather made the difference. One authority thought that the reason was an economic one and that no other factor played a significant role in this development.²⁴

²⁰Computed from compilations from Auditor of Public Accounts, Report of, 1861, 3-106; Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 317.

²¹Avoyelles where eight million pounds of cotton and four million pounds of sugar were produced; Rapides where nineteen million pounds of cotton and twelve million pounds of sugar were produced, and West Feliciana where eight million pounds of cotton and five million pounds of sugar were produced are good examples. Agriculture in 1860, 67, 69.

²²Hilgard, "Louisiana," 33.

²³Computed from Agriculture in 1860, 230. Ibid.

²⁴Hilgard, "Louisiana," 33.

Thirty-one of the forty-eight parishes produced more cotton than sugar, but 85 per cent of the cotton was produced in nineteen Black Belt parishes. The leading five cotton producing parishes were Tensas, Carrol, Concordia, Madison, and Rapides of which all are Alluvial and all but Rapides north of the Red River. Altogether the alluvial soil north of the Red River produced 57 per cent of the cotton of the state. On the Bluff, Prairie, and Alluvial lands south of the Red River, was produced 20 per cent of the cotton, and 21 per cent of the state's cotton production was contributed by the small slave owners and non-slave owning farmers living on the pine hills and flats and the Oak Uplands of both North and South Louisiana.²⁵

Plantation life emanated from the home of the planter around which, if present, were usually clustered the carriage house, office, smoke house, and domestic servants' quarters. Much has been written about the plantation home, perhaps too much. Many have come to accept the elaborate mansions found along the rivers and bayous as typical of Louisiana plantation architecture, although in actuality large and pretentious plantation homes were not prevalent and in most areas were unusual. An English visitor to St. Mary Parish stated that the best home sites

²⁵Computed from Agriculture in 1860, 230; table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 316.

along Bayou Teche had not been utilized as settings for mansions but rather that the proprietors of extensive estates were "often housed in cottages which an English bailiff would despise."²⁶

The majority of the smaller plantation homes were either cypress or pine structures facing a river or a bayou.²⁷ These modest houses were usually one or one and a half story buildings whose main floor was elevated the height of a full story above the ground, and the space beneath the floor was either enclosed as a basement or left open except for the supporting brick foundations. Usually included under the eaves of the gabled roofs were either a front or back porch or both, and generally the floor plan was characterized by a central hall around which were the living rooms of the house.²⁸

Houses larger than the above, but far from the oft-described mansions, and perhaps closer to being typical

²⁶Charles Daubeney, Journal of a Tour Through the United States and Canada Made During the Years 1837-1838 as quoted in Wendell H. Stephenson, Alexander Porter, Whig Planter of Old Louisiana (Baton Rouge, 1934), 120.

²⁷Ibid. Even today a ride through the countryside would confirm this statement.

²⁸Based on Jewel Lyn deGrummond, "A Social History of St. Mary Parish," an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1948, 22-23; hereafter cited as deGrummond, "St. Mary Parish." Cecile Willink, "Architectural Daguerreotypes of Louisiana," Country Life, XXXIV (1932), 69; Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 659. The author has seen several homes of this type along the rivers and bayous of the state.

of the planters' residences were usually two story houses. These buildings, often made to appear pretentious by the presence of colonnades, were in actuality simple in internal arrangement. In the majority there was a wide hall running the length of the building and sometimes there was a hall that ran across the main corridor offering a side entrance.²⁹ Only rarely were the capitals of the colonnades worked with much attention to the architectural orders, for they were commonly left to the imagination and taste of the local carpenters.³⁰

A plantation home, perhaps typical in many respects, had a first floor of brick and a second of wood and was completely encircled by a broad gallery which was shaded by an extension of the steep roof. The white family's quarters were all on the second floor.³¹ An example of this category was the home of William E. Edwards of Iberville Parish who owned land valued at \$76,000 and seventy-five slaves valued at \$76,750. In his two story home were fourteen rooms with furnishings valued at \$2,059.50, the furniture in the parlor alone being valued at \$1,700. Other household items included \$50 worth of silverware, \$25 worth

²⁹deGrummond, "St. Mary Parish," 23.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 659.

7 glassware,
\$20.00 worth
Clock etc.

of glassware, and \$20 worth of crockery.³²

As stated previously, nearly half of the slave owners in the leading sugar parishes held less than six slaves, but in the important cotton parishes two out of three planters owned more than five slaves.³³ Furthermore, the average size of the slaveholdings in the Black Belt parishes producing more cotton than sugar was 23,³⁴ and to this it might be added that over half of the value of slaves in the Black Belt was accorded to the slaves of the leading cotton producing areas. From this it would appear that the common belief that slavery and sugar were more compatible than slavery and cotton is false.

Although tradition has it that work on cotton plantations was easier than that on sugar plantations, most cotton planters would probably have agreed that "the cotton plant is the most tender plant that grows," and "is susceptible to more disasters and requires more of human manual labor to produce it than anything else."³⁵ Furthermore, the

³²Iberville Parish Succession Records, Book 6, Entry 355.

³³Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 26.

³⁴Computed from compilations from Agriculture in 1860, 230; table in Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 317.

³⁵Speech before the United States House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture, December 19, 1905, as quoted in Rupert B. Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture (Chapel Hill, 1929), 84.

growth of cotton was no simple matter that hard work alone could conquer. The advantage that made cotton the most widely cultivated commercial crop was its adaptability to agricultural conditions on small, large, or average sized holdings without an exceedingly large capital investment in equipment.

On cotton plantations the year's work began shortly after Christmas, and the first few weeks were used to prepare the plantation for the year's routine. Fences were mended, gins repaired, stables cleaned, new fields cleared, and old fields cleaned of withered cotton stalks.³⁶ In general there was intense activity by slaves accomplishing tasks that would later have to be left undone.

During late January and early February, the slaves usually started plowing although it was not rare to wait until the middle of February.³⁷ Toward the end of February small grains were planted, and the first crop of corn was sown before the end of March.³⁸

On some plantations the planting was started in

³⁶Comite Plantation Diary, 1857. Kilbourne (J. G. and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

³⁷E. A. Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846 (New York, 1943), 25. Hereafter cited as Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes.

³⁸Plantation Diary, February, 1841. Liddell (Moses, St. John R. and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

late February or March,³⁹ but when this practice was followed a replanting was occasionally necessitated by frost or excessive dampness; other planters, a bit more cautious or fearful of cold and dampness, waited until April. The better planters tried to begin planting during periods of relative dryness for seed planted in very damp weather might be baked into clods by the sun and be unable to penetrate the hard soil, and cold and dampness combined could and did cause seeds to rot before they germinated.⁴⁰ Often, however, these wise precautions were ignored due to the pressing need to get the planting done as soon as possible.

Cotton seed was planted in rows varying from three to four to six to eight feet apart, and on many plantations, the planters were likely to use a bushel of seed per acre.⁴¹ The actual planting was often done by women and children following a light plow which was run down the center of the furrow.⁴² Unless behind schedule, the planter seldom used his entire force in the planting operation; usually at the same time some of the men were clearing other fields and the women were busy clearing grass from the corn that had

³⁹Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 25.

⁴⁰Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, April 7, 1841. Liddell Papers.

⁴¹Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 159.

⁴²J. G. Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1951, 81.

that had been planted earlier.⁴³

Blessed with the right amount of moisture, spring warmth, and, above all, no frost, the fortunate planter had not long to wait for the little plants to show above the ground, and as soon as the plants had reached a stand the planter began to chop out his cotton.⁴⁴ This called to work all of the hands skilled with a hoe. Prior to this the rows were scraped, a process in which the earth was thrown back from the side of each row leaving the plants on a ledge, and then the choppers, slaves with hoes, were sent down the rows chopping out the grass and cutting down many of the small cotton plants. This "thinning out" was necessitated by the generous manner in which the seed was sown to insure a stand. The scraping and chopping processes "next to picking [are] the most laborious process[es] in [cotton] cultivation."⁴⁵ There was no set rule for thinning as some planters preferred single stalks about eighteen inches apart and others preferred "hills" of several two or three feet apart. It was always necessary to hoe and scrape several times depending on the amount of rain.

⁴³Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, February, March, 1836; February, 1846. Diary published in Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes. Hereafter cited as Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow.

⁴⁴Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 160. Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 25.

⁴⁵Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 161.

and sunshine.

It is difficult to give the exact time when the crop was ready to lay by, for even the planter could not tell how much cultivation his cotton would require. In some localities the practice was to continue cultivation as long as possible, but normally in late June or early July, the fields free of grass were laid by.⁴⁶ The traditional though not often actual date for the start of the lay by was July the Fourth; therefore, when allowed, celebrations among the slaves on this date were certainly not in remembrance of Independence Day.⁴⁷

Between lay by and picking time, fodder was pulled from the standing corn, hay was cut and stored, potatoes were dug, and equipment was readied for the harvest.⁴⁸ While the hands were completing the above chores, the planter had to wait for the processes of nature, the reaction of sun and soil, to do their work, for while harvest usually started near the middle of August, it was possible for hot dry days and moist hot nights--the planter's ideal weather--to speed the opening of the bolls. On the other

⁴⁶Ibid., 162.

⁴⁷DeBow's Review, XII (1852), 291.

⁴⁸Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes,

hand, a cooler, moister summer could delay harvest until September.⁴⁹

The harvest, cotton picking, required certainly as much and perhaps more hand labor than any other agricultural process,⁵⁰ and it also required considerable skill. Since the bolls opened at different times, the fields had to be picked over "thrice or more" times.⁵¹ The time required for a man to pick an acre of cotton, which was from thirty to one hundred hours, depended on the yield, the size of the boll, and the spacing of stalks. The average time usually allowed or estimated by the planter was approximately fifty hours of man labor per acre,⁵² and the average poundage expected from an adult picker in one day's work was about 150 pounds.⁵³ Before the end of September hauling to the wharves or shipping points was begun.⁵⁴

It would be a mistake to believe that plowing, planting, and harvesting of cotton and corn completed the

⁴⁹Plantation Account Book, 1859-1860. Butler (Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 164-166.

⁵⁰Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 166.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Comite Plantation Diary, September, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

⁵⁴Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 26.

routine on cotton plantations for in reality, the work was never done. Wood had to be cut and hauled from swamps and woods. This usually was done in the winter months preceding spring planting. Buildings of all types had to be built and mended, equipment repaired, warehouses weather proofed, fences inspected and all in all a continual process went on in more or less slack seasons between cotton operations, at odd times and during inclement weather. In general, it might be said that when there were holidays on cotton plantations, they were extended not because of lack of work but due to special occasions.⁵⁵

That agricultural misfit, sugar cane, attracted far more attention among visitors than did the better known cotton. Sugar cane culture and the manufacture of sugar could not be successfully and profitably carried on on a small scale because not only was expensive machinery required to grind the cane, but the constant danger of floods along rivers and bayous necessitated large capital outlays to build levees, the cost of which at first was borne entirely by the riparian proprietors.⁵⁶ Further, the rich and fertile land most suitable for sugar cane culture sold

⁵⁵Ibid., 25-32.

⁵⁶Based on a study of the Police Jury Minutes of the Louisiana Parishes. See also J. H. Rills, ed., A New Digest of the Laws of the Parish of Iberville (Plaquemine, Louisiana, 1859), Article 136.

for prices beyond the reach of newcomers without capital.⁵⁷ None but the rich or those with ample credit could afford to cultivate, much less buy the best sugar lands⁵⁸ for the heavy alluvial soil demanded more labor than other soils.⁵⁹

The routine on a sugar plantation was far more complicated than that on a cotton plantation. Obviously the combination of agriculture and manufacture made this so because the production of sugar demanded a variety of skills and techniques along with specialization and organization that was not only unnecessary, but unthought of on cotton plantations. The profitable and successful growth of sugar cane demanded constant attention at all seasons of the year, and when the planter prepared for the manufacture of sugar from one crop, he, at the same time, made preparations to plant his cane for the next year.⁶⁰ The latter was carried out by cutting the cane which was to be used for seed and storing it in mats in order to protect it from freezing weather during the coming winter.

⁵⁷Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 5.

⁵⁸U. B. Phillips, "Plantations with Slave Labor and Free," American Historical Review, XXX (1925), 746.

⁵⁹Dennett, Louisiana As It Is, 25.

⁶⁰John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, July 11, 1846 as cited in Paul E. Postell, "John Hampden Randolph, A Louisiana Planter," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXV (1942), 190-191. Hereafter cited as Postell, "John Hampden Randolph."

Cane could be planted at any time from the beginning of October to the end of March, but if cane were planted in the fall precautions had to be taken to prevent its freezing or decaying.⁶¹ Usually planting started near the beginning of the calendar year, but this practice depended as much on the weather as did other operations on a sugar plantation.⁶² Some planted a new crop every year while others only every third year for there was no standard practice as weather conditions determined the advisability of using stubble from the preceding year.⁶³

Cane was planted in rows varying from three feet to six or eight feet apart, but in exceptional cases some planters were known to space the rows as far apart as ten, twelve, or even fifteen feet.⁶⁴ The cane, three or four stalks together, was laid parallel in the furrow and then covered with earth. After the cane was planted, other kinds of plantation work could be done, such as ditching the fields, cutting wood for fuel, getting the roads in condition for hauling the crop, and making the necessary

⁶¹y. Alton Moody, "Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXV (1942), 44.

⁶²Walter Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation Under the Slavery Regime," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XIV (1927), 169. Hereafter cited as Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation."

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Franklin Planters' Banner, July 22, 1847.

repairs to the sugar house and its machinery.⁶⁵

The cultivation of the cane did not begin until March, but weather permitting, some work might be done on the plowed ground in February.⁶⁶ In March, all hands were put to work chopping weeds and grass from the growing stalks. They hoed and plowed the cane from this time until the middle of the summer when the cane was laid by, and until lay by cultivation of the cane was the principal activity on the plantation. For instance in June, 1861, two gangs of slaves were working amidst the cane on a plantation north of New Orleans; twenty men were plowing out the cane middles, and thirty-six women were hoeing the cane.⁶⁷ It was not unusual for the more backward stubble to receive attention well into July.⁶⁸ The routine work in cultivating cane that kept the growth steady and constant was the repeated hoeing and plowing.⁶⁹

There was no leisure for the slaves during lay by--there was much to be done. During the intervals when

⁶⁵John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, July 11, 1846 as cited in Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 190. Palfrey Plantation Diary, January, 1845. Palfrey (William T.) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁶⁶Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 170.

⁶⁷William T. Russell, My Diary North and South (New York, 1863), 100.

⁶⁸Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 170.

⁶⁹Moody, "Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations," 172.

the cane did not need attention, the planter had his laborers clean ditches, repair levees, level roads, and make staves for the hogsheads necessary for the shipment of sugar. However, during the lay by season the chief interest of the planter was to secure a sufficient fuel supply for his sugar house,⁷⁰ and his two chief sources of fuel were drift wood from the river or wood from the swamp in the rear of the plantation.⁷¹ Some planters preferred to cut enough wood to have a surplus to help start next year's grinding.⁷² The arrival of the month of October usually brought with it the beginning of the period of most intense activity on the plantation. A problem also arrived: should the planter allow his cane to grow to better the yield or should he rush his operations to stay ahead of possible early freezes? Generally, grinding began in October after the seed cane was cut and the corn and peas were gathered.⁷³ Sometime earlier, usually April, a first crop of corn had been planted, with a second crop in July after the first had matured. Along with the cultivation of corn often went the planting of cow peas which not only offered a welcome

⁷⁰Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 172.

⁷¹Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 190. Palfrey Plantation Diary, December 18, 1852. Palfrey Papers.

⁷²Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 190.

⁷³Pugh Plantation Diary, October 11, 1860. Pugh (Alexander and Family) Collection.

variation to plantation diet, but also enriched the soil. However, the corn and peas were usually harvested in August and September along with the hay which usually grew wild on the rear of the plantation.⁷⁴

Before the actual grinding, three or four days' supply of cane was cut for the mill. This was done so that the grinding operation would be continuous and the mill would not have to close for the lack of cane.⁷⁵ The grinding season usually occupied all hands for sixteen to eighteen hours daily. In unusually fortunate years the planter might complete his grinding by the end of November, but in general grinding lasted until December or later.⁷⁶

Although the sugar region in general and the grinding season in particular were considered "man-killers," the truth is that the slaves preferred grinding to any other period of the year and usually they worked better during this time.⁷⁷ Further, since fewer slaves ran away in autumn and winter than in spring and summer, it would appear

⁷⁴Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 173.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Mather (Joseph) Diary, December 25, 1855. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. Palfrey Plantation Diary, December, 1852. Palfrey Papers.

⁷⁷Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 668-669.

that the slaves were happier during the period;⁷⁸ however, the decline in the number of runaways might have been caused by the fear of discomforts in the cold woods and swamps.

Although the main efforts of sugar and cotton planters were turned to the staples, it would be incorrect to think that they excluded all else from their attention. Sugar planters practiced diversification to a limited extent throughout the ante-bellum period,⁷⁹ and besides cow peas, hay, and corn, they grew large or small amounts of beans, flax seed, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes. Small amounts of cotton were sometimes grown for home use just as sheep were kept for shearing purposes. Milch cows were present and from the milk butter and cheese were made. For all their sugar, honey was not foreign to the slaves and white families of Louisiana sugar plantations. An idea of the diversification on sugar plantations can be obtained from a glimpse into the production of one sugar parish which produced, in 1860, 572,022 bushels of Indian corn, 15,000 bushels of sweet potatoes, 17,874 pounds of butter, and 2,779 pounds of wool. The value of livestock

⁷⁸Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 99.

⁷⁹J. Carlyle Sitterson, Sugar Country, The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950 (Lexington, Kentucky, 1953), 52. Hereafter cited as Sitterson, Sugar Country.

slaughtered the same year was \$48,315.⁸⁰

Most plantations produced enough food crops; the great shortage was in meat and flour.⁸¹ The planters realized this shortcoming, but felt that to invest in meat production was uneconomical. An experienced planter of Rapides Parish wrote:

As for raising hogs, here, contending with diseases among them peculiar to this climate and cultivating a large quantity of land in corn, besides the enormous amount of this grain that a team requires on a sugar plantation are matters I leave to you to settle. My opinion is if you can get \$50 per hhd. for sugar, it is cheaper to buy the pork for it is utterly impossible to raise hogs here without green pastures and plenty of corn and all lands here fit for pasturage will make a hhd. [of] sugar per acre.⁸²

Most of what has been said about diversification on sugar plantations applies to cotton plantations. However, on many Louisiana plantations, as is well illustrated by the Barrow plantation in West Florida Parish,⁸³ much attention was paid to the production of vegetables, and Irish and sweet potatoes and pumpkins were planted in quantity. Tobacco was produced for plantation use. Watermelons were

⁸⁰Agriculture in 1860, 66-67.

⁸¹Sitterson, Sugar Country, 53.

⁸²Kenneth Clark to Lewis Thompson, 1855 as cited in Sitterson, Sugar Country, 53-54. Original in the Lewis Thompson Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁸³Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 31-33. Agriculture in 1860, 66-69.

planted on ditch banks and wherever else convenient, and there were orchards of peaches, plums, and other fruits.⁸⁴ Diversification of truck and orchard products, though not so common on absentee planter-owner plantations, was a common, if not almost general practice where the owner resided on his rural estate, and many a planter took pride in announcing, as Bennet H. Barrow did on June 21, 1840, "First water Mellon to day, verry sweet, fine large seed."⁸⁵

⁸⁴Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 31-32.

⁸⁵Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, June 21, 1840.

CHAPTER IV

Next to a fertile, prolific soil the most important factor in the successful operation of a plantation was the labor supply. Since the great majority of the laborers on sugar and cotton plantations were slaves, Louisiana planters were constantly faced with two problems, supply¹ and supervision.²

Supervision of slave labor was planned so that what was considered to be the best possible performance would be obtained from the laborers. Obviously the most important person supervising the slaves was the owner, but in many cases, especially on large plantations, the planter was forced by necessity to hire an overseer to aid him in maintaining efficiency among the slaves. The primary duty of the overseer was direct control and supervision of the laborers as they carried out the plantation routine. It was the overseer who was responsible for maintaining the general well being, health, and contentment of the plantation

¹The acquisition of slaves will be covered in a later chapter.

²Here the concern is with the slave as a laborer.

population,³ but his most important and specific duty was to be with the Negroes as much as possible and to see that their duties were performed satisfactorily.⁴

On almost every plantation the most valuable assistant to the overseer was the driver, a Negro slave appointed because of his good character, intelligence, and leadership,⁵ who was usually in charge of a gang and was responsible for its work and not infrequently helped in the issuing of rations.⁶ Usually the drivers treated the slaves indifferently, but it is said that they tended to be boastful and to parade their authority.⁷

Perhaps the most successful use of a driver was made by Bennet H. Barrow of West Feliciana Parish who, after he decided to stop using overseers, appointed a driver with more supervisory authority than was usually delegated to one in that position. On the occasions when Barrow was absent from the plantation the driver assumed much of the responsibility for keeping the routine going. However, he

³DeBow's Review, X, 625; XI, 325, 621-625, 64-65, 369-372; XIII, 193-194; XIV, 177-178; XVIII, 713-719; XIX, 359-368; XXI, 376-381, 147-149, 277-279; XXII, 376-381; XXIV, 321-326; XXV, 483 contains much information on the duties and functions of overseers.

⁴U. B. Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston, 1929), 327. Hereafter cited as Phillips, Life and Labor.

⁵DeBow's Review, XXI (1856), 279.

⁶Moody, "Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations," 22.

⁷Ibid.

was not allowed to punish slaves, and when things went wrong he was often disciplined along with the other hands.⁸

Some planters did not feel that many slaves could be taken from the routine work of the plantation, and in those cases, a young white man was hired to oversee some of the simpler plantation routine. One planter wrote: "I have engaged a young man . . . to oversee He has no experience in sugar business but ans [answers] my purpose very well as I only want him to have the cane cut and loaded properly & by this . . . [to] save me a driver."⁹

The basic ingredient of the supervision scheme was naturally the routine of the plantation itself, a fact which was so well accepted that the state legislature at one time enacted a law setting up a schedule to be followed.¹⁰ Although this procedure was not consistently used, some form of routine daily schedule was adhered to on every sizable plantation.¹¹

⁸Based on Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 40-41.

⁹F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers.

¹⁰Louisiana Territorial Acts, 1806, 150-190. See also Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 252-253.

¹¹DeBow's Review, X, 625; XI, 325, 621-625, 64-65, 369-372; XIII, 193-194; XIV, 177-178; XVIII, 713-719; XIX, 359-368; XXI, 376-381, 147-149, 277-279; XXII, 376-381; XXIV, 321-326; XXV, 483.

When plantation routine was not sufficient to insure proper performance of chores, it was necessary to resort to many types of punishment. Perhaps the most prevalent were whippings¹² which were sometimes severe enough to leave scars.¹³ The significance of the lash on a sugar plantation was revealed by a traveler when he wrote that he saw the overseer holding in his hand "a short handled whip . . . which had a lash four or five times the length of the staff. . . . he remained watching the motions of the slaves, quickening the steps of a loiterer by a word, or threatening with his whip. . . ."¹⁴

Most of the punishments were designed to prevent loss of time in the field or house, and for this reason, the stocks were not too often used though some regarded that punishment as ideal for some rule infractions.¹⁵ Other punishments were deprivation of privilege,¹⁶

¹²A study of the journals, diaries, and letters of the period readily confirms this statement.

¹³A reading of the "Runaway Register" or the list of runaways printed in the newspapers proves this statement.

¹⁴Joseph H. Ingraham, The Southwest (New York, 1835), 237.

¹⁵Thomas Afleck, The Sugar Record and Account Book No. 2 (New Orleans, 1854), no pp. Hereafter cited as Afleck, Record and Account Book No. 2.

¹⁶E. E. McCollam Diary, August 2, 1840. McCollam (Andrew and Ellen E.) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. Mather Diary, August 17, 1855.

demotion of house servants to field hand status,¹⁷ and incarceration.¹⁸ Along with punishment, some planters tried the incentive method to get more efficient work from their hands,¹⁹ and this, of course, worked two ways: good work, more privileges; poor work, loss of privileges.

Since the overseer dealt directly with the slaves and on the larger plantations was often in direct charge, the most essential quality of this employee was his ability to successfully handle Negroes.²⁰ He might be highly skilled in the proper cultivation of sugar cane and cotton, but if he were unable to get the slaves to work, he was useless to the planter. If he had mean qualities, he caused dissension, and even passive resistance disrupted efficient operation. If he were too lenient, the results were worse.²¹

Even more important than loafing on the job, carelessness, insubordination, or insolence was running away, which in many instances was caused by fear of punishment and which not only removed a part of the labor force but

¹⁷McCollam Diary, April 8, 1845. Robert Q. Mallard, Plantation Life Before Emancipation (Richmond, 1892), 46.

¹⁸Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, October 4, 1839.

¹⁹Phillips, Life and Labor, 327.

²⁰Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 41.

²¹Arleek, Record and Account Book No. 2.

if successful might encourage others to follow. Further if the slave escaped permanently, the planter suffered a large financial loss. One planter wrote, "I had rather a negro would do anything Else than runaway."²² An institution which did a great deal to prevent running away was the patrol which was originally under the militia law of the state, but which after 1821 was administered by the individual parishes.²³

A significant, though small, part of the labor force on the plantations of ante-bellum Louisiana were slave and free hired laborers. The most important hired freeman on the plantation was the overseer, for he was in many instances the supervisor of all plantation activity.²⁴ This employee, holding a very responsible job, probably caused as much complaint among planters as did all other hired laborers combined.

There was an unquestioned shortage of capable overseers in the sugar region,²⁵ and if the complaints of

²²Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, October 4, 1839.

²³Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1821, 10.

²⁴See above information on overseers.

²⁵J. Carlyle Sitterson, "Hired Labor on Sugar Plantations of the Ante-Bellum South," The Journal of Southern History, XIV (1948), 199. Hereafter cited as Sitterson, "Hired Labor."

plantation proprietors are to be believed a shortage in the cotton regions.²⁶ Letters and records of the planters seem to justify Olmsted's pointed evaluation of overseers: "the defective education and consequent habits of the overseers of the South, with a few exceptions, disqualify them for the high and sacred trust confided to them. . . ."²⁷

While Olmsted may have been too severe in his observation, extant plantation records tend to support his generalization concerning the overseer. John Hampden Randolph, for example, hired an overseer on December 3, 1842, but fired him on December 18 of the same year.²⁸ In May, 1848, he paid an overseer only \$16 when he terminated his services, and in August of the same year he fired the man he had hired in May.²⁹ In 1851, Randolph was unable to attend the trial of his brother-in-law³⁰ because "I would be running too much risk in leaving the place at this particular time under the charge of an overseer, especially as I have detected him in drinking a great deal too much whiskey from

²⁶Based on a study of manuscript collections in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

²⁷Frederick L. Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country (New York, 1863), 57.

²⁸Cotton Book, 1842. Randolph (John Hampden) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

²⁹Plantation Book, 1848. Randolph Papers.

³⁰St. John R. Liddell who was on trial for murder.

a jug which he had concealed."³¹ Earlier Randolph had to forego his vacation due to the incompetency of his overseer.³²

Bennet H. Barrow of West Feliciana Parish complained in 1837, "my Overseer so good he is good for nothing."³³ In the same year he angrily wrote, "more Whipping to do this Fall than all together in three years owing to my D mean Overseer--Never will have another unless I should be compelled to leave--they are a perfect nuisance."³⁴ Later Barrow noted that the amount of cotton being picked "under the eyes of my D. fool Overseer" was too small and was very trashy.³⁵ After 1838, Barrow decided to do without the services of an overseer, and on July 25, 1839, wrote, "I hope the time will come When every Overseer in the country will be compelled to addopt some other mode of making a living--they are a perfect nuisance cause dissatisfaction among the negroes--being more possessed of more brutal feelings--I make better crops than those Who Employ them."³⁶

³¹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, December 6, 1852. Liddell Papers.

³²Ibid., August 11, 1851.

³³Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, April 26, 1837.

³⁴Ibid., October 2, 1837.

³⁵Ibid., October 4, 1837.

³⁶Ibid., July 25, 1839.

In a thirty year period on the Minor sugar plantations, only seven overseers were satisfactory enough to remain for more than two years. The usual reasons given for dismissal were incompetence, insolence, and negligence of duty.³⁷ Finally after great dissatisfaction with all experienced overseers, Minor promoted to the position Alexander Nisbet, a carpenter, who lasted until his death in 1852 after five years of good service.³⁸ When Minor discharged one of the ex-carpenter's successors, the overseer became "much enraged & left vowing vengeance."³⁹

Planters sometimes had trouble with overseers who became too intimate with their female slaves. Rachel O'Conner of West Feliciana wrote shortly after the dismissal of her overseer, Patrick, that "Charity has a fine daughter, just like Patrick."⁴⁰ His successor made a favorable first impression, and the woman planter wrote, "There is many an overseer that cannot get near the work done . . . , and he don't appear to wish to abuse the

³⁷Charles L. Wingfield, "The Sugar Plantations of William J. Minor, 1830-1860," an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1950, 50. Hereafter cited as Wingfield, "The Minor Plantations."

³⁸Minor Journal, 146. Minor (William J. and Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

³⁹Minor Diary, December 15, 1853. Minor Papers. This is the personal diary of William J. Minor and is not to be confused with the Minor Plantation Diary.

⁴⁰Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, January 19, 1833. Weeks (David and Family) Collection, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

negroes nor to have wives among them⁴¹ The lady changed her mind, however, for less than a year later she wrote, "he is a shameless being, nearly as bad as Patrick in the same way. . . . he has too many ladies to please."⁴²

The majority of the overseers were probably dependable only while the owner was on the plantation or was not too long absent from it.⁴³ This was not entirely the overseer's fault for he was usually hired without being known to or without knowing his employer.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the employer maintained the right to discharge at will,⁴⁵ and it was not unusual that, regardless of the season of the year and the lack of opportunity for new employment, the overseer would find he had been dismissed for real or imagined inefficiency. As Sitterson has written, "This insecurity of tenure undoubtedly contributed to the perpetuation of an incapable group of overseers and frequently

⁴¹Ibid., November 6, 1832.

⁴²Ibid., October 23, 1833.

⁴³Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 196.

⁴⁴Ibid. Many of the manuscript collections in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, contain letters of application by overseers and letters of recommendation for overseers. See especially the Weeks Collection and the Liddell, Marston, and Randolph papers.

⁴⁵Based on a study of ante-bellum plantation diaries and journals.

resulted in undesirable relation between planter and overseer.⁴⁶

After the overseer, the most important hired laborers on sugar plantations were sugar makers and engineers,⁴⁷ the most highly skilled laborers employed on Louisiana plantations. Only rarely did the slaves perform the duties of a sugar maker or engineer.⁴⁸

Of the two the sugar maker was the more important, and usually a sugar maker was hired for each grinding season.⁴⁹ By the decade of the fifties skill in sugar making was more widespread than in earlier decades, but still many planters could not get satisfactory results from their employees. C. C. Weeks wrote in 1860, "I fear my Sugar Boiler will neither use the test papers, nor regard your advice--men of his class are generally foolish and conceited."⁵⁰ Eight years earlier, F. D. Richardson had

⁴⁶Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 196.

⁴⁷See particularly F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, October 9, 1852. Liddell Papers; Ernest Naquin to John Moore, March 30, 1859. Weeks Collection; F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers; C. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection; John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, October 27, 1853. Liddell Papers; Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 200.

⁴⁸Palfrey Plantation Diary, February 26, 1857. Palfrey Papers. Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 200.

⁴⁹Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 196.

⁵⁰C. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection.

"concluded to get Boute again as sugar [boiler]. . . . True, he made bad sugar last year; but so did everybody and if he does not succeed to my satisfaction he is to leave."⁵¹ Although there were usually many applications for sugar making jobs, the hopeful applicant was sometimes completely ignored, and a man hired who had worked in another parish but who carried recommendations from an acquaintance or ex-employer.⁵² As with the overseer, the sugar maker changed jobs frequently, seldom remaining more than a year or two on one plantation.⁵³

Most of the large planters using steam mills and vacuum pans required the services of skilled engineers and often relied on the manufacturer of the equipment to procure the services of an engineer for him.⁵⁴ However, grinding was often held up by lack of skilled technicians to repair the machinery.⁵⁵

Although most planters were happy to get any engineer and complained much less about the engineer's work

⁵¹F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, October 9, 1852. Liddell Papers.

⁵²Ernest Naquin to John Moore, March 30, 1859. Weeks Collection. William Lourd to John Moore, September 30, 1859. Weeks Collection.

⁵³Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 201. This is well substantiated by even a casual perusal of the records of the period.

⁵⁴Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 200.

⁵⁵John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, October 27, 1853. Liddell Papers.

than the work of overseers and sugar boilers, one wrote, "My engineer I am glad to say, has left me--I have replaced him by one who . . . appears to be a far more efficient engineer than Mr. LeDuc."⁵⁶ More often the comments ran in the following vein: "I was . . . unable to get an engineer to do some little repairs to my machinery";⁵⁷ or "I was fortunate in getting an engineer this season";⁵⁸ or "There is a great scarcity of Engineers . . . as most of them live out of the state and have been prevented from returning by yellow fever."⁵⁹

The hierarchy of the plantation hired labor was obviously the overseer, sugar maker, and engineer, but these made up only a minority of the whites and free colored working on the plantations of the state. Other laborers of importance were carpenters, brickmasons, and coopers.

It was of utmost importance to have hogsheads ready for the coming sugar crop, and as often as possible, the planter had this work done by a cooper among his slaves,⁶⁰ but when this was impossible the planter was

⁵⁶C. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection.

⁵⁷John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, October 27, 1853. Liddell Papers.

⁵⁸F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers.

⁵⁹Ibid., October 18, 1853.

⁶⁰West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, July 17, 1858.

forced to purchase hogsheads from New Orleans or to hire coopers to make them.⁶¹ Although most planters owned at least a few slaves with a rudimentary knowledge of carpentry, they did not usually allow them to do the most important work of this type on the plantations. For instance, in the construction of a brick sugar house⁶² and the building of his home, Nottoway, John Hampden Randolph imported carpenters, painters, brickmasons, and a plasterer.⁶³ Other planters made use of brickmasons and carpenters, either by the job or by the day or month.⁶⁴ Other skilled personnel employed by planters were blacksmiths and gardeners.⁶⁵

There were many positions available for hired laborers, and at times there was an actual scarcity of really capable workers in certain categories.⁶⁶ On the

⁶¹Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 203.

⁶²Contract with John Townsend, April 15, 1861. Randolph Papers.

⁶³Contract with Howard L. Diettel, June 8, 1857; Contract with Lequin and Corrairie, May 5, 1859; Plastering Bill, June 20, 1859. All in the Randolph Papers.

⁶⁴William Lourd to John Moore, September 3, 1860. Weeks Collection. Richard Hall to John Moore, April 16, 1859. Weeks Collection.

⁶⁵Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, July 26, 1843. Hilliard (Mrs. Issac) Diary, February 7, 1850. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁶⁶Engineer, Overseer, Sugar Boiler.

other hand there were instances when the planter was turned down when he offered employment to skilled workers. In 1859, when G. C. Weeks offered employment to a Mr. Johnson to survey some of Weeks's land, Johnson refused. Weeks wrote, "Mr Johnson, he declined surveying at present, as he says it is too hot."⁶⁷ In general there were more positions available for really skilled workers in Louisiana than there were men to fill them.

The employees mentioned above made up only a small part of the hired labor on the plantations of the state for the majority were unskilled white laborers employed on jobs considered to be too dangerous to risk the valuable slave property.⁶⁸ Many felt that it was safer as well as more economical to hire German and particularly Irish immigrants to ditch and drain plantations and swamps and to cut timber and clear forests.⁶⁹ The majority of these ditchers and swampers resided in the villages of the plantation region,⁷⁰ but others were residents of New Orleans and were employed through labor contractors.⁷¹

⁶⁷G. C. Weeks to John Moore, August 4, 1859. Weeks Collection.

⁶⁸Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 193. Russell, My Diary North and South, 104.

⁶⁹Ibid. Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 204.

⁷⁰Manuscript Censuses of 1850 and 1860, Schedules I.

⁷¹Thibodaux Minerva, December 17, 1853. See also Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 204.

Another source of labor for plantations was hired slave labor. Slaves were sometimes hired during the picking season on the cotton plantations⁷² and during grinding on sugar plantations.⁷³ However, the owners of such laborers often were particular about to whom they hired their slaves. One slave owner once wrote another concerning hiring: "I saw the girl Emma She complains about your feeding if it is so my girl shall not pass the grinding at your house. As for the rest of my boys, I have already hired them . . . I was to hire . . . to you, but they told me they would go anywhere before they would to you I hired them according to their wishings."⁷⁴ Another slaveholder offered eight field hands for hire, but expressed his desire to be engaged as their overseer.⁷⁵ Obviously this suggestion was made for two reasons; one to secure a job for himself and second to remove the chances of the mistreatment and undernourishment often associated with hiring out.

Negro slaves were sometimes allowed to hire

⁷²Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, October 3, 1833. Weeks Collection.

⁷³McCollam Diary, December 5, 1844.

⁷⁴Euphimon Hebert to A. E. Crane, October 6, 1856. Crane (Andrew E. and Zachary) Collection. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁷⁵Franklin Planters' Banner, February 10, 1848.

themselves out on Sundays,⁷⁶ and this not only offered a source of money to the slave, but also a source of labor to the planter. However, it appears that some slaves, realizing the need for their Sunday service, took advantage of the employer to make unlawful demands. One plantation steward wrote to his employer: "Two Negro boys that promised me to come last Sunday backed out when they found I would not provide them with whiskey. John says that next Sunday he will take the risk and get some himself for them. If you were here yourself to deal it out it would probably do no harm but I have reason to think that John is not the proper one to administer it and in all probability the whole crowd will get drunk."⁷⁷

From the preceding discussion it becomes increasingly evident that hired labor was more than just an auxiliary labor force on the plantations of Louisiana. If more has been written about hired labor on sugar rather than other plantations, it is because of the fact that the free laborer was more important in the operation of the sugar than the cotton plantation. There was no regular hired personnel on the cotton plantation to compare with the engineer or sugar maker on the sugar plantation, and

⁷⁶E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, March 5, 1860; April 22, 1860. Gurley (John W.) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁷⁷Ibid., March 5, 1860.

outside of the unskilled ditchers and swampers found on the cotton plantation, the only other regular hired labor of any significance was the overseer. While the cotton planter often had irregular need of a brickmason, a carpenter, or a blacksmith, in general his planting operations could be successfully completed more easily without outside labor than could that of a sugar planter.

The labor problem, both slave and free, was a serious one on the plantations of Louisiana. Concerning slave labor, it was the question of owning a sufficient number of slaves and of supervising them efficiently; with free labor, it was the problem of obtaining employees with initiative and ability at their trades. Jobs were available for many of the free Negroes as well as whites of the plantation areas, but the men and the positions were scattered over a great expanse of river and bayou threaded land. It was difficult to bring the man and the job together. The planter of Louisiana faced a much more difficult problem than did the factory owner of the Middle Atlantic states or the mill owner of New England.

CHAPTER V

The transportation of plantation staples to market and of supplies to plantations, farms, and villages was of primary importance in the economic life of ante-bellum Louisiana. The steamboats on the rivers and bayous have been thought to have provided an excellent and efficient transportation medium, for a study of the map of the state reveals that there were only four parishes without direct water navigation facilities.¹

In the southern part of Louisiana, two of the most important avenues of transportation leading into the interior were bayous Lafourche and Plaquemine. Of these two, Bayou Plaquemine was the more important, and as early as 1806, one traveler wrote that Bayou Plaquemine was "the principle and swiftest communication with the Attakapas Region."² This stream served as the gateway for a network of streams that formed a means of communication with the Attakapas Region and the Bay of Berwick which led to the

¹John Christian L. Andreassen, "Internal Improvements in Louisiana, 1824-1837," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXX (1947), 1.

²Thomas Ashe, Travels in America. . . . (London, 1809), 295-96.

Gulf of Mexico.³ However, Bayou Plaquemine did not fulfill the expectations of that early traveler because its location was at the same time both advantageous and disadvantageous.⁴ This stream left the Mississippi River at Plaquemine. The mouth of the bayou was situated on an abrupt bend which lay directly in the path of the descending body of water. On the east side of the Mississippi directly opposite the mouth of the bayou lay Point Manchac from which a sand bar had begun to form. This bar forced the river with greater pressure against the Plaquemine shore and into the bayou.⁵ These facts caused the Committee of Lands and Levees to call Bayou Plaquemine, "a great vortex . . . for the ingress of drift timber and nearly four-fifths of the vast body of floating drift, encumbering at every rise . . . to enraft and destroy the utility of the streams below."⁶

As time passed, this situation became worse for the mouth of the bayou was continually enlarging, enabling it

³"Annual Report of the State Engineer, 1857," 13, Legislative Documents, 1857. Hereafter cited as "Engineer's Report." The network consisted of bayous Plaquemine, Marin-gouin, Sorrel, Big Pigeon, Little Pigeon, and the Atchafalaya and Grand rivers.

⁴"Report of the Committee on Lands and Levees, 1857," 4, Legislative Documents, 1857. Hereafter cited as "Lands and Levees."

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

to take in more and more river drift of all types.⁷ The ingress of this large amount of drift into the stream rendered unnavigable that potentially navigable river and bayou network.⁸ Grand River, one of the important links in this transportation network, at one time had been two hundred yards wide and thirty feet deep.⁹ It had several outlets on its western side which ran into Grand Lake, some of which were large enough for steamers, but two of these outlets, Big and Little Pigeon, were almost entirely closed by rafts, and for a distance of twelve miles from its junction with Bayou Sorrel, Grand River was closed by drift and other debris. These rafts were solid, and the water had no passage. As the Committee reported, "Indeed, a stranger would never suppose a river had existed."¹⁰ Bayou Sorrel which flowed from Grand River to Grand Lake was the only remaining outlet to lower Grand River and the dimensions of this stream were being greatly reduced by drift. In order to maintain this last outlet, two state-owned boats were in continuous operation on its waters.

Along with the difficulties caused by drift,

⁷Ibid., 6.

⁸"Engineer's Report," 8.

⁹The information on Grand River, bayous Sorrel, Big and Little Pigeon is based on "Lands and Levees," 3-6.

¹⁰Ibid., 5.

navigation was further hindered by the fact that the entrance of Bayou Plaquemine was four feet higher than the normal water level of the Mississippi River,¹¹ a condition which often necessitated unloading and reloading of produce and equipment.¹² If this transshipping was done, the shipper had to unload his freight and move it from eight to ten miles overland to a point where the bayou was navigable.¹³

Usually this process was not used, and other routes were utilized to ship produce or to travel from the interior. In 1851, Moses Liddell wrote to his son that "it may be possible that if I feel well enough . . . that I may make a trip to N.O. but the Plaquemine has become so low as to prevent navigation and we are obliged to ship our Sugar round by Atchafalaya at one dollar p Hhd expense say 3.50 instead of 250 & Sugar has slightly got lower."¹⁴ In January of the following year Liddell again wrote:

I have spoken to the commandant of a new job Boat to know what he would take me to Trinity¹⁵ for & whether he could do so about the 15 or 20 th Jan'y

¹¹Walter Prichard, ed., "Southern Louisiana and Southern Alabama in 1819: The Journal of James Leander Cathcart," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXV (1945), 7. Hereafter cited as "Cathcart's Journal."

¹²Ibid. Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, January 9, 1851. Liddell Papers.

¹³Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852.

¹⁴Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, January 26, 1851. Liddell Papers.

¹⁵Trinity was located in Catahoula Parish. St. John R. Liddell lived on Llanada plantation near Trinity on the Black River.

Inst. but have had as yet no reply- The Route is the usual way to what is termed the Park Or Indian Village on the Plaquemin Bayou¹⁶ then leave the Plaquemin northward up the Atchafalaya River or Bayou which I presume is now in good navigable order all the way to mouth of Red River (quite a large Str past up the Bayou Teche yesterday that must have come through the Atchafalaya) and will return up through the same unless the Plaquemin is opened- and I do not know but it would be easier for a small Boat to go up the Atchafalaya than go out through Plaquemin & up the Mississippi--but the Boat navigating the Atchafalaya should have a Pilot that understood the river, the Atchafalaya has been navigable for small Steamers all the time--but it was at times difficult & they had to lighten the Boats in some places--very little sugar has been taken or shipped to N. O. I have just shipped 69 Hhds of sugar & 140 Hhd molasses to New York¹⁷ the Schooner just yet at our Landing waiting for a Wind. If however the Mississippi Rises & the Plaquemin becomes navigable & no other chance we can go out to the town of Plaquemin & there wait the passage of a Black river Boat to go up, but I will yet try to obtain one of the Teche towboats of which there are several my fear is the want of a good Pilot. I will get the negroes off without taking much of their baggage trusting to provide for them on their arrival at your place- I must provide meat and meal & Bread to do them for a Week or so-¹⁸ . . . if practicable we . . . would prefer taking the Atchafalaya route-¹⁹

¹⁶Indian Village was located about eight miles from Plaquemine.

¹⁷This was shipped through the port of Franklin.

¹⁸Moses Liddell and his son were in partnership in their planting enterprises. John Hampden Randolph to St. John R. Liddell, December 13, 1852. Liddell Papers.

¹⁹Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, January 4, 1852. Liddell Papers.

The journey was completed by the Atchafalaya route for Liddell found that there was no chance of getting through to Plaquemine.²⁰

The editor of the Baton Rouge Gazette described a trip he took on Bayou Plaquemine in the 1850's: "We ran down the Bayou, the waters of which rush in from the Mississippi river with fearful violence, forming a continuous series of foaming rapids so that it is with the greatest care that any boat can navigate the stream, either by turning its abrupt windings or avoiding the vast amount of drift timber. . . . the present means of reaching a market are extreemly [extremely] precarious and dependent upon mere accidents."²¹

The same editor described transportation conditions on Bayou Grosse Tete, which flows from Bayou Plaquemine in a northerly direction.²² He wrote:

When Bayou Grosse Tete is low it is not navigable for steamers above the Portage,²³ so that freight has to be hauled there at a distance of ten miles and upwards to be shipped. Then at many seasons the Bayou Plaquemine is not navigable, so that steamers are obliged to go around by Red River and down the Atchafalaya, and thence up Bayou

²⁰Ibid., January 9, 1852. Liddell Papers. F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, January 23, 1852. Liddell Papers.

²¹Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852.

²²This separation takes place about nine miles from Plaquemine.

²³The Portage was eighteen miles from Plaquemine.

Sorrel to Grand river, and thence up Plaquemine Bay²⁴ and Grosse Tete, full thirty hours steaming from the city of Plaquemine; and even this means may be cut off by closing of Grand River and its communications with the Atchafalaya, by rafts, a circumstance quite probable, as the communications are nearly closed at present.²⁵

The low water that caused cessation of transportation on these important streams was not the only difficulty faced by the planters and farmers who tried to ship their goods. To the navigational hazards presented by the abrupt windings of the bayou should be added the danger caused by the swift ingress of water into Bayou Plaquemine which provided a current that was not only strong, but dangerous due to the presence of so much drift. Many valuable flat boats loaded with timber and other produce were destroyed each year.²⁶

Therefore, one of the most important of all of the transportation networks in Louisiana was as often as not unavailable to the people of the interior parts of the state. As the secondary channel which included the Atchafalaya and the Red rivers was also often unnavigable, the farmers and planters of the interior, and particularly those depending on the Bayou Plaquemine network and the

²⁴The area or stretch of bayou from Indian Village to Bayou Grosse Tete Junction.

²⁵Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852.

²⁶"Lands and Levees," 1-6. "Engineer's Report," 13-14.

Atchafalaya River, often were hard pressed to dispose of their products.

To overcome the poor facilities that water transportation offered, in 1852, the residents of the Bayou Grosse Tete-Maringouin area called a public meeting to push a movement for the development of some other "mode of communication with the Mississippi River" and decided on a plank road as the best means of ending the relative isolation of their region.²⁷ In 1853, an act was passed by the legislature incorporating the Grosse Tete and Baton Rouge Plank Road Company whose purpose was to construct a road from opposite Baton Rouge along a good route to a central point on Bayou Grosse Tete. It was hoped that the road could later be continued to some point on Bayou Maringouin.²⁸ A few months prior to this time one thousand dollars had been appropriated for repairs to the Bayou Grosse Tete Levee Road which ran from opposite Indian Village to the Portage.²⁹ Although the editor of the Plaquemine newspaper said the road stayed in "complete order and as hard as a

²⁷Baton Rouge Gazette, May 8, 1852.

²⁸Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1853, 243.

²⁹Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 6, 1852. All of the Police Jury Minutes used in this study are in the Transcriptions of Parish Records of Louisiana. Series I. Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 6, 1853.

dollar,"³⁰ evidently these improvements were neither satisfactory nor permanent. In 1859, the residents along bayous Grosse Tete and Maringouin threatened to secede from Iberville Parish if they were not given better roads.³¹ The threat of secession led to the adoption of a Police Jury resolution which provided for the construction of a road and bridges from Indian Village to a point on Bayou Grosse Tete.³² This road was to be maintained only so long as the district remained a part of Iberville Parish.³³ Later in the same year, the residents of the area successfully petitioned the Police Jury for the right to force people with lands fronting on either bank of bayous Maringouin or Grosse Tete to clear all impediments from the front of their land so that a free cordelle road would be available on both sides of the bayous.³⁴

The other entrance to the back country, Bayou Lafourche,³⁵ was not considered a satisfactory means of transportation to the Attakapas Region because its

³⁰Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 26, 1854.

³¹Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, April 12, 1859.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., June 8, 1859.

³⁵Christian Schultz, Travels on an Inland Voyage (New York, 1810), II, 162. "Gathcart's Journal," 7. Ashe, Travels in America, 295.

connection with the Atchafalaya River was not a natural one but by a canal.³⁶ By the 1850's Bayou Lafourche was no longer mentioned as a gateway to the Attakapas Region, but it was of great importance to the planters and farmers along bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne as well as to the towns of Houma and Thibodaux.

The importance of this stream to the residents of the area was frequently proclaimed by the ante-bellum newspaper editors of Houma and Thibodaux. In August, 1853, all of the larger boats were withdrawn from the Bayou Lafourche run until the next high water,³⁷ and by November the bayou was so low that only flat boats were moving, and even the Jean Webre, a shallow draft steamer built especially for shallow water, was unable to navigate.³⁸ The editor complained that the "town [was] no longer accessible by bayou,"³⁹ and until the end of January, Bayou Lafourche remained at its lowest ebb. It was said that the situation "spreads a seeming dullness of all things. Our people are confined to their homes."⁴⁰

³⁶"Cathcart's Journal," 7.

³⁷Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853.

³⁸Ibid., November 5, 1853.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., January 7, 1854.

Not until February 4, 1854, was the bayou open to steamers,⁴¹ but by May 20, five steamers were withdrawn from the trade,⁴² and by July 22, the bayou was again too low for the larger boats, and a stage line was started from Thibodaux to Donaldsonville.⁴³ The stage line was not prosperous, for the owner lost some of his horses and his stage was wrecked.⁴⁴ This was a blow to the residents of Thibodaux because in August the bayou was no longer open to any type of steamboat.⁴⁵

Two weeks later the people of the area thought that they had found the solution of their problem, as the Mary Jane, a steamer built especially for extremely low water, had been assigned to Bayou Lafourche to run through the entire low water period,⁴⁶ but by September 16, the Mary Jane had to be withdrawn from the trade because of low water and the great danger of snags that could not be removed.⁴⁷ By November the water was so low that flat boats drawing over one foot could not navigate, and the

⁴¹Ibid., February 4, 1854.

⁴²Ibid., May 20, 1854.

⁴³Ibid., July 22, 1854.

⁴⁴Ibid., August 19, 1854.

⁴⁵Ibid., August 12, 1854.

⁴⁶Ibid., August 26, 1854.

⁴⁷Ibid., September 16, 1854.

bayou was dotted with grounded boats.⁴⁸ After a brief period of navigation, trade was closed again and the editor of the Thibodaux Minerva wrote: "The Lafourche still continues low, and no prospects of a rise. What a beautiful stream it is? being closed nearly all the year, and terrifying the people when it does rise, lest it should destroy their crops."⁴⁹

Bayou Lafourche was also important to the people living in Terrebonne Parish as it was their only water connection to the Mississippi River. Bayou Terrebonne caused the people of the area and the directors of the Lafourche and Terrebonne Navigation Co. a great deal of difficulty due to its tendency to silt up. In June, 1853, there was doubt that the boats would be able to continue to operate for another year on that bayou unless sands were removed from the channel.⁵⁰ The next month the Lafourche and Terrebonne Navigation Co. put its slaves to work clearing the channel.⁵¹

Until the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western Railroad was completed to Lafourche Crossing, the people of

⁴⁸Ibid., November 11, 1854; November 25, 1854.

⁴⁹Ibid., March 3, 1855.

⁵⁰Ibid., June 25, 1853.

⁵¹Ibid., July 16, 1853.

Terrebonne Parish had to endure the same inconveniences as the residents along Bayou Lafourche. In fact they were worse off, for they were much further from Donaldsonville and connection with regular packet traffic with New Orleans. Even with the opening of the railroad, the people of Terrebonne Parish and along Bayou Lafourche still had problems for the railroad did not run along the bayou, and the goods and produce had to be moved to Lafourche Crossing for shipment. Although the editor of the Thibodaux Minerva concluded that conditions would be unbearable without the railroad,⁵² the editor of the Houma Ceres questioned the value of a railroad if there was no way to get to it.⁵³ In periods of low water, travel was so difficult and expensive that unless a person owned his own conveyance he did not leave home. The roads were in "miserable condition" and it appeared as if ordinances for the making and repairing of roads were non-existent.⁵⁴

The residents along the Red River and its tributaries were confronted with many of the same problems as were those Louisianians living along the streams of the southern part of the state. Until 1851 the quickest trip made from New Orleans to Alexandria took thirty-one hours.⁵⁵

⁵²Ibid., November 25, 1854.

⁵³Houma Ceres, September 27, 1855.

⁵⁴Ibid., December 12, 1855.

⁵⁵Alexandria Red River Republican, April 26, 1851.

A new Englander, who had married a Louisiana resident, wrote to her sister that "There are about 16 steamboats running up and down the Red river continually, . . . and they make it very lively here. I am always sitting out on the back gallery watching them as they load and unload."⁵⁶

There were regular weekly packets running on Red River in the years prior to 1850, but starting in February, 1851, two of the best of this group were withdrawn from regular runs.⁵⁷ There was little fear of the consequences of any of the other more or less scheduled boats withdrawing completely for it was felt that the Shreveport boats would take up the slack.⁵⁸ However during August, when the river was low, even the smallest boats had trouble getting over the rapids.⁵⁹ Several low draft cotton boats were turned back, and there was much activity trying to get produce out before navigation closed completely.⁶⁰ At the times when only the smallest boats could bring in fall and winter supplies and carry out the produce, freight rates

⁵⁶ Augusta to Sarah W. Simpson, February 10, 1851. Anonymous Letter, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁵⁷ Alexandria Red River Republican, February 1, 1851.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., August 24, 1850.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

were exceedingly high.⁶¹ When this gateway to the interior was closed, and the whole region was relatively isolated, it was not only the residents of Rapides Parish who suffered, but all of the people depending upon the Red River for connection with the Mississippi River and New Orleans.

The people living along the tributaries of the Red River had difficult transportation problems without having to worry about the depth of the Red River at the rapids. The planter or farmer living along a smaller stream who relied on steamboats had to worry not only about the entering of boats into Red River, but also their stopping at his small landing. Sometimes important business transactions but more often simple problems had to be left unsolved due to the uncertainty of the steamboat travel.⁶²

In the majority of cases the difficulty was simply that the boats could not enter the smaller bayous and rivers of the area. In January, 1856, J. D. Richardson informed his employer that the water in the Boeuf River in Morehouse Parish was high enough for navigation but that it was falling rapidly.⁶³ It is possible however that Richardson was trying to speed up his employer, for later in the

⁶¹Ibid., August 25, 1851.

⁶²W. M. Kerr to St. John R. Liddell, August 31, 1854. Liddell Papers.

⁶³J. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, January 9, 1856. Liddell Papers.

same month he wrote that "the river is plenty high for a boat and rising it has been high enough for a boat for the last six weeks if one dont come in a fiew days I shall have to go to Monroe as I have to go the bead now to have my clothes washed I never was so nigh naked since I can remember we have nary pair of shoes amongst all hands but what leeks badly the Pork is all out I useing the meet I killed the cows."⁶⁴ When the steamboat did arrive with goods later in the year, Richardson wrote, "the steamer Linden did not fetch your corn up she left it at Hanlands she put it in an open house whare the hogs could get at it and before I knew it was there the y/ eat and waisted a bout ten bushels."⁶⁵

In Rapides Parish, just south of the Red River, there was also much difficulty transporting goods and receiving supplies for on some of the smaller streams only seldom did the steamers bother to come in with supplies. It was not until 1850 that there was a steamer willing to try a regular run on Bayou Rapides,⁶⁶ and at least one editor was not too certain that the venture would be a success.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Ibid., January 30, 1856.

⁶⁵Ibid., April 8, 1856.

⁶⁶Alexandria Red River Republican, March 3, 1850.

⁶⁷Ibid.

In Catahoula Parish, north of the Red River, there was a great deal of difficulty in obtaining satisfactory steamboat facilities. The situation was so bad that a group of five men approached St. John R. Liddell in the attempt to borrow five thousand dollars to finance the purchase of a "real Catahoula boat."⁶⁸ They were willing to mortgage their property because they felt that in seven months the venture would bring in enough money to pay the amount with interest.⁶⁹ J. B. Markham, one of the promoters of the venture, wrote: "I have been informed by Steamboatmen that a better investment could not be made. If you will assist us and we fail our property is at your service but there is no probability of not complying with the contract, because the boat can make money sufficient to pay you in two good trips."⁷⁰ Perhaps the most important reason for the scarcity of steamboats on Black River was that when they ran aground they often remained stranded for a long period of time.⁷¹

The trade of Opelousas was carried on through the village of Washington which had water connections with the Atchafalaya River through bayous Cocodrie and Teche. This

⁶⁸J. B. Markham to St. John R. Liddell, October 15, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Houma Ceres, August 9, 1855.

route as well as most of the other transportation chains in the state was often cut off by low water.⁷² An idea of the problem can be obtained from the following editorial:

Since the heavy rains and the high water in September last, we have had almost no rain. . . . our streams [are] either dry, or so low as to admit of no navigation. At the moment we have no boats running, and are not likely to have until there is a rise of water both on the Courtableau and Atchafalaya. . . . we must rely upon heavy rains in this region for speedy resumption of navigation. When the water shall rise, we will have a fleet of boats in our trade to take to market the large amount of produce in the warehouses . . . which has accumulated to an extent before unknown. Our Bayou Boeuf friends will also [sic] have an opportunity of shipping freely⁷³

However the residents along Bayou Boeuf were not fortunate in realizing an early opening of navigation, for after the village of Washington reported that her produce was moving, the Boeuf remained unnavigable "retaining in the gins and sugarhouses the large amount of produce on its banks."⁷⁴

Another difficulty faced by the residents of St. Landry as well as those of the other parishes of the area was the quarantine for when one of the parishes along the Teche declared a quarantine to prevent the entrance of

⁷²Opelousas Courier, et passim. Opelousas Patriot, et passim.

⁷³Opelousas Patriot, March 3, 1855.

⁷⁴Ibid., April 7, 1855.

yellow fever or cholera, the parishes further north were vitally affected. In 1853, St. Mary Parish established a quarantine,⁷⁵ and one planter wrote that "Doct Chas Smith has been appointed by the parish at a salary of \$350 per month to visit all boats coming from N. O. & in case of sickness on any of them they will be detained at the quarantine ground six days--which will have the effect of driving the Atchafalay boats off--as they cannot afford to be subjected to a delay of that length. The country about here is very healthy, no sickness at all."⁷⁶

There were two boats built especially for the trade between Washington and New Orleans. These two packets, called the New Orleans and Opelousas Regular Semi-Weekly Packets, were the W. Hurtona and the Anna Perret. The Hurtona left Washington every Sunday at nine A.M. and left New Orleans on the return trip Wednesday at five P.M. The Anna Perret left Washington Wednesday at nine A.M. and New Orleans Saturday at five P.M.⁷⁷ Since these two vessels took "freight for all intermediate landings, via the Atchafalaya,"⁷⁸ detention in quarantine caused a loss of time

⁷⁵W. F. Weeks to Mrs. Mary C. Moore, August 17, 1853. Weeks Collection.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Opelousas Patriot, January 15, 1859.

⁷⁸Ibid.

as well as a loss of money, and rather than this, the owners preferred to move the boats to another run temporarily.

Since water transportation did not meet all of the transportation requirements of the people of rural antebellum Louisiana, the residents of the interior made attempts to implement it with overland transportation. They received little help from the large planters along the Mississippi who had the use of an open river. There was never any need to fear that the packets would not run along that great stream. A large number of regularly scheduled and non-scheduled steamers continually plied the Mississippi River bringing to the great plantations their supplies and picking up their produce. To be sure the service was not consistent and efficient, but it gave to the river planters the best possible water transportation facilities available during the period. Their greatest difficulty was to get the boats to stop with minor articles of necessity or luxury.⁷⁹ It appears that all of the power of the planter could make no impression on the steamboat captain who was evidently supreme in his domain. Sugar planter John Hampden Randolph once wrote that "I would like, if convenient, and the boat will put it out, that you

⁷⁹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, August 27, 1853. Liddell Papers.

will send me a light bale of cotton for calking and spinning purposes, in stopping to put it out at Bayou Goula the boat captain can drop me a line and let me know when he will be back to take the sugar and molasses."⁸⁰

The independence of the boat captains becomes more obvious when it is known that Bayou Goula had many of the facilities required to handle any and all kinds of supplies. Further, Randolph had made arrangements with a resident of Bayou Goula, Clement Dehon, to build a warehouse on his property at the Bayou Goula landing.⁸¹ Randolph and his partner, Paul O. Hebert, were to build and maintain the warehouse, but the title was to remain with Dehon; all that they requested was free use of the warehouse for ten years.⁸² However it seems that the primary transportation difficulty of the planters along the Mississippi River was the problem of getting the cane or cotton from the fields to the sugar house or to the gin and thence to the landings on the river.⁸³

At the opening of the decade those people of the state who could not get satisfactory service from the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Iberville Parish Conveyance Book, II, entry 340.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See Chapter III. Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 174. Iberville Parish Conveyance Book, IV, entry 58.

packets at first turned to cordelle or plank roads rather than to railroads. The editor of the Baton Rouge Gazette, who entered into the discussion regarding the comparable merits of railroads and plank roads, wrote concerning their comparative cheapness of construction and safety:

Entirely a mistake As far as safety is concerned, the lamentable number of accidents, chronicled daily as occurring upon Rail Roads, show that your calculation is entirely fallacious. The cheap proposition will not stand the test of demonstration, for an instant. All experience goes to show that the Plank Road is the cheapest thorough fare over which the Farmer can transport his produce to market. Why? Because he can choose his own time.--employ the motive power which would otherwise, perhaps, be idle and expensive on his own plantation, profitably in the transportation of his produce--make his own bargains, and in all respects, suit his own convenience. This he cannot do on a Rail Road.

The Plank Road--truthfully termed by a distinguished writer, the Farmer's Rail Road--is the only one for a productive country like ours.⁸⁴

The residents of the isolated areas of some of the parishes got little support from those who lived in less isolated sections. In Iberville Parish, where the section of the parish on the east side of the Mississippi was seriously contemplating petitioning the legislature for permission to join Ascension Parish because over five hundred of its citizens were cut off from justice and religious services "by distance and bad roads," a measure proposing a road was carried only by the vote of the

⁸⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, August 31, 1850.

President pro tem after a tie vote among the other Police Jurors⁸⁵ although the inhabitants of that area had "paid the assessed Parish Tax, into the Parochial [sic] Treasury for the past forty years, and during all this time have never received back, by way of appropriations one single Dollar!"⁸⁶ The ordinances of the parish stated that the roads had to be twenty-five feet wide, but the people preferred to have more roads at twenty feet wide.⁸⁷

Perhaps one reason for the lack of good roads in the parishes of the state was the parsimony of the Police Juries. When individuals requested the right to build roads leading to the so-called public highways, they were given permission to do so providing that they, the citizens, paid all of the costs of building even though the road benefited the whole parish.⁸⁸ One Police Jury refused to pay the account of one of its supervisors of roads because he failed to conform with a petty technicality.⁸⁹ The Police Jury of Lafayette Parish in 1858 appointed a commission to ask the residents of the parish if they would

⁸⁵Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 2, 1850.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., September 1, 1851.

⁸⁸St. Charles Parish Police Jury Minutes, April 14, 1856.

⁸⁹Ibid., December 28, 1854.

be willing to grant free of cost the land necessary for the building of a public road, agreeing, however, that if the road were discontinued the individual could regain his title to the land.⁹⁰ The next year that Police Jury decreed that any of the owners who had not "delivered . . . lands for the use of the Public . . . shall be fined in the sum of One Hundred Dollars."⁹¹

In Bienville Parish the public roads were divided into three classes known as classes 1, 2, 3, with Class 1 being most suitable for parish needs. Class 1 roads were to be cleared of trees cut within six inches of the ground and of logs and bushes for a width of thirty feet. In the center of the road the stumps were to be removed as well as roots, rocks, and all other obstructions for a width of fifteen feet. All of the bridges and causeways were to be at least twelve feet wide.⁹² The Class 2 roads were to be cleared of logs and trees to a width of twenty feet with a center clearance of twelve feet while Class 3 roads were merely twelve feet wide trails cut through the woods.⁹³

The supervising agents of the roads of Bienville,

1858. ⁹⁰Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 7,

⁹¹Ibid.

1859. ⁹²Bienville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 18,

⁹³Ibid.

as in other parishes, were the road overseers or syndics.⁹⁴ Usually the parishes were divided into road districts, each of which was under the supervision of one of these appointed officials. This official was to inspect the roads and to make certain that they were kept in good order.⁹⁵ It was within his jurisdiction to call on the owners and to get a list of slaves subject to work on the roads. If due to the failure of a slave owner to provide a proper number of slaves, the work had to be completed with hired labor, the road overseer had the right to go before a justice of the peace and recover the money from the slave holder who refused to obey the summons. The road overseer was to superintend all of the work done on the roads in his district. However, he was to give notice in writing to owners of slaves and free persons who were to work on the roads. He had the right to call out with only one day's notice both free people and slaves subject to road labor to meet special emergencies. The road overseer was usually paid a small stipend for the days he actually spent working on the roads, but he was subject to a fifty dollar fine for each offense of failure to discharge his duty.

The male residents of the parishes were generally

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵This paragraph is based on a study of the Police Jury Minutes of the parishes of Louisiana.

subject to labor on the roads. In Lafayette Parish, for example, all males between fifteen and forty-five except ministers of the gospel and "such other persons as are or shall be exempt" had to perform this duty.⁹⁶ Whoever refused the summons of the road overseer or neglected to do as ordered was subject to a fine of one dollar a day for himself and/or his slaves.⁹⁷ The amount of work that could be demanded was twelve days per year.⁹⁸ In Bienville Parish no overseer had the right to work any free man or slave on the roads for more than ten days a year.⁹⁹

Similar regulations prevailed throughout the state, and as written in the Police Jury minutes they appeared generally effective; however, the results of the program were poor. In St. Mary Parish where there was much criticism of the roads, one disgruntled citizen complained that "it would have taken two yoke of oxen to drag my caleche through some portions of the public highway Some also who have the finest carriages, of which there are fifty to one in comparison to the number twenty years ago,

1860. ⁹⁶Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, March 17,

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

1859. ⁹⁹Bienville Parish Police Jury Minutes, July 18,

have the worst road in front of their own dwellings."¹⁰⁰
 Of the roads west of Natchitoches Olmsted wrote: "The road could hardly be called a road. It was only a way where people had passed before. Each man had taken such a path as suited him, turning aside to avoid, on high ground, the sand, on low ground, the mud. We chose, generally, the untrodden elastic pavement of pine leaves, at a little distance from the main track."¹⁰¹

The roads in the Attakapas Region were distinctly marked but full of frequent and embarrassing forks.¹⁰² Furthermore it was very difficult to obtain directional information, and when information was received, the result was often unsatisfactory for many of the directions obtained were conflicting.¹⁰³ Bayous of any considerable size were bridged, but the crossings were built of logs and were crudely constructed, and it was frequently safer to leave the road, ignore the so-called bridges, and seek a nearby ford.¹⁰⁴ The editor of the Opelousas Patriot complained because the road between Opelousas and Grand Coteau was almost impassable and wrote that "The bridges are nearly

¹⁰⁰Franklin Planters' Banner, February 15, 1849.

¹⁰¹Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 55.

¹⁰²Ibid., 193.

¹⁰³Ibid., 394.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

all broken up; and were yesterday informed that . . . the mail contractor, will be compelled to stop his coaches unless a remedy is immediately applied. What are the commissioners of roads and bridges about?"¹⁰⁵ The road between Opelousas and Washington, a new road in 1860, was also in bad shape. The bridges were a little over one-third of the width of the road, a fact which compelled wagons to travel in the same rut.¹⁰⁶ Near the bridges, the roads were "terrible" and after a rain were impassable. The editor of the Opelousas Courier suggested that the ruts be filled in and that the bridges be widened.¹⁰⁷ In another parish, the bridges were so poorly constructed that it was unlawful for anyone to cross more than fifteen head of cattle, horses, or mules at the same time or to gallop over the bridges on horseback.¹⁰⁸

Land travel in the area around Baton Rouge was limited by the lack of good roads but was not hindered by lack of conveyances.¹⁰⁹ In 1852, the editor of the Baton

¹⁰⁵Opelousas Patriot, January 5, 1856.

¹⁰⁶Opelousas Courier, February 25, 1860.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 7, 1858.

¹⁰⁹Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, January 7, 1858.

Rouge Gazette wrote that the roads from Baton Rouge to Ascension Parish were fairly good and that only a small state appropriation was necessary to bring these two areas into much closer contact with one another.¹¹⁰ On the same day the editor complained of the attitude of the owner of Waterloo Plantation who had been paid for the construction of a road and then proceeded to destroy it "by driving his cattle over it twice every day, rain or shine; thereby, depriving the people of the use of that which they had paid for."¹¹¹

The building of private roads sometimes caused disagreements among planters. In 1848, for example, William J. Minor warned Edwin Griffin about taking wood from Minor property:

A party of men have been & are now cutting & wasting my timber in a most shameful manner for the purpose, as they say, or making or mending the New River road, & by yr authority- I know of no law by which you or any one else can take my timber, without my consent, to mend or make even a public road--much less a private one--As this road is known to be- I shall therefore hold you responsible for all timber that has been or may be cut on my land, & I hereby warn you not to cut, yrself, nor allow any one else, under yr authority, to cut timber on my land for any purpose whatsoever.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Minor Letter Books, August 8, 1848. Minor Papers.

Some of the property holders along Bayou Lafourche were not as interested in the roads and levees as they should have been. These individuals were usually not resident land owners. In October, 1853, the "non-resident proprietors of lands" were warned that the work required on the roads and levees fronting their property would be given to the highest bidder if the owners did not look to the repairs.¹¹³ As late as 1855, there was no decent road between Houma and Thibodaux, and since there was greater need for traveling as time passed it was thought that some one should try to interest the people in the construction of a plank road between the villages.¹¹⁴

As mentioned previously parish governments often took no action unless forced to by necessity,¹¹⁵ but when Police Juries did take action they usually went about their work in what was considered a thorough going manner. On June 8, 1859, for example, \$35,000 was appropriated for the purchase of slaves "for and in the name of the parish of Iberville, for the construction of said works, [roads from Indian Village to a point on Bayou Grosse Tete] except so much of said appropriation as may be deemed necessary by said commissioners for the maintenance and management

¹¹³Thibodaux Minerva, October 1, 1853.

¹¹⁴Houma Ceres, December 6, 1855.

¹¹⁵See pages 93-94, 107-108.

of said slaves."¹¹⁶

The often faulty bridges were inadequately supplemented by poor ferry service. The ferry at Alexandria was "a bore-a humbug-a very nuisance," and when the wind blew "a little hard," there was no crossing for horses or vehicles.¹¹⁷ Even in good weather there was often a wait of a half hour or more for service, and "besides, the flat used for crossing is not as safe as it might be."¹¹⁸ The trip across from Alexandria to Pineville sometimes took one hour and fifty-five minutes.¹¹⁹ Olmsted blamed the lack of traffic in the area west of Natchitoches on the ill-tended and expensive ferries.¹²⁰

Some of the ferry-keepers were not over-ambitious or even desirous of giving satisfactory service. One ferry-keeper had to be ordered by the Police Jury to cross all transportation,¹²¹ but to insure proper service most parishes enacted specific ordinances to guide ferry-keepers. The operators of the ferries in Jefferson Parish were

¹¹⁶Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 8, 1859.

¹¹⁷Alexandria Red River Republican, February 19, 1853.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., March 26, 1853.

¹²⁰Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 43.

¹²¹Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 22, 1855.

forced to erect signs to designate the location of the landings and to keep at least two skiffs not less than nineteen feet in length at the landings. At no time were both of the skiffs to be on the same side of the river. The regular ferry hours were from 4:30 A.M. until 8:00 P.M., but the ferry-keepers were ordered to ferry anyone over at any time for a charge four times greater than the regularly listed one. Barges could be kept at the landings, but this could in no way interfere with the crossings of the skiffs which were scheduled to cross every half hour.¹²²

Although a study of the newspapers and Police Jury Minutes shows much dissatisfaction with ferry service, the holders of ferry franchises made money. The ferry between East and West Baton Rouge parishes, for example, was leased for five years for \$500 in 1855, but half a decade later the same right was worth \$9,350.¹²³

There had been considerable interest in the building of railroads in Louisiana prior to the Panic of 1837; however, following this depression there was little if any

¹²²Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

¹²³Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, September 12, 1860.

revival of interest during the decade of the 1840's.¹²⁴ Although in 1850, the editor of one of the Baton Rouge newspapers still thought that the plank road was superior to the railroad,¹²⁵ with the advent of the 1850's the people of the state became more aware of the need for something to supplement the poor roads and unsatisfactory water routes. The greatest interest in railroad construction was centered in the city of New Orleans where it was felt that unless something was done much trade would be lost to other areas where railroad lines were being developed.¹²⁶ The residents of Baton Rouge also felt that they had to develop a transportation system that would enable them to regain some of the trade that no longer came to the town. They wanted particularly to add to the trade region of the town by gaining the trade of the Grosse Tete area.¹²⁷

There was a more widespread interest throughout the state than there had been a decade before. The residents of the Attakapas and Teche sections were aware of the

¹²⁴H. H. Evans, "James Robb, Banker and Pioneer Railroad Builder of Ante-bellum Louisiana," an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1935, 43-44.

¹²⁵See page 107.

¹²⁶See L. E. Newman, "Commercial Life in New Orleans on the Eve of the War for Southern Independence," an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1939, 38.

¹²⁷J. McGrath, "The Baton Rouge, Grosse Tete, and Opelousas Rail Road," East and West Baton Rouge Historical Society Proceedings, II (1917-1918), 45-46.

necessity for arousing the interest of people with financial means in an Attakapas and Mississippi railroad. They felt that their best chance was to get some river town interested in the project: "No steps have yet been taken about the survey of the Attakapas & Mississippi Rail Road The people of Donaldsonville seem to have waked up to a just appreciation of the advantages to be gained by having the terminus at that place. The rivalry to effect this, between that & other points on the Miss River may produce much good in our favour by getting stock taken."¹²⁸

In 1852 the residents of the Teche Country and the Attakapas Region anxiously awaited word from the railroad convention in New Orleans. The news that they received was favorable; one man wrote that the "right spirit is up, and it is only necessary to push matters & we can accomplish At least two of the great stems or trunks."¹²⁹ The major attention of the planters of those areas was turned to the railroad "starting in the Vicinity of New Orleans . . . leading to Attakapas, Opelousas on to Texas."¹³⁰

¹²⁸F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, September 10, 1850. Liddell Papers.

¹²⁹Thomas Curry to John Moore, January 16, 1852. Weeks Collection.

¹³⁰Ibid.

That interest ran high is seen from the fact that railroad conventions were held in some of the small villages of the area.¹³¹

The line of greatest importance to the residents of southern Louisiana was the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western which was organized in 1853.¹³² By 1854 the track had been laid from Algiers to Lafourche Crossing, a distance of fifty-two miles.¹³³ This railroad was of great importance to the people of the Teche and Attakapas regions because: "Since the connexion with the Rail Road at Lafourche our distance from N. O. is greatly decreased- We now go it in twelve hours from Pattersonville [St. Mary Parish] 52 miles of the way by R. R."¹³⁴

Naturally, the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Rail Road meant a great deal to the people along Bayou Lafourche and in the adjoining back country. Lafourche Crossing and Houma were connected by an express stage; stage fare to the crossing was for a time two dollars,¹³⁵ but later the cost of travel to the crossing

¹³¹F. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, March 6, 1852. Liddell Papers.

¹³²Louisiana, A Guide, 83.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, February 18, 1855. Liddell Papers.

¹³⁵Houma Ceres, December 6, 1855.

was reduced to \$1.50 because of the competition between rival stage lines.¹³⁶ There were daily trains between Algiers and Lafourche Crossing and a special train that left on Saturday and returned on Monday.¹³⁷ The cost of the ticket to Algiers was \$2.50, and the trip took approximately three hours.¹³⁸

All of the people along Bayou Lafourche were not happy over the opening of the railroad. Those who earned their living in trade with the people of Terrebonne Parish felt that they were doomed to lose this important business.¹³⁹ In fact the people of Thibodaux felt that the connecting canal between bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne would not even be opened and that the people of the Terrebonne area would carry on all of their commerce with New Orleans via the railroad.¹⁴⁰

Perhaps William J. Minor's attitude toward the railroad was similar to that of most planters of Terrebonne Parish. In 1855 Minor's overseer was instructed to sell no more molasses on the plantation because shipments

¹³⁶Ibid., December 13, 1855.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., May 27, 1854.

over the new railroad to New Orleans would bring more profit.¹⁴¹ The first recorded shipment of supplies over the line by Minor was in the next year.¹⁴² Minor seemed to have been well-disposed toward railroads as he attended some of the railroad meetings in his vicinity, and particularly after one such meeting, he seemed impressed with the prospects offered by rail transportation.¹⁴³

Previously mention has been made of the interest of the people of Baton Rouge in the building of a railroad line to tap the resources of the Grosse Tete-Maringouin area, and although this line was a boon to the residents of that town, it was more beneficial to the people of the back country who had been forced to rely on the uncertainties of water transportation.¹⁴⁴ The rise in the value of the ferry across the Mississippi River between East Baton Rouge and West Baton Rouge parishes was "directly traceable to the increased trade and travel brought about by the Grosse Tete Rail Road."¹⁴⁵ This evidences the value of this line to the inhabitants of the Maringouin-Grosse Tete area.

¹⁴¹Minor Letter Books, August 21, 1855. Minor Papers.

¹⁴²Ibid., December 25, 1856.

¹⁴³Minor Diary, April 16, 1859.

¹⁴⁴See pages 86-95, 117.

¹⁴⁵Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, September 12, 1860.

Although this railroad was of great advantage to both Baton Rouge and the back country, the extension of the line on through the Maringouin country was opposed by one of the Baton Rouge editors who wrote: "It is well understood that the vacant lands along the route of the New Orleans road, will speedily be withdrawn from market and donated to the company. This of itself will realize a large amount--if not enough for the completion of the road.--Not so on the Grosse Tete. After crossing that, the land on to the Marangoin [Maringouin], is in the hands of speculators, who entered it but a short time ago, at government price of \$1 25 per acre, and now hold it as \$20 per acre."¹⁴⁶ Regardless of the opposition, "the extraordinary success of the Grosse Tete road--surpassing fourfold the most sanguine expectations of its originators--has imparted great zeal and enthusiasm to the railroad feeling."¹⁴⁷

The Police Jury of Jefferson Parish showed its gratitude for the betterment of transportation facilities by granting to the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad right of way "across through or along any streets, alleys, avenues, or highways that may be desired

¹⁴⁶Ibid., July 26, 1857.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., July 26, 1860.

by the said company . . . in and through all that part of the Parish of Jefferson Right Bank of the Mississippi river, and over which the Police Jury have now the authority or right to grant legally the right of way"¹⁴⁸

But the generosity of the Police Jury was not appreciated by some of the citizens of the parish who complained that the railroad was encroaching on the public roads,¹⁴⁹ and by 1860 the relations between the citizens and the railroad were so strained that a special meeting of the Police Jury had to be called to settle the trouble. It seemed that livestock was "liable Constantly to be Killed or maimed by the Cars running upon the . . . Rail Road," and that the company did not consider it its duty to maintain fences along the tracks.¹⁵⁰ The people of the parish demanded a law requiring that the railroad construct fences along any land where there was a danger of livestock being killed,¹⁵¹ and on December 3, 1860, a special committee reported that they found the complaints of residents justified and recommended that the company be forced to build fences.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 1, 1860.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., December 6, 1858.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., June 1, 1860.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Ibid.

One of the five lines operating in the state in 1850, the Clinton and Port Hudson, apparently had not been giving satisfactory service for in 1850 a company circular informed the public that although there had been some irregularities in the transportation of freight, there would be no more delay in service and that cotton awaiting shipment would not be stored in the weather. The agent of the company said that the railroad and its facilities were in excellent condition; in fact the facilities of the line had been enlarged. He said that the "Rail Road Company will, in all cases of carelessness, be responsible for the damages sustained by freights on the Road The charge for Cotton, per bale, is FIFTY CENTS, and TEN CENTS additional, for, attending to shipping it on the Boats."¹⁵³ This line was only fourteen miles long.¹⁵⁴

On the death of his father, Moses Liddell, St. John R. Liddell wanted to dispose of the stock he had inherited in the West Feliciana Rail Road Company,¹⁵⁵ but when he wrote to the cashier he received the following reply: "With reference to the market value of the stock I think you will find it a difficult matter to dispose of

¹⁵³Based on a circular of the Clinton and Port Hudson Rail Road, 1850. Marston Papers.

¹⁵⁴Louisiana, A Guide, 82.

¹⁵⁵T. H. Dyer to St. John R. Liddell, September 12, 1856. Liddell Papers.

it on any terms as the construction and constant repairs of the rail road have swallowed up most of the assets of the company."¹⁵⁶

The railroads were a great improvement where they existed, but in some instances they antagonized the people by poor service, carelessness, and lack of respect for the property of individuals. While they at times gave poor service, their poor service seems to have been far more satisfactory than the service rendered by the steamboats, and railroad efficiency far surpassed the efficiency of travel on the inadequate roads of the period.

When the Sigurs of Iberville Parish, impressed by the performance of the railroads of the state, decided to employ that means of transportation to move the sugar from their sugar house to the Mississippi River,¹⁵⁷ the parish granted to them the right to run their railroad across the public road to the Mississippi River "provided they do not impede travel or subject the public to any inconvenience."¹⁵⁸

Another private railroad was described by the editor of the Opelousas Patriot as follows:

The iron is of the most approved pattern for durability and strength, and the road seems in all respects to be appropriately constructed for the

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, February 3, 1855.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

freight trade to which it is applied. Although but limited as regards length its utility must be admitted by even the most inveterate old bogy; and it is hoped that it will aid in reviving the railroad spirit among those who have never yet listened to the 'snorting' of the iron horse.

But we are compelled, however unwillingly, to throw cold water upon the reader's expectations. The road traverses only that 'section of country' between Mr. Ireland's ice-house and the waters of the bayou--say 150 or 200 feet--and is but temporary structure, built to unload from the biggest kind of a flatboat several hundred tons of ice¹⁵⁹

The people of ante-bellum Louisiana complained of everything, but one thing that all Louisianians, without exception, continually complained about was the mail service. In the newspapers are continual inquiries regarding the slowness of the mails. The editor of the Thibodaux Minerva wrote that "One of the greatest nuisances of the day is the Mail Service between this place and New Orleans."¹⁶⁰ The people of Houma complained that if it were not for the stage express bringing in the New Orleans newspapers, they would not know what was happening in the outside world.¹⁶¹ During July and August, 1851, there was a three week period when the people of the region

¹⁵⁹Opelousas Patriot, April 18, 1857.

¹⁶⁰Thibodaux Minerva, July 23, 1853.

¹⁶¹Houma Ceres, February 28, 1856.

north of the Red River received no mail at all.¹⁶² Earlier the same complaint had been voiced by the editor of the Concordia Intelligencer.¹⁶³ The editor of the Baton Rouge Gazette exclaimed: "GRATIFYING.--To receive an interesting communication from the city a full week after the period it ought to have arrived, and when the matters it treats upon are too aged for publication. Mr. Postmaster General! please do kill some of your subordinates, or make them do their duty."¹⁶⁴ The Baton Rouge Daily Comet reported that: "Independent of the delay and irregularity of the mails, we hear of losses, of money and other valuables. Indeed this department of government is in . . . a hopeless state of decay under . . . inefficient mismanagement . . . no reliance can be placed in it. . . . merchants should not remit a dime in money, but obtain checks [checks]. The Registering system, is what may well be denominated a 'marvelous humbug,' and the man in whose mind it originate [originated] should have a leather medal."¹⁶⁵

In one of the sugar parishes where the mail was

¹⁶²Alexandria Red River Republican, August 16, 1851.

¹⁶³Concordia Intelligencer, February 15, 1851.

¹⁶⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, September 7, 1850.

¹⁶⁵Baton Rouge Daily Comet, September 25, 1855.

supposed to be delivered three or four times a week, the citizens were fortunate to receive communications once or twice.¹⁶⁶ The postmaster at the parish seat refused to send out the mail if there were only small amounts.¹⁶⁷ Since the postmaster was also the mayor, the owner of a hotel, a drug store, and a newspaper, the opinion of the rural editor was that little if anything could be done about his shortcomings.¹⁶⁸ Perhaps one of the difficulties was that the mail contractor was supposed to use the packets for transporting mail to the parish seat, but most of the time he preferred to use his own horses.¹⁶⁹

In 1851 a Catahoula Parish planter made the following comment on the rapidity of the mail service:

"Yours of the [illegible] inst came to hand on the 6th, which shows material improvement in the speed of the mails--It is just 4 days less than it takes one of our Steamer Ships to cross the Atlantic to England--about 3,000 miles, which by our mail route we cant exceed 140 miles at farthest--You perceive thus, that there is vast room yet for improvement. . . ."¹⁷⁰ This letter was carried

¹⁶⁶Plaquemine, Southern Sentinel, September 2, 1854.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., February 17, 1855.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., August 6, 1854.

¹⁷⁰St. John R. Liddell to Moses Liddell, September 8, 1851. Liddell Papers.

from the plantation of Moses Liddell in the Teche region to St. John R. Liddell living on the Black River in Catahoula Parish.

It is possible that the irregularity of the mails offered a handy excuse to some people when they had to alibi for not writing. For instance: "yesterday morning I had . . . the great pleasure to receive a letter . . . in which he states you have received but two letters from me since you left home, it must be incoincidence [inconsequence] of the irregularity of the Mails, for I have written to you and Puss alternately nearly every week since you left me, I wish some of you Shreveport folks would complain to your Post Masters"171

Clearly some of the difficulty was caused by incompetence on the local scene, but often the mistakes were made by the individuals who did some of the complaining. One correspondent informed a friend that the mail would arrive quicker if it were properly addressed. He wrote: "when you direct another letter to St. Francisville . . . it would be well to write on the envelope 'West Feliciana Parish,' or Louisiana in full, otherwise your

¹⁷¹Mary Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Morris, December 2, 1854. Morris (Mrs. Thomas H.) and Sibley (Mrs. Mary W.) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

letter might be sent to San Francisco, Cal^a again."¹⁷²

At other times seeming failure of the mails was due to the failure of individuals not employed by or connected with the post office. One planter wrote to his factor inquiring about the delay in delivery of shoes for his slaves blaming the delay on the mail when in reality the fault was with the clerk on a steamer who had forgotten to give the letter to the factor. The planter evidently forgot that he had not mailed the order but had handed it to the clerk for delivery, and thus the inefficiency of the post office officials was again made the target of a planter's ire.¹⁷³

The mail contractor had no easy job. Besides having to listen continually to griping citizens, he had to protect himself from highwaymen. It was dangerous enough in the Teche country even when the mail carriers traveled well-armed. In that region one mail carrier was stopped and threatened by a bandit in 1851, and in the ensuing struggle the carrier was seriously wounded.¹⁷⁴ In 1853 a mailman was robbed on his route between

¹⁷²H. L. Noble to Anna Maria Johnson, April 1, 1853. Barrow (W. M. Family) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

¹⁷³Gillis & Ferguson to St. John R. Liddell, October 9, 1860. Liddell Papers.

¹⁷⁴Franklin Planters' Banner, September 9, 1851.

Alexandria and Opelousas,¹⁷⁵ and in the same year the mail bags for Lobdell were stolen from the agent on the wharf.¹⁷⁶

One occasion the reason for the failure of mail deliveries in the Teche country was the inability of the mail contractor to meet his financial obligations. The contractor's horses, wagons, and other equipment were seized by his creditors along the mail route.¹⁷⁷

After only momentary hesitation, the people of Louisiana became enthusiastic proponents of the Electric Telegraph.¹⁷⁸ Obviously the telegraph would bring all of the people of the state into closer contact, but in reality its chief benefit was to the people of the city of New Orleans and the residents of the towns and villages along the rivers and streams of the state.

At first the Morse-Kendall interests had no competition within the state and they gave very poor service, but with the entrance of the People's Company, the service was bettered.¹⁷⁹ There was great interest in stringing

¹⁷⁵Alexandria Red River Republican, June 25, 1853.

¹⁷⁶Concordia Intelligencer, March 19, 1853.

¹⁷⁷Z. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, February 24, 1851. Liddell Papers.

¹⁷⁸E. B. Carlton, "The Establishment of the Electric Telegraph in Louisiana and Mississippi," an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1942, 9-10.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 16-20.

the wires all through the state, but as soon as some of the towns received telegraphic connections they began to complain about the service. Many of the complaints were not justified as the telegraph companies had a difficult time combatting the problems brought on by floods, storms, and other occurrences.¹⁸⁰

In 1850 a Baton Rouge editor crowed that "Baton Rouge may now be said to be 'in town'--for have we not the lightning wherewith to hold converse with all parts of the Union, and is not the Plank Road soon to connect us closer with the rich and growing interior!"¹⁸¹ Two years later the same editor queried, "Where is the Telegraphy? Are the wires broken? The Operators are always very kind and attentive in furnishing us the news when they are in operation."¹⁸²

In 1855 the editor of the Baton Rouge Daily Comet informed his readers that "The stock-holders and chief wire workers of the different tellegraphs, throughout the . . . nation, should not complain of a want of patronage on the part of the people, until they can have such operators, at the different posts, as will feel some interest in transmittin despatches with despatch. The complaints

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 44-45.

¹⁸¹Baton Rouge Gazette, July 27, 1850.

¹⁸²Ibid., February 28, 1852.

are universal."¹⁸³ The editor continued to say that the operators took the message whether or not the line was in operation, and "If it reaches the party for whom intended, in advance of the mail, it is a miracle."¹⁸⁴

The Opelousas Courier reported that there were telegraphic connections between Alexandria and Shreveport via Natchitoches,¹⁸⁵ and the Plaquemine Southern Sentinel informed its readers that Plaquemine and Donaldsonville would soon both be linked by wires running from Baton Rouge.¹⁸⁶ The entrance of the telegraph into the Attakapas Region simply gave more work to the overseer of roads; the editor of the Opelousas Patriot said that "The present condition of the telegraph wires along the public roads through our parish makes them dangerous to travel, and calls loudly for their removal; and it is certainly the duty of the road overseer to look to it. The wire is down in many places, and lays stretched across the road, or in loose rolls in the road. Vehicles and horses are in constant danger of becoming entangled in the wire, and the latter of becoming frightened and running away."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³Baton Rouge Daily Comet, December 29, 1855.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Opelousas Courier, September 3, 1853.

¹⁸⁶Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, June 24, 1854.

¹⁸⁷Opelousas Patriot, September 15, 1855.

The residents of Shreveport were linked to the inhabitants of Alexandria by telegraph wires, but a study of the Shreveport The Southwestern reveals that, in many instances, communication between the towns was prevented by one type of difficulty or another.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸Shreveport The Southwestern, et passim.

CHAPTER VI

Although the rivers and bayous of Louisiana gave to the state its most fertile soil and the best of its poor transportation system, they also contributed one of the state's most difficult problems. Fear of floods never left the thoughts of the agriculturists as the possibility of disaster was constantly present to the great planters along the Mississippi and Red rivers and, to a no lesser extent, to every planter or farmer residing near any stream in the state.

Since the residents could do nothing to prevent the rise of the streams their only alternative was to try to control the rampaging waters. The levee system of Louisiana thus came into being, and by 1812, when Louisiana became a state, the levees extended from the lowest settlements on the Mississippi River to high land at Baton Rouge on the left bank and to Pointe Coupee Parish on the right bank.¹ By 1844, they were practically continuous from twenty miles below New Orleans to the mouth of the Arkansas River on the right bank and to Baton Rouge on the left bank.²

¹Report, Louisiana Department of Public Works, 19.

²Ibid.

DeBow gives the following description of these levees:

These levees, on the average, appear to be about five feet high, thirty feet wide at the base, and seven and a-half feet wide at the top; hence, the constructing and keeping of them in repair are very expensive. Moreover, the current of the river being very rapid and the banks alluvial, those banks are subject to great and rapid abrasions; and, as a matter of prudence and safety, therefore, the levees are, and must be, constructed some distance back from the margin of the stream. Between the levees and the enclosures of the planters, space is always left for a public road, that being the highest and driest ground, and therefore best adapted for that purpose, the rear lands being so wet that they are frequently impassable. The proprietors of the lands fronting on the rivers, creeks, bayous, &c., are thus deprived of the use of a considerable portion of their very best lands, by the necessity for making these levees and the peculiar topographical features of the country.³

By the end of the 1850's jurisdiction over the levees had been delegated to the parishes,⁴ but before that time at least one parish had realized that the practice of holding the riparian proprietor responsible for the building and maintenance of levees was not only burdensome but unfair. In 1850, the Police Jury of Iberville Parish resolved "that the Burden of Making and Keeping up Roads and levees upon the Mississippi River and its large tributaries, or outlets should no longer rest upon the

³DeBow's Review, X (1851), 531.

⁴Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1858.

Riparian Proprietor-But being of general interest, Roads and Levees should be made by the State- That the body of the people should be taxed for the making of the Same and no portion of the State be exempt."⁵ Perhaps the interest of Iberville Parish in state control rested on her desire to free the river planters from the heavy burden that levee construction and maintenance placed upon them, or maybe she felt that it was the state's duty to build and maintain levees, but whatever it was that caused this feeling, this parish did offer aid to West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee parishes in 1850 when they needed it. The residents of Iberville apparently felt that if the state would not help the parishes, they should help each other, for the Police Jury stated that they felt "anxious to render them assistance."⁶ The jurors also requested that the governor call a special session of the legislature to appropriate money to aid the residents of West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee parishes in rebuilding their levees. At the same time a resolution was passed which authorized a grant of \$1,200 to the fund set aside for rebuilding the levees affected by the rampaging waters; however, the parish informed the state that she expected the

⁵Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, December 7, 1850.

⁶Ibid.

amount would be refunded to her.⁷

Unfortunately for the river and bayou planters and farmers, all of the parishes did not have the same attitude. Generally the riparian proprietors were held financially responsible for the building and upkeep of the levees fronting their land.⁸ St. Charles Parish refused to pay for the lumber used by a syndic⁹ in repairing the levees in his district, and after lengthy consideration told the contractor to present the bills to the owners of the property on which the lumber had been used.¹⁰ In Jefferson Parish, the Police Jury deemed the responsibility of the land owner so great that it ordained that any "party to whom sums of money shall be due for work done to levees . . . by virtue of the ordinance of this Police Jury, shall have a privilege on the property . . . [of the proprietor] and such privilege shall have precedence over any other privilege."¹¹ This does not mean that the owners received no aid from the parishes, for in some instances the Police Juries

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid. Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858. Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 6, 1853. Thibodaux Minerva, October 1, 1853.

⁹The syndics were levee overseers.

¹⁰St. Charles Parish Police Jury Minutes, March 14, 1857.

¹¹Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

appropriated money out of the general funds of the parishes for the construction and repair of levees.¹²

Jefferson Parish was perhaps hardest on its proprietors who lived along streams and bayous. In this parish as in all of the parishes, the levees were under the control and supervision of levee overseers or syndics whose duty was to inspect the levees and to see that they were kept in order by the owners. The syndics had the authority to call out the slaves necessary to do the required work, and if slaves available on the plantation in whose front the break occurred were not sufficient to complete the work, the overseer could call slaves from other plantations in his district. Payment due the owner of the slaves brought in from other plantations was usually borne by the proprietor of the land on which the levee break occurred. Further, the overseer could recommend that slaves be brought in from other districts to accomplish emergency necessities. In most cases the overseer was not given the authority to order construction of new levees; usually this was left to a commission or jury composed of the levee overseer and several of the planters of the district.¹³

The importance of the levees to the residents

¹²Based on a study of the Police Jury Minutes of the parishes of Louisiana.

¹³Ibid.

along the Mississippi and Red rivers is obvious but the plight of those along the bayous is not so well known. The residents along many of the bayous of the state were fighting a losing battle, for they could not prevent flooding of their land as long as the Mississippi and the Red rivers could flow unhindered into the mouths of the bayous at every rise.¹⁴

An understanding of the intolerable situation faced by these interior inhabitants is obtained by a description of the situation along bayous Lafourche and Plaquemine. There was a strong movement to close Bayou Plaquemine all through the 1850's. The proponents of the move were those people living along bayous Plaquemine, Maringouin, Grosse Tete, Big and Little Pigeon, and Grand River. The planters of the interior wanted to close the bayou because they were continually losing money when their land was overflowed; they could not take advantage of the smaller subsidiary streams which were clogged up by the drift from the Mississippi River; and the drift in the major bayous along with the current caused excessive transportation costs and delays.¹⁵

¹⁴Thibodaux Minerva, November 25, 1854. "Lands and Levees," 1-6. "Engineer's Report," 13-16.

¹⁵"Lands and Levees," 1-6. "Engineer's Report," 13-16. Walter Prichard, ed., "A Tourist's Description of Louisiana in 1860," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXI (1938), 1128-1129.

In opposition to this closure movement were the river planters, who seem to have had some influence with the State Engineer.¹⁶ The State Engineer used as his argument for keeping Bayou Plaquemine open the opinion that "We must give vent to our surplus water"¹⁷ and said that if the bayou were closed and the great mass of water that the bayou carried off were thrown into the Mississippi below, devastation and ruin would occur, "therefore, close not the Plaquemine."¹⁸

The residents along the river concurred with this belief and on it based their fight.¹⁹ In 1859, the legislature voted to close Bayou Plaquemine, but Governor Robert C. Wickliffe vetoed the bill on two counts.²⁰ He said that the measure was unconstitutional and that the proposal of the legislature, that of driving piles across the mouth of the bayou, would save no land from floods.²¹ The defeat of the measure left the advocates of the closure movement no

¹⁶"Lands and Levees," et passim. "Engineer's Report," et passim.

¹⁷"Engineer's Report," 21.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Baton Rouge Gazette, February 7, 1852.

²⁰"Veto Message, 1859," Louisiana Legislative Documents, 1859.

²¹Ibid.

better off than before, and they still had to struggle against the irresistible Mississippi and the powerful river interests. It was not until after the Civil War that the bayou was closed.

The residents along Bayou Lafourche were slower in becoming interested in the closing of their avenue of trade. It was not until the New Orleans, Opelousas, and Great Western Railroad was completed to Lafourche Crossing that these people began to press for the closure of Bayou Lafourche.²² The residents near Donaldsonville and those of Ascension Parish did not want the bayou closed as they felt that the railroad was too far from them to be of use as a satisfactory means of transportation.²³ Although the people of Lafourche and Assumption parishes wanted the bayou closed, they did not request it until they were certain that railroad facilities would replace it as their link with New Orleans. However, the losses from floods, levee expenses, and the many transportation inconveniences caused them to decide to promote a movement to close the bayou.

The closure movements that developed among the inhabitants along the courses of these two bayous were at the same time similar and different. The demands for

²²Thibodaux Minerva, February 10, 1855.

²³Ibid.

closure were motivated by the same reasons among the residents of both areas, but it was not as unanimously favored along Bayou Lafourche as it was along Bayou Plaquemine. Along Bayou Lafourche a large portion, although a minority, of the bayou planters favored keeping the bayou open, but there is no record of any strong resistance to the closure of Bayou Plaquemine among the planters along its meandering course.²⁴ Nevertheless, the same arguments were levied against the damming of Bayou Lafourche as were employed against the closing of Bayou Plaquemine; however, the movement to close Bayou Lafourche did not turn into a disagreement between river planters and bayou planters as it did concerning Bayou Plaquemine.

Unfortunately the flooding of the land along the courses of these two streams affected more than just the residents along the streams, for when the bayous left their banks a large portion of the back country was also flooded. It is probably true that the planters along the lesser streams suffered more regularly from flooding than did those along the Mississippi River. After a crevasse at Lockport the editor of the Thibodaux Minerva stated that it would be useless to try to stop the flow of the water

²⁴Based on a study of the Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, April, 1858-July, 1858; August, 1860-July, 1861; Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August, 1853-August, 1855.

and that the best policy would be simply to wait until the water went down in August.²⁵ When the water in bayous Plaquemine, Grosse Tete, Maringouin, Big and Little Pigeon, and Grand River flowed over the banks of the streams, the greater portion of the land between Lake Natchez, Lake Verret, and Berwick Bay was inundated.²⁶ Certainly a larger number of people would have profited from the closing of these two streams than profited by their remaining open, but whether or not the principle propounded by the State Engineer was right it was accepted as sound. The bayous were not closed during the period under discussion, although later both were closed. Bayou Plaquemine still serves as the gateway to a communication network to the Gulf, but its junction with the Mississippi is controlled by locks. Bayou Lafourche is now completely closed off from the Mississippi.

Strangely enough one of the greatest enemies of flood control was the planter himself. He who needed the most protection was often very negligent in his duties. For instance, for failure to carry out their duties as

²⁵Thibodaux Minerva, April 1, 1854.

²⁶"Engineer's Report," 1-6.

levee inspectors, several prominent planters were fined.²⁷ Among those fined was John Hampden Randolph²⁸ who it seems would have been the last man to be negligent in this matter, for during the previous year the water had risen so rapidly that he had been in constant dread of a flood. He complained that the water had risen to within twenty inches of the high water mark of the previous year. At that time, 1851, he stated that his levee was in good shape and that it had "helped me [him] a great deal," but he did not have a water wheel although he planned to purchase one.²⁹ The Police Jury minutes of the period reveal many instances when planters refused or neglected to make vital repairs to insure the safety of a levee district or at least a plantation or two.

Perhaps the attitude of the following planter is typical of those who thought they were safe from all levee breaks except those in front of their own places: "there is still some danger to my hopes from crevasses-but I have strong confidence in the ability of these levees that would effect me-being secure & keep-back the waters--The

²⁷Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, January 5, 1852.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, April 21, 1851. Liddell Papers.

crevasse that has occurred in the upper part of this Parish, will not injury me--My place was not at all injured from all the crevasses of last year--which is a good test of it being high land & not easily inundated from crevasses--I think I would only suffer were some to occur in front--I wish the river would fall it Keep's a poor fellow so uneasy."30

If a planter were unfortunate enough to suffer disaster following the wake of a crevasse, he might have followed a plan similar to that proposed to St. John R. Liddell, who lived on Black River in Catahoula Parish. The plan was:

... you might make some improvement on your Pine Hill place with your stronger hands & lay a foundation for future exigencies and high waters and wait for the falling of the water to pitch a late crop of corn and Peas and to secure a good crop of Provender to the next year as no doubt but that after the water subsides the corn-Peas, Grass &c. will grow with active luxuriance [luxuriance] and vigilance, that you may lay in good stores of Hay, Peas &c. to save what corn you may be required to purchase to sustain on for the next year, and then in the mean time (having no cotton to pick) you will be able to advance in your improvements [improvements] of ditching & leveeing during the fall and Winter & be ready next season to meet the high water & save a crop--and if you get your Stock of Cattle, horses, &c. out all safe to the Pine Woods, where you can have good range for them to sustain on would it not be as well to keep

them there all together putting a trusty one to attend to them at your pine House, keeping only as many on the River as may be necessary to supply your wants there, driving back or forwards as occasion may require--This may be expensive & require a good deal of personal attention, but you are yet young and active & ought to devote your time more to active life than heretofore at present no doubt you have full share of employment. I am not able to advise you about going to the up Country for corn--you might make an engagement for corn to be brought down to the Mouth of Red river or Washita and then have them towed up to your place by a Steamboat--I should think that you have yet to Learn how to steer & manage a flat Boat.³¹

This letter of fatherly advice gives not only some of the difficulties confronting a planter who had been flooded out, but also some of the things that a planter should know and do. The tone of the letter became reproachful when the older man told his son, "you are yet young and active & ought to devote your time more to active life." Was the father telling his son that he, himself, was partly to blame for the trouble besetting him because of his failure to pay enough attention to his plantation? It would appear so. Again when the father stated that he did not think that the son had yet learned to steer or manage a flat boat, he may have been informing the son that there was more to owning a plantation than spending the profits. He told the son in not so many words that he had suffered a loss, but that he could recoup it

³¹Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, May 12, 1850. Liddell Papers.

by hard work. This letter also gives an idea of the difficulties encountered in obtaining necessities after the receding of a flood. Further, this planter had obviously lost all of his cotton crop; no mention was made of the fact that obviously a great financial reverse had been sustained. Above all the period of cleaning up is pointed out as a time of great work for both the planter and his slaves.

An idea of the importance of levees to the people in the vicinity of the Red River can be gleaned from the complaints of the editor of the Alexandria Red River Republican. In 1850, this newspaper man informed his readers that the new parish of Madison was rapidly increasing in wealth and population and was but little behind older Rapides in those two respects. He continued to say that a few years earlier most of that parish had been submerged swamps, but in the past ten years the production of the area had increased tenfold. In comparison, the production of Rapides Parish had shown no increase. The editor's opinion was that Rapides was the only parish in the state that had not and the reason was not because the parish had been divided, for other parishes that had been divided had shown production increases, particularly Natchitoches. What then were the reasons for this state of affairs? First, the parish was still too large, but the main cause was the failure of the local government to provide internal

improvements. The crying need was for good levees, the lack of which had kept out population and capital causing the whole parish, not just the residents along the river, to suffer.³²

The predicament of the interior planter is pointed up by the plantation experiences of William J. Minor. There was a break in the levee near Minor's plantation in 1849, but no mention was made of the damage sustained.³³ However, a crevasse in front of the Doyal Plantation in May, 1850, necessitated the use of Minor's slaves to arrest the flow of the water.³⁴ Another break in the levees fronting the same plantation forced Minor to replant corn and peas in the fields that had been covered by water.³⁵

In 1851, when Minor suffered a reverse for the second year in a row, he blamed it on the poor judgment of his neighbor. Minor recorded that "Mr. Doyal made a great mistake in cutting . . . his old levee above his house to let the water in against his new one - . . . This levee is 20 feet base & 6 ft high about 4 feet was made with carts & the balance with handbarrows--It was made in a very dry

³²Based on the Alexandria Red River Republican, February 2, 1850.

³³Minor Plantation Diary, March 8, 1849. Minor Papers.

³⁴Minor Diary, June 9, 1850. Minor Papers.

³⁵Ibid., June 18, 1850. Minor Plantation Diary, July 21, 1850. Minor Papers.

time & there has been no long & heavy rain since it was made & the water was let on it too suddenly. Men. Don't make a levee in a very dry time, nor let the water against it suddenly or all at once. But above all things don't out away part of the old Levee to make the new one."³⁶

Shortly after there were more breaks which brought forth disparaging remarks by Minor concerning Doyal's efforts to mend them.³⁷ These breaks required the use of most of Minor's slaves; those not sent to fight the flood waters were put to work building a levee around the Minor home and elevating the sugar in the sugar house.³⁸ Later in the year, in order to protect himself from similar disasters, Minor increased the height of his levee twenty inches, and at the same time widened the base and the top.³⁹

As a result of the breaks, Minor lost over 200 acres of plant cane, 240 acres of first year stubble, 400 acres of corn and suffered damage to bridges, livestock, his home, and his slave quarters.⁴⁰ Probably angered by what he considered negligence on Doyal's part, he presented

³⁶Minor Plantation Diary, March 21, 22, 1851. Minor Papers.

³⁷Ibid., March 23, 28, 30, 1851.

³⁸Ibid., March 30, 1851.

³⁹Ibid., September 10, 1851.

⁴⁰Minor Letter Books, undated. Minor Papers.

that planter with a bill which included the cost of the labor that his slaves expended on Doyal's levees. He included this claim because he assumed that Doyal was responsible for any work done on his place unless he ordered it stopped.⁴¹ When the neighbor refused to pay the \$31,260, Minor turned the matter over to his attorney.⁴²

It should be remembered that although the losses by Minor were large, they probably were smaller than those suffered by Doyal. The disaster that these two planters met shows that operating a plantation in Louisiana entailed something more than a knowledge of planting and labor control. With the preceding facts in mind it is easy to understand why at least some of the planters of the interior region wanted the bayou outlets of the Mississippi River closed.

It appears that the maintenance of any adequate flood control system was far beyond the means and abilities of the planters of the state. Also should be added the fact that with no centralized authority over the levee system, all of the efforts of the most thorough planter could be brought to naught by haphazard work of his neighbor. Further, this set-up allowed the river planter to protect himself to the great disadvantage of the

⁴¹Ibid., March 11, 1857.

⁴²Ibid., March 27, 1857.

interior planter. As long as the interior planters were totally dependent on the bayou-river networks for transportation and communication, they were forced to withstand the onslaughts of the raging waters, but with the development of railroad lines into the interior of the state, the people began to adopt new ideas concerning the smaller streams. This fact is particularly noticeable among the inhabitants along Bayou Lafourche, but it is also seen among the residents along bayous Plaquemine, Grosse Tete, and Maringouin. Although the great majority of the residents along those streams wanted the bayou closed, perhaps the inhabitants of the Grosse Tete-Maringouin area would not have voted 125 to eleven for closing the bayou⁴³ had not they been sure that the area would be connected with the Mississippi River at Baton Rouge by a railroad. The motto of the residents of Louisiana should have been, "Look out for your levees, the river is rising rapidly, if not faster."⁴⁴

Louisiana had the highest death rate of any state

⁴³Undated newspaper clipping in a Scrap Book, 29. Brusle (Charles A.) Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁴⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, February 28, 1852.

in the union,⁴⁵ and as is usual, the people of the rural areas enjoyed better health than did those of the one great urban center.⁴⁶ If New Orleans is omitted, the eastern parishes had a much smaller death rate than did the western parishes.⁴⁷ This occurrence cannot be explained by the climate for the people of the western parishes had far better climatic conditions than did those of the hot, wet, lowlands on the east.

This difference probably resulted from the fact that the planters of the river bottoms were more careful of sanitation and were closer to the medical facilities of New Orleans. Further, it must be remembered that the residents of the eastern lowlands had a large amount of capital invested in slaves whose health was of vital importance to the owners' financial well-being. To this should be added the assertion that more of the residents of the lowlands could afford to leave the area when a disease reached epidemic proportions. The less prosperous people of the western parishes stayed home and suffered the hardships and death which were consistent with their mode of life. It is

⁴⁵Compendium of the Seventh Census. . . . (Washington, 1854), 105, 107. E. D. Fenner, ed., Southern Medical Reports. . . . (New York, 1849-1850), II, 215. Hereafter cited as Southern Medical Reports.

⁴⁶Southern Medical Reports, II, 151.

⁴⁷Ibid.

probable that only few of the residents of the plantations had to endure the physical hardships and discomforts borne by the people of the western parishes of the state. Probably the true cause of the difference was poverty and though this does not mean that all of the residents of the eastern lowland were more prosperous than those of the west, it does mean that even the poor of the east could and did benefit from the precautions taken by the more prosperous inhabitants of the area.⁴⁸

Although the two most dreaded killers of antebellum Louisiana were cholera and yellow fever, many suffered the ill effects of measles, malaria, dysentery, worms, whooping cough, tuberculosis, and other diseases.

One of the most frequent maladies was diarrhea, which most often occurred during the spring of the year when large amounts of fresh vegetables were consumed. One physician felt that the primary cause of this complaint was the faulty preparation of food coupled with the use of bad water.⁴⁹ A common cause of illness among children of all classes was worms, and this affliction was especially prevalent around Trinity, Catahoula Parish,

⁴⁸For a similar opinion see Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 51-52.

⁴⁹DeBow's Review, XXV (1858), 571-572.

where together with "dentition," it was responsible for "nearly all children who die."⁵⁰

Another disease which had no regard for race or class was malaria. Since people knew nothing of the causes of the disease, their efforts to prevent it were in most cases futile. Some planters did profit by not allowing their slaves to work at night, while others protected themselves and their laborers by using mosquito nets;⁵¹ however, there is no surviving evidence that shows that the planter connected malaria and the mosquito.

Some people believed that malaria, which usually struck in late summer and early autumn, could be prevented by cleanliness and warm clothing.⁵² Other persons, even though aware of quinine, preferred to use home remedies such as tea made from the inner bark of willows and strengthened by a little red pepper or perhaps a little ginger combined with a purgative to prevent and cure this disease.⁵³

Respiratory ailments were not uncommon among the residents of rural Louisiana, and diseases of this category

⁵⁰Southern Medical Reports, II, 184.

⁵¹Liddell Plantation Diary, Liddell Papers.

⁵²Comite Plantation Diary, August, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

⁵³Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, August 22, 1839. Liddell Papers.

ranged from common colds to tuberculosis. Some planters did realize the significance of protection from the elements in preventing the occurrence of these types of illnesses and made endeavors to protect themselves and their slaves against sudden weather changes.⁵⁴

Other diseases that brought death and suffering to Louisianians were Dengue fever, typhoid, scarlet fever, and mumps. Dengue or Break-bone fever, while not often fatal, caused much agony and could invalid most of the hands on a plantation when it struck in full force.⁵⁵ In contrast, typhoid was very often fatal, and an epidemic allegedly brought in from Virginia in the early 1850's struck portions of North Louisiana causing many deaths.⁵⁶ Also taking many lives was scarlet fever, whose striking power was particularly potent among the slaves, although nearly as often fatal among the whites.⁵⁷ It is not rare to read of several children dying from whooping cough, although this disease was not much more dangerous to the young than was measles.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Franklin Planters' Banner, August 9, 1849.

⁵⁵Concordia Intelligencer, September 29, 1854.

⁵⁶Southern Medical Reports, II, 185-203.

⁵⁷McGuire Diary (R. F.). Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁵⁸Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, June 22, 1854.
Palfrey Plantation Diary, March, 1860. Palfrey Papers.

Not a rarity was the habit of eating dirt, a practice not peculiar to slaves, but one frequently resorted to by some of the poorer whites.⁵⁹ Some physicians believed that this habit was caused by improper diet and recommended that the sufferers, who usually had an unhealthy skin color and little energy, eat more fresh meats and vegetables.⁶⁰ One person, thought to be a dirt eater and who was rapidly wasting away, was found to have been eating rags instead, and when he was prevented from doing this made rapid strides towards recovery.⁶¹

Although yellow fever probably killed more Louisianians than any other disease, it appears that the most feared disease in rural Louisiana was cholera. Continual mention of this killer in letters, diaries, and plantation journals conclusively proves that many rural Louisianians lived in dread of the coming of cholera. One of the most obvious factors leading to this fear among planters was the general belief that cholera was more fatal among the slaves than among the whites.

There can be little doubt that the ravages of cholera were exaggerated, but when it is considered that in 1849 and 1850 out of 311 cases of cholera reported on

⁵⁹Southern Medical Reports, II, 194-195.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Baton Rouge Gazette, June 5, 1852.

two plantations along Bayou Lafourche, there were eighty-one fatalities, the death dealing efficiency of this disease is easily recognized.⁶² Epidemics of this type were not unusual along Bayou Lafourche, but fortunately the devastating striking power of this disease was short-lived for at least in this area the epidemics lasted only for brief periods.⁶³ Usually the ravages of cholera along Bayou Lafourche were mainly among the slaves and in the epidemic of 1854 was "almost exclusively among the slaves."⁶⁴ Another distressing characteristic of cholera that confused both laymen and physicians was its complete lack of regard for "weather, food or preventative measures,"⁶⁵ for "intelligent planters . . . commenced . . . the most judicious precautions against cholera, as soon as they heard of its arrival on the continent. . . . yet in no instance was the epidemic warded off by these precautions, but in several it prevailed with extraordinary virulence."⁶⁶

Although it was the slave owner who usually took the lead in promoting sanitary measures in the rural areas, it was the newspaper editor who spread the alarm of the

⁶²Southern Medical Reports, I, 196-235.

⁶³Thibodaux Minerva, July 1, 8, 1854.

⁶⁴Ibid., July 1, 1854.

⁶⁵Southern Medical Reports, I, 197.

⁶⁶DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 476.

coming of the pestilence. One has but to read the newspapers of the time to sense the great fear that gripped people at the mention of yellow fever or cholera. However, by the time the newspapers got around to admitting the presence of the disease, it was usually widespread.⁶⁷ An excellent example of this practice was the procedure followed by the editor of the Plaquemine Southern Sentinel who tried valiantly to convince the public that the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853 was a mild one and of no real significance.⁶⁸ He did advise that all drainage ditches be left undisturbed and that lime be used profusely;⁶⁹ but these were meant to be precautionary measures, for as late as September 3, he was suggesting that the judge be informed that there was no fever, except among the floating foreign population and that court could be convened.⁷⁰ It was not until October that he acknowledged the presence of an epidemic, and probably would not have at that time had it not been that all of the schools in the area had to be closed and that his own family had been stricken with the disease.⁷¹ Then he plaintively

⁶⁷Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁶⁸Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August, September, October, 1853.

⁶⁹Ibid., August 6, 1853.

⁷⁰Ibid., September 3, 1853.

⁷¹Ibid., October 22, 1853.

stated that he just did not know what to say about the fever.⁷²

The epidemic of 1853 was especially virulent, and some plantations were extremely hard hit. On the Garlick Plantation, the overseer and his entire family succumbed to the disease.⁷³ Later in 1853, one planter wrote, "I hear of some cholera in the neighborhood but to a very small extent. I hope it will not become an epidemic."⁷⁴ Measles accompanied the yellow fever and cholera and was fatal mainly to young children although none were exempt from its attacks.⁷⁵

A cholera epidemic, particularly virulent among the slaves, raged along the Teche in 1849. This epidemic, which remained concentrated along the bayou, sometimes seized the entire working population of a plantation while passing over another estate entirely.⁷⁶

The same area was besieged by the terrible Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853, and it was at this time that the people became so aroused that they created the position

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, October 1, 1853. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁴Ibid., December 11, 1853.

⁷⁵Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, June 22, 1854.

⁷⁶Southern Medical Reports, I, 192.

of Parish Health Officer and hired a physician to fill the post. Feeling that the efforts of one man were insufficient, a health board of five men was appointed to assist the doctor in looking to the health of the people and preventing the spread of the disease. The officials also passed a quarantine regulation which required all vessels entering the port of Franklin to submit to thorough examination and inspection.⁷⁷ Due to the inconveniences this resolution caused the shippers and the residents of the interior portions of the parish and the parishes further north, there was some difficulty in its enforcement.⁷⁸ To insure compliance with the regulation a group of men formed an armed organization which was subject to rapid mobilization in times of danger.⁷⁹

In 1850 the luck of the northeastern Louisiana ran out. After several years of good health, no floods and large cotton production, the lands drained by the Ouachita, Tensas, Little, and Black rivers were flooded and besieged by cholera.⁸⁰ This epidemic was especially

⁷⁷Franklin Planters' Banner, August 18, 1853.

⁷⁸Ibid., September 1, 1853.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Alexandria Red River Republican, March 16, 1850.

bad around the village of Trinity in Catahoula Parish.⁸¹ After 1850 good fortune deserted that area completely. In 1855 a Black River planter, his family, and slaves were in such poor health that his factor was ordered to hire two nurses for him. The factor replied: "We received, yesterday evening, . . . a telegraphic dispatch ordering for, two Yellow fever nurses, to Trinity. We send two today per Amanda to Felix Robb. Their pay is to be \$5 per day, and their passage to and from."⁸² In March of the next year the planter ordered a large supply of castor oil, a favorite remedy for the fever.⁸³ He received the shipment but the merchant informed him: "the price of Castor oil is very high-100% higher than usual & the quality only fair--it is the best in the market & every day advancing, on account of a very great scarcity throughout the whole country."⁸⁴

There would have been little sickness in the state if the patent medicines and home remedies had performed the duties and miraculous cures accorded them by their

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Cox, Gillis & Boyd to St. John R. Liddell, September 28, 1855. Liddell Papers.

⁸³West Baton Rouge Capitolian Vis-a-vis, September 14, 1853.

⁸⁴Richard Chinn to St. John R. Liddell, March 31, 1856. Liddell Papers.

proponents. Although many of the planters hired physicians to attend their slaves as well as their families, they did not hesitate to prescribe remedies for the cure and prevention of just about all of the ills reported on the plantations. One planter followed the practice of copying into the plantation diary favorite remedies for the use of his overseer. He felt that a fine cure for dysentery was

"Raspings of Buckshorn filings of Iron one or two ounces of each--Dissolve in a quart of Medera [Madeira] wine --Dose a table spoon full 3 times a day."⁸⁵ Cholera could be prevented simply by taking a little powdered charcoal each day in tea, coffee, or water, and the cure could be effected just as easily with a mixture of equal parts of charcoal, brandy, whiskey, and laudanum administered "every five minutes till better."⁸⁶

The accursed cholera had to be handled with care; the slaves were worked as lightly as possible when the disease was in the neighborhood, and they were fed as many vegetables as possible.⁸⁷ If none of the above measures were successful, the advances of the killer could be halted by wearing flannel next to the skin or by keeping the feet

⁸⁵Minor Diary, May 25, 1850. Minor Papers.

⁸⁶Ibid., February 4, 1859.

⁸⁷Minor Letter Books, August 21, 1855. Minor Papers.

dry or by eating very little.⁸⁸ However along Bayou Teche, the plan of having the ill eat plenty of vegetables was frowned upon, for all fruits and vegetables except well-boiled or roasted potatoes were on the prohibited list.⁸⁹ Perhaps a more sensible program was outlined a few months later when it was advised that the Negro cabins should be kept thoroughly clean, the bedding aired for eight hours in the fresh sunshine, and the slaves required to wear clean clothing.⁹⁰ If not the most sensible preventative, certainly one that would have been very popular among the slaves was the one practiced by one "pretty large sugar planter:" "As soon as cholera appeared on his place he made all hands quit work, and permitted them to go into a regular frolic. Whiskey and the fiddle were called in . . . , and for two or three days the plantation presented a scene of unrestrained merriment and mirth; he did not permit them to drink to intoxication, but sufficient to produce a pleasant exhilaration. He informed me that hardly a new case occurred after the commencement of the frolic."⁹¹

Since none of the preceding remedies were completely successful, the people turned to some of the marvelous

⁸⁸Franklin Planters' Banner, January 5, 1849.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., March 22, 1849.

⁹¹DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 476.

and miraculous patent medicines that were advertised in every ante-bellum Louisiana newspaper. One of the more prominent was Ayer's Cherry Pectoral which guaranteed a rapid cure for coughs, colds, hoarseness, bronchitis, whooping cough, croup, asthma, and consumption. This wonderful medicine was "pleasant to take and perfectly safe in accordance with directions." To prove the extravagant claims a long list of testimonials was inserted in the advertisement. A medicine even superior to Ayer's Cherry Pectoral was Wistar's Balsam, which cured all that Ayer's did, but in addition guaranteed a cure for liver infections and influenza. Dr. Rogers' Liverwort and Tar was equally as effective.

The "wonder drug" of its day, however, was Perry Davis' Pain Killer, and it was not necessary to waste money on any other alleged cure when this amazing medicine was handy. The Davis Company slogan was "For the entire eradication of all pain." The company extolled the virtues of a nostrum that might be used "in certain cases externally and internally, but never eternally, like too many preparations The Pain Killer almost immediately cures . . . Chill and Fever, Cholera, Cholera Morbus, Diarrhoea, Sever Burns, Dyspepsia, Painter's Colic, Piles, Boils, General Debility, Coughs, Head Ache, Sudden Colds, Swelled Joints, Cramp and Spasms, Rheumatism, Pains in the

Back and Side, and various other complaints.⁹²

The Louisiana ruralists of the 1850's faced dangers of flood and levee break and epidemic and miasmatic illness without the aid of state agencies which have become common a hundred years later. The individual farmer and planter drained his own fields, built and kept in constant repair his own levees, and guarded the health of his own family and slaves as best he could. When tragedy struck he usually greeted it with some degree of stoicism, accepted the inevitable, and then went doggedly to work to make the best of things. His record of achievement parallels and in some instances exceeds that of his brother planter or farmer in other southern areas, for his problems were frequently more difficult of solution than theirs.

⁹²The quotations and information concerning the patent medicines of ante-bellum Louisiana can be found in any of the newspapers of the period.

CHAPTER VII

I had hoped that when the two sugar houses were complete, that my troubles to a certain extent would have ended--but I find in commencing my operations at home in taking off my crop--that my troubles & personal labor have increased tenfold.¹

The discussion of labor supply and supervision, transportation, floods, and fever has already emphasized some of the difficulties confronting the planter, but in reality there were many other factors that made the efficient operation of a plantation one of the most difficult of all agricultural ventures.

Perhaps first among these factors was the weather, something over which the planter could only hope and pray. It has been said that cotton, though a sensitive plant, "is of all summer-growing crops of the South about the least affected by ordinary changes in the weather. Its long period of growth, fruiting, and maturity affords it ample opportunity to recover from a number of temporary set-backs. During the protracted season from planting . . . to the completion of the harvest . . . , it is exposed to many varieties of weather and seems to endure the

¹W. M. Barrow to Anna Maria Johnson, November 11, 1850. Barrow (W. M. Family) Papers.

bad as well as enjoy the good."² While cotton may not have suffered materially from the vagaries of the weather, there is abundant evidence to show that cotton production was greatly influenced by variations from what was considered the most favorable weather. Soon after planting the planter needed frequent, but light showers to moisten the soil for the germinating seed; too much rain and cold during this period caused the seeds to rot before they could germinate. Further, the ground could not be too damp at planting time for too much moisture followed by a hot sun would bake the soil into clods preventing the weak sprout from breaking through to the sunlight.³ It is also well known that too much rain during the blooming season (middle of July and early August) caused the squares to drop off as well as allowing an overgrowth of weeds, but on the other hand a lack of rain during the same period could and did cause the cotton to shrivel.⁴ If the planter were not fortunate enough to receive dry weather during the picking season, he might discover the unpleasant fact that the cotton bolls were decaying or at the least were

²Department of Agriculture Yearbook, 1904, 141.

³Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 85. Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 25. Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, April 7, 1841. Liddell Papers.

⁴Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, July 17, 1844.

becoming discolored.⁵ In Louisiana the most likely weather difficulties were out of season frosts or too much rain, although periodic dry spells did cause more than enough damage to Louisiana cotton.

Regardless of all other considerations, successful sugar cane culture was most vitally affected by weather. Freezing temperatures at any time between March and December could cause serious damage to this delicate plant, although many planters relied on windrowing to cut their losses after the harvest.⁶ Unfortunately, this process could cause serious loss if after the cane were windrowed, ✓ the weather turned hot instead of remaining cold. However, the major problem was cold, and often the most thorough precautions could not protect the cane from destruction.⁷ In Rapides Parish in 1850, to cite one example, there was "immense injury to the cane . . . [and] Not even the windrowed cane was able to resist it, but was wholly frozen and destroyed."⁸

Since Louisiana was not accustomed to drought, the

⁵Ibid., August 13-14, 1844.

⁶Sitterson, Sugar Country, 18.

⁷Alexandria Red River Republican, December 7, 1850. Sitterson, Sugar Country, 18.

⁸Alexandria Red River Republican, December 12, 1860.

periodical appearance of this phenomena caused much severe hardship among all residents of the state. Further since many of the inhabitants relied on rainfall for their water supply, a lack of rain could cause as much inconvenience around the home as it did in the fields,⁹ but the principle damage was done on the plantation and farm fields of the state. One planter once wrote that "The weather is very dry here and some of the river planters have to haul water from the river for the use of their sugar houses- I have a plenty as yet and hope will not give out before it rains."¹⁰ The letter of another indicates the fatalistic manner in which the weather was regarded by the Louisiana agriculturist. This planter regretted that his crop, as well as those of the remainder of the planters in his vicinity, had suffered "much from the drought of the past two months," but said that he did not "murmur" on that account for it was "the will of an all wise being that there should be a droughth over the land, causing the crops to droop & stand still--It is doubtless all for the best, & I thank our God most heartily that it is no worse,

⁹Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, May 31, 1855. Morris and Sibley Papers.

¹⁰John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, October 13, 1852. Liddell Papers.

& that fine health has prevailed throughout the south."¹¹

Other less pious planters might have taken the advice of a New Orleans rain maker who suggested that all of the people in the state "kindle up the largest fires they can, in order that we may have rain."¹² The editor of the newspaper that printed the recommendation considered the advice, "A good suggestion. Were it followed the desired result would most certainly be brought about."¹³

Rain was a villain that caused much trouble for it often prevented the planters from getting the crops from the field and also hindered the movement of produce to the wharves along the streams. Further losses would be sustained if the rains prevented the gathering of fodder.¹⁴

Usually the residents of the state were not bothered by destructive wind or rain storms, but when they did appear they brought suffering and much financial loss. Between April 6, and May 11, 1850, there were two violent storms in Assumption Parish which not only destroyed the crops but also blew down cane sheds, sugar houses, and

¹¹M. B. Barrow to Alex Barrow, October 14, 1850. Barrow (W. M. Family) Papers.

¹²Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 18, 1855.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, August 8, 1855. Liddell Papers.

several plantation homes.¹⁵ In 1856, a hurricane passed a short distance south of Washington uprooting trees, scattering fences and material in every direction, and destroying on one plantation the brick sugar house and all of the slave cabins.¹⁶ Some of the damage done by wind and rain was not due to the velocity of the storms but to the carelessness of the planters or their working force.

August 3, 1844, started out a clear day with a pleasant east wind, but around two o'clock in the afternoon, a very hard rain blowing in from the east destroyed a cotton shed on a Bluff plantation. The planter attributed the loss to failure to follow his directions: "posts were not in the ground deep enough--and only half of the number that were told him [Essex, a slave] to put under it, just yesterday scolding about it."¹⁷ The destructive force of storms can be seen from the happenings in St. Mary Parish, the traditional leader among the sugar producing parishes, where in 1853-1854, the year of the largest cane crop in the history of ante-bellum Louisiana, she lost her leadership due to an August hurricane which caused great destruction within the

¹⁵McCollam Diary, 1850.

¹⁶Opelousas Patriot, March 8, 1856.

¹⁷Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, August 3, 1844.

parish, wiping out in some instances entire crops, flattening homes, outbuildings, and sugar houses.¹⁸

Of course not only the staple crops of the state were seriously affected by the weather. On plantations that practiced diversification and on small farms unfavorable weather could cause loss of food crops as well as fodder. There was much complaint in the vicinity of Clinton about the sweet potato crop when it was discovered that the severe winter had caused almost "universal rot among them" and that it would be "a very difficult matter to procure seed in sufficient abundance to supply the demand."¹⁹

The year 1855 was a disastrous one for the cattle men of the state for from the middle of January through the end of March, thousands of cattle died from hunger and thirst. This was brought on by the cold and drought of the winter which killed every "particle of grass on the parishes," the chief subsistence of the cattle of the state, and when in March the ponds dried up, the cattle were compelled to resort to the sloughs and bayous for water. The drought caused the death of hundreds more cattle for upon entering the swamps in search of water they bogged in the mud and since they had not the strength to extricate themselves,

¹⁸Champonier, Statement of the Sugar Crop, Made in Louisiana, in 1856-57, vii. Hereafter cited as Champonier.

¹⁹Opelousas Patriot, April 12, 1856.

they perished. By the end of March hundreds were dying daily.²⁰

There was no phase of the agricultural life of the people that was not affected by the weather. From the preparation of the soil to the harvesting, all moves were controlled by the whims of nature. But the influence of the weather went even further, for the market, too, was governed by it. The profit reaped by a planter might be greatly increased if sections of the state other than his were pummeled by vicious winds and rains. One factor informed a client that he regretted to have to report the poor returns obtained from the sale of his cotton, but that it was not his, the factor's, fault for he had advised his partner to wait for information regarding the results of the storms before selling. However, the partner of the agent had thought that a better deal could be made by selling early and therefore had sold on Saturday instead of waiting until Monday. The factor said that this was an inexcusable blunder as prices increased immediately on word of the storm. The agent wrote that "for every sale made on Saturday I have been awfully scored and all that I can say is that it was an unfortunate one, my partner no doubt thought of doing well in selling, but has been proved

²⁰Ibid., March 31, 1855.

[illegible], sadly mistaken."²¹

An adequate supply of wood was a constant necessity on all plantations and farms. Lumber was needed for new gins, cabins, jails, houses, sugar houses, floors, scaffolding and various other construction purposes. Wood was used on all plantations for heating purposes, but it was far more important on sugar plantations as fuel for the sugar houses. The two most readily accessible sources of wood in the lowlands were the swamps in the rear of the plantations and the drift floating on the streams of the state. In the Oak Uplands and on the pine hills and flats, wood could be cut from plentiful stands of nearby timber. However, the demand for wood could not be met in all parts of the state, and where this was the case, expenditures for fuel and building materials became an important part of the resident's budget.²²

The fuel problem was not so serious in the lowlands of the eastern parishes as in the Teche and Attakapas areas, where it was frequently necessary to import wood from outside of the area, sometimes from points as distant as Mobile.²³ Since the successful completion of grinding

²¹M. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, November 11, 1860. Liddell Papers.

²²Champomier, 1853-54, preface.

²³Franklin Planters' Banner, September 20, 1845.

depended on the proper supply of fuel, planters expended many man hours in securing this necessity. However, the large amount required--three cords to produce one hog-head of sugar--²⁴ on the sugar plantations often exhausted the readily available fuel and caused the planters to turn to other sources of supply. One source which was right at hand was bagasse²⁵ which when dry and burned in the proper type of furnace could produce enough steam to take off at least two-thirds of most crops and in some instances was successfully employed to the exclusion of any other type of fuel.²⁶ One of the more prosperous planters of the Teche country, in order to eliminate the heavy financial outlay involved in the purchasing of fuel, devised a scheme where he used a small elevated railway to transport the bagasse from the rollers of the mill to a shed where it was dried and then moved to the furnace where it served satisfactorily as fuel for the boilers.²⁷

Itinerant peddlers were a source of considerable worry to both large and small planters. One traveler thought that the nuisance of the petty trader was worse

²⁴T. B. Thorpe, "Sugar and Sugar Regions of Louisiana," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, VII (1853), 758.

²⁵The pulp left after the cane had been put through the rollers.

²⁶Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, July 3, 1858.

²⁷R. L. Allen, "Letters from the South--No. 9," The American Agriculturist, VI (1847), 214.

along the Mississippi River than anywhere else. To this observer, it appeared that the peddler, under the cover of darkness, moored his boat to the shore near the slave quarters and remained there until he had obtained all the "booty" that could be obtained from the slaves on that plantation.²⁸ These itinerant merchants sometimes enticed slaves to steal articles from their masters that were of value to the peddler and for which he would give worthless trinkets or even worse, bad whiskey.²⁹

The situation became so intolerable in Jefferson Parish that the Police Jury passed an ordinance which forbade any species of water-craft to moor in front of any riparian estate without the consent of the owner. The same law also prohibited the placing of permanent stake or check posts along the banks of the river without the consent of the owner.³⁰ The people of one of the Attakapas parishes became so aroused over the conduct and "ill commerce of certain Peddlers" that a public meeting was called at which it was declared that the suppression "of the traffic with slaves, and the exercise of strict supervision over suspicious persons wandering about the country" was of the

²⁸Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 333.

²⁹Ibid., 334.

³⁰Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1860.

utmost importance.³¹ Another parish, in attempting to control the influence and activity of these peddlers, passed strict and almost exorbitant license laws which required a peddler on foot to purchase a one hundred dollar license, a mounted transient merchant to pay two hundred dollars, and a peddler owning a cart or a trading boat to pay four hundred dollars.³²

In 1855 the editor of a Baton Rouge newspaper asked his readers if they were aware that more of these "itinerant vagabonds" were on the prowl than ever before. He complained that most of them avoided the towns and thus sold without the required license thereby becoming contra-band traders peddling all "manner of bogus jewelry, and other trumpery."³³ This influential villager continued: "They generally [generally] besiege the country house with their wares, at an hour of the day, when they are certain that the male members are absent; and never leave until they are satisfied that no another dime of change, is to be had about the house."³⁴

Perhaps the most significant reason for the bitter

³¹Opelousas Courier, February 18, 1860.

³²Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 23, 1860.

³³Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 4, 1855.

³⁴Ibid.

feeling toward the transient peddler was the belief that he was usually not a native of the state. At least that was implied by one Police Jury when it requested the passage of a state law restricting this activity to natives of the state.³⁵ If that be the case, the attitude of Louisianians toward the peddlers appears to have been based on two points; first, the sale of spirituous liquors which could reduce the efficiency of the working force, and second, the Louisianian was suspicious and perhaps afraid of the ideas that an outsider might be spreading among the slaves. When an attack was launched by a trade center spokesman such as the editor of the Baton Rouge Daily Comet, the antagonism might have been due to the business that these nomadic merchants removed from the town.

The planter and farmer had to combat the various insects that at times attempted to devour the entire cotton and corn crops of certain localities. One small planter complained that the "insects are eating my cotton up rapidly and if it does not rain very soon to stop them will have to plant the most of it over again."³⁶ Caterpillars and army worms sometimes invaded cotton fields

³⁵ Opelousas Courier, February 18, 1860.

³⁶ W. B. Prescott to John Moore, May 12, 1853. Weeks Collection.

with disastrous effects.³⁷

At the same time the sugar planters were so gravely concerned over the deterioration of the riband cane that they requested that their representatives in Congress ask the Secretary of Navy to permit naval vessels to procure seed cane from foreign ports so that it might be introduced into the state and thereby improve production.³⁸

Ever present was the danger of fire from which there was very little defense once it started. The destruction of valuable sugar houses and cotton gins were all too frequent occurrences.³⁹ The destruction of property by fire during dry periods was almost as uncontrollable as destruction by flood during time of high water.

As if weather, labor, fire, marketing, insects, storms, and floods were not enough some of the sugar planters chose to worry over the acquisition of Cuba. One planter explained that "Mr McG and John went down to the Osburn place . . . and I think . . . would buy it, if it were not for fear of the annexation [sic] of the Island of Cuba which would ruin the sugar interest [sic] in Louisiana."⁴⁰

³⁷Concordia Intelligencer, August 2, 1845.

³⁸Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1848, 139.

³⁹Opelousas Patriot, October 23, 1858.

⁴⁰McCollam Diary, May 15, 1850.

Happenings in foreign countries were of great import to Louisiana planters as disturbances abroad might result in market fluctuations, particularly in the cotton market, and as one planter wrote: "The reported death of the Czar created some activity in the cotton market but [illegible], most everybody is doubting the Statement & look for further information before giving it full credit for my part I don't think it would make things any better in Europe, but might complicate the present situation."⁴¹ Obviously any change in the European situation that involved England, the South's greatest foreign customer, would influence the price of cotton and the prosperity of the planter of that staple.

Another vital but troublesome aspect of life in rural Louisiana was the acquisition of supplies. The instability of Louisiana's transportation system has already been discussed, and the results of the deficiencies of steamboats, roads, and railroads have been shown, but the supply problem involved more than just the moving of supplies from New Orleans or any other trade center to the rural back country.

⁴¹W. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, March 21, 1855. Liddell Papers. In 1855, Nicholas I, Czar of Russia and devotee of Metternich's reactionary policies, died. At the time England, France, and Russia were fighting the Crimean War.

Often the purchaser not only did not know when he was going to receive his order, but also he could not be certain of the price he would pay or the quality of the merchandise he would receive.⁴² One merchant wrote in trying to explain his position in regard to a complaint received from a North Louisiana customer: "Mrs. L. makes some complaint of currants & sugar sent some time ago, at which we are some what surprised, as we distinctly remember having looked personally at the currants, and thought them remarkably good for the season; as it is almost impossible to get those things fresh & fine at so late a season. The sugar was one of our choicest brands & such as we furnish our most particular customers."⁴³

The indirect purchase of merchandise caused much complaining and led some individuals to take pains to insure that they would get what they ordered at the price they wanted to pay for it. For obvious reasons the planter controlled and supervised as closely as possible all of the purchasing done for his plantation or plantations, although through necessity the overseer sometimes took the responsibility for the ordering and checking of supplies.⁴⁴

⁴²Richard Chinn to St. John R. Liddell, March 31, 1856. Liddell Papers. Charles R. Bailey & Co. to St. John R. Liddell, July 1, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁴³Charles R. Bailey & Co. to St. John R. Liddell, July 1, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁴⁴Based on a study of plantation records of all types in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

One planter often required his factor to send rather detailed information which included the names of commission houses and wholesale merchants selling the best merchandise at the cheapest prices.⁴⁵ Since the procuring of supplies was such a demanding chore and successful negotiating for the most favorable produce and bargains was so important to the profitable operation of the plantation, the purchaser did not always restrict himself to Louisiana firms.⁴⁶

Among the more important purchases made for the farms and plantations of the state were clothing, medical supplies, agricultural equipment, and food. Since many of the plantations and nearly all of the farms were more or less self-sufficient as regards to food, the greatest food purchases were usually pork and flour, although the references to purchases of flour were much fewer than those to the buying of pork. Since there always was considerable danger of obtaining tainted or ill-cured pork the planter had to be exceedingly careful in the purchase of this staple. In fact, there was probably no single item that required more care. One planter, to insure that he got what he wanted, wrote the following painfully detailed

⁴⁵Minor Letter Books, et passim. Minor Papers.

⁴⁶See invoices, letters, and journals in the Randolph, Weeks, Liddell, Palfrey, Kilbourne, Marston, and Minor papers.

instructions to a Cincinnati meat packer:

I . . . /want/ . . . Four hundred & twenty five (425) barrels best Mess Pork delivered free of expense to me--25 barrels at Natchez . . . 200 at Waterloo Plantation . . . & 200 at Donaldsonville . . . or on board of one of the Lafourche boats at Donaldsonville, or New Orleans. The pork is to be fully guaranteed in every respect--That is to keep sound & sweet for twelve months, to weigh out not less than 200 pounds a barrel, to be packed with coarse /sic/ or rock salt, to be corn fed heavy Mess meat, none but mess pieces, according to the strictest rules of packing best Mess pork, to be put in-- You agree to refund, in case of loss by reason of non-fulfillment of any one of the above stipulations, on the statement of one of my overseers. If, you accept the above terms, you can draw on me at ninety days.⁴⁷

When the purchaser did not deal directly with the seller, he often gave as detailed instructions to his factor, going so far as to direct not only where and when the order was to be placed, but also to describe minutely how he wanted the containers constructed in which the merchandise was to be shipped.⁴⁸

Another major problem confronting the Louisiana agriculturist was the profitable marketing of his crop. The satisfactory termination of this operation demanded a subtle blending of skill, good advice, and luck. Some producers felt that if they received poor prices for their crops that it was the fault of the factor who was paid to

⁴⁷Minor Letter Books, February 5, 1855. Minor Papers.

⁴⁸Ibid., June 5, 1854.

sell profitably, and when this was the attitude, the planter proceeded to change his agent for one he deemed more competent.⁴⁹ Usually most planters understood that it was possible for agents to make both good and bad deals, and they accepted the bad years along with the good without too much grumbling.⁵⁰

The factor was likely to be a man of financial means as well as business acumen and actually was more than just an agent to dispose of the planter's crop. The relationship between the factor and the planter was often a personal one, although the planter borrowed money from, purchased supplies through, and even wrote drafts on the factor. The intelligent and industrious factor was allowed a rather large profit without too much complaint for the planter realized that the factor was involved in the same great gamble that he was, the making of a profit from the successful sale of cotton and sugar. The agriculturist of ante-bellum Louisiana owed much to the foresight and ability of the factor.⁵¹

⁴⁹Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 17-18.

⁵⁰Based on a study of the letters in the Randolph, Weeks, Palfrey, and Minor collections.

⁵¹See A. H. Stone, "The Cotton Factorage System for the Southern States," American Historical Review, XX (1915), 559-565.

Although the sugar planter relied heavily on the bankers and factors of New Orleans, he often handled more of his own business than did the cotton planter. There were three possible methods for the disposing of sugar and molasses. The planter could sell through his factor who then would sell at the sugar platform in New Orleans to the highest bidder; he could sell his crop at his own wharf to a sugar merchant buying for the markets of St. Louis, Louisville, Cincinnati, or Pittsburg; or he might sell his sugar in the sugar house and his molasses in the cisterns to a speculator.⁵²

The planter usually preferred to sell at his own wharf or from his sugar house and cisterns as in this way he knew what he was going to get for his products before they left his plantation; the buyer had to worry about transportation difficulties and expenses, and as an added attraction, the seller was freed from the charges made by the commission merchant.⁵³

If a planter felt that the price of sugar was too low for a profitable return, he might store it in a warehouse and wait for a better market, but this practice was not too widely followed because of high storage costs and

⁵²See Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 176-177. Based on a study of the Liddell, Randolph, and Weeks collections.

⁵³Based on a study of the Randolph Papers.

the loss of weight which occurred when sugar dried out. The only justification for this procedure was the reasonable certainty that the market would rise sufficiently within a short time after the crop was in to make the gamble worth taking.⁵⁴

The planter also gambled when he sold his sugar from his own wharf or from his own sugar house and cisterns. In 1846, for example, a member of a New Orleans commission house offered to purchase one planter's sugar for six cents a pound, but the planter feared that the prospective buyer had inside information on sugar futures and refused to sell. The decision cost him considerable money for although his crop was large, the yield of sugar was poor, and later he was forced to sell his sugar as fast as it could be manufactured for five cents a pound.⁵⁵

The planters along Bayou Teche and in the Attakapas Region not infrequently shipped their crops to eastern seaports by way of the port of Franklin. This practice was followed because of the uncertainties of transportation to New Orleans and because the planters of the area felt that the higher prices paid in the marts along the Atlantic seaboard overcame the higher transportation costs.

⁵⁴Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 176-177.

⁵⁵John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, June 30, 1846. Liddell Papers. Ibid., December 2, 1846.

Although there was a large trade between the eastern ports and Franklin throughout the entire late ante-bellum period, the advantages of this method of marketing soon became less for as more and more of the interior planters adopted the practice a decline in prices set in which no longer allowed the planter to recover the higher costs of shipping.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Sitterson, Sugar Country, 168-169.

CHAPTER VIII

The first requisite for beginning any agricultural operation is the ownership or use of land. Under the Southern plantation system, however, the requirement was not just land, but fertile soil that could withstand the continual process of growing cane, cotton, tobacco, rice, hemp and other lesser important staples. The inhabitants of Louisiana were blessed with an abundance of land of the soil types that the production of her staple crops required.

The areas of the state most suited for plantation agriculture were the Bluff and Alluvial regions with the Oak Uplands containing some soil that could maintain staple production on a satisfactory scale. Outside of these three areas, only the southern and eastern portions of the Prairie Region supported profitably the growth of cotton and cane on a large scale.¹

Slavery, the concomitant requirement of plantation economy, had increased in importance during the 1850's in all of the plantation areas except the Bluff Region where

¹See Chapter I for a discussion of the soil characteristics and productive capabilities of Louisiana soils. Refer to Chapter II for a discussion of population characteristics. *Swamp?*

further proportional gains of that census class had halted.² Since slave population was not as significant in the Bluff Region as it had been earlier, the further development of that area as a plantation region was not expected. The greatest proportional increase made by slavery was in the Oak Region, and it appeared that this area would be the home for new recruits to the advancing plantation system.³ But there is no evidence that would point to the conclusion that planters who were already established on plantations in the older plantation areas were interested in the acquisition of land for plantation purposes in this region.⁴ Only the planter with an eye for speculation showed any interest in the Oak Uplands, and this speculative class had already taken over much of the good upland of the state and was demanding from five to ten dollars an acre for even unimproved tracts.⁵

In the Attakapas Region much valuable land had been acquired by speculators who hoped that the proposed Opelousas railroad would be run through or near their holdings.⁶

²See pages 16-21 for a discussion of the characteristics of the development of the slave population in the plantation areas.

³Ibid.

⁴Based on a careful study of the letters, papers, diaries, and newspapers of the 1850's.

⁵New Orleans Picayune, January 8, 1860.

⁶Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 392, 404.

This land was not made available for purchase until the proprietors were certain that it was not going to be crossed by the proposed rail line. In Rapides Parish, the spread of sugar cane culture had the same effect, and land that had no takers in the early forties was selling for as high as forty dollars an acre at the opening of the 1850's.⁷ Obviously few newcomers could hope to establish plantations on good upland when it sold for such high prices. On the other hand this price was so much less than that asked for unimproved alluvial land that if anyone wanted to make an attempt to move up in the agricultural hierarchy, the upland regions were the only possible localities where it was possible to acquire land.⁸

The individual who already owned a plantation in the alluvial lowlands and who had aspirations to expand his operation was faced with a similar problem for land in this locality went for prices ranging from twenty to seventy-five dollars for uncleared lowland⁹ to one hundred or more dollars for each acre of improved plantation land.¹⁰ The bite of the speculation-bug caused some planters to hold

⁷Alexandria Red River Republican, January 11, 1851.

⁸Ibid.

⁹New Orleans Crescent, July and August, 1860. Alexandria Red River Republican, January 11, 1851.

¹⁰New Orleans Picayune, January 8, 1860.

valuable lands out of cultivation in Avoyelles, Morehouse and other northern parishes in order to wait for a buyer. In some areas of Avoyelles, land from which not one tree had been cut was up for sale at fifty dollars an acre, and in some areas north of the Red River land that had been offered for seventeen dollars an acre in 1857 was being held for forty or fifty in 1859.¹¹ Prices within these ranges were far out of the reach of any save the most prosperous planter or merchant.

One authority is of the opinion that some Louisiana planters made more from land speculation than they earned from the marketing of their crops,¹² and this may well be true, but the majority of the planters engaged in the purchase of land were interested in increasing their wealth by their position as planters. No other reason can be offered for the purchase of improved acres in the lowlands where the price was almost prohibitive for speculators.

In the late 1840's and early 1850's planters continually complained about the price of plantation land, yet they continued to purchase it admitting, however, that the chances of making money on land purchased at such prices

¹¹New Orleans Crescent, November 17, 1859.

¹²Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 84-85.

were slim.¹³ Undoubtedly some of the planters who purchased over-valued plantations were approaching financial disaster even before the Civil War brought ruin.¹⁴

In 1852 one sugar planter wrote to his brother-in-law:

I have a proposition to make to you which you can reflect upon, & one which I think will operate to our mutual Benefit- Which is to go into the purchase of Paul Heberts' plantation which will be sold next spring or the year following- I consider it one of the best sugar plantation on the coast¹⁵ & worth \$200,000.00 although do not think it will reach that price when sold.

We might arrange it so as to buy it and your father can hold on to the Black river & Teche place to help out with the payments- My present crop will about put me even with the world and I would consider it safe to borrow money to make the first payment provided it is sold next spring.¹⁶

The two planters did not make the purchase for the brother-in-law looked unfavorably upon the "proposition."¹⁷

Here was a planter who still owed considerable sums and who only had hopes of paying off most of his obligations if his crop came through. If lucky, he would be

¹³See particularly the Liddell, Randolph, and Weeks papers.

¹⁴Sitterson, Sugar Country, 164-165.

¹⁵The land along the southern course of the Mississippi River was often called the coast.

¹⁶John Hampden Randolph to Stas John R. Liddell, December 13, 1852. Liddell Papers.

¹⁷John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, March 19, 1853. Liddell Papers.

almost clear of debt, but instead of trying to make certain that he could meet the demands of his creditors, he was willing to borrow enough money to pay the down payment on a two hundred thousand dollar plantation. Why did he wish to enter into such a bargain when it seems certain that the plantation he was then working was profitable? He answered the question in a later letter when he wrote: "I would like to get a place in a year or so on the bank of the Mississippi that I may live on it and not be so far out of the way as I am here."¹⁸ Jane says she is tired of this swamp and wants to live where it is not so lonely."¹⁹ Satisfied that alone he could not swing the deal to purchase the Hebert plantation, he decided to wait until later as "There is a place in view in front of me belonging to a mulatto which he says he will sell in 1855 and has given me the refusal, or his promise to do so. If I had his place I would get a nearer way out to the river than I now have."²⁰

Obviously this was no speculative venture, although this planter had invested money in land speculation

¹⁸He lived on a plantation back of Bayou Goula several miles from the Mississippi River.

¹⁹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, March 19, 1853. Liddell Papers.

²⁰Ibid.

in Louisiana and in states in the Southwest and Midwest.²¹ His desire to purchase land along the Mississippi River was no more than an ambition to become a larger and more prosperous planter, and when he did acquire frontage on the river, he built one of the most pretentious of the Louisiana planter homes.²²

The death of a neighbor and the disposition of his property was often the high point of interest in some of the letters written during the period. A good example of the type of information exchanged was revealed in a letter written in 1853: "My nearest neighbor John Garlick died about two weeks ago in N Orleans, his property was yesterday appraised at \$120,000.00 Say 2200 acres land 100 slaves, corn, stock, plantation utensils I do not know if it will be for sale as the old woman can keep it if she chooses. Mrs Sewall my next neighbor has sold her interest in the plantation to her partner for \$40,000.00 all of which things make quite a difference in the affairs of Bayou Goula."²³

The unswerving desire to buy more land often



²¹Based on a study of the Randolph Papers.

²²The residence and the plantation is called Nottaway, and the home is now occupied and in good condition. The house is located approximately three miles south of Bayou Goula.

²³John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, March 19, 1853. Liddell Papers.

over-powered common sense and led a planter into a deal in which he knew that he was being outrageously over-charged. For example in 1856, one small planter agreed to purchase from a river planter-speculator some land along the Boeuf River for fifteen dollars an acre, land that had been purchased by the speculator for one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre. ²⁴ The purchaser wrote that "I must be allowed to say that I think it is very high for any lands in that part of the Country and I would not give the Price any [sic] that your place lies adjoining me as it does. I think Major that you ought to throw me in a good lot of Cattle & Hogs and some of Uncle Richy Shanghi Chickens to give me a start in the world as it will take all the mony [sic] I can rake & scrape to pay for the land shall have nothing to start upon." ²⁵

Usually the only time a planter refrained from purchasing an available plantation was when he had his eye on another in some other locality or when he could not stock it with slaves. When it was proposed to one coast planter that he purchase half of a plantation in the Attakapas Region, he had to decline for he had "already purchased

²⁴General Statement of the Business Relations of St. John R. Liddell and Moses Liddell, December 15, 1856. Liddell Papers.

²⁵Johnson Jordan to St. John R. Liddell, May 7, 1856. Liddell Papers.

a little place on the river for \$27 000.00 and it would be advisable for me to retain what ever surplus funds I may have to buy another small place adjoining; the two will make a fine little place: (530 acres).²⁶

Although the editor of the West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter had never heard of a large sugar plantation paying more than a fair return on an investment or making as much money for its owner in "proportion to the means employed" as a medium-sized estate, most of the planters of Louisiana were striving to become great planters.²⁷ This ambition may have been "humbug," as was the sometimes used expression, but if it were, the editor was right and the Louisiana planters were wrong.

An amusing description of the sale of a Louisiana sugar plantation was printed in the Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel of June 9, 1858. This sale, which disturbed the "proverbial equanimity" of the entire parish, involved a plantation located some three miles from the village of Bayou Goula and which had been appraised for \$183,000 including 1,643 acres of land, "95 negroes, all told--old and young, good, bad, and indifferent--(say about fifty working hands)," and all of the fixtures found on a sugar

²⁶John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, September 12, 1855. Liddell Papers.

²⁷West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, February 13, 1858.

plantation.²⁸ This sale "occupied the minds of all--from the wealthy forty to fifty thousand cash-in-hand holder to the holder of five cents-to-pay-for-a-drink poor fellow (the latter class, especially, talking very knowingly on the subject)."²⁹

The day was rather unpropitious for a country sale. . . . April showers . . . were active and plentiful, though not in demand. . . .

. . . . The army of not-bloodthirsty, (some got alcoholically so before the thing was over,) . . . closed around. The skirmishing bid from a clever and jolly son of Erin, . . . who went in just for the fun of the matter, . . . to the tune of \$100,000. . . . This shot was followed by another loaded with \$20,000 more, from a grave and reverend denizen of the inner purlieus of Bayou Goula. Here the engagement became general --random shots being fired at the Sheriff of the caliber of \$5,000, \$10,000, \$20,000, up to \$200,000-- when some one suggested an armistice --'to take a drink.'

. . . . The army of bidders having 'smiled' . . . and cooled off apparently . . . the battle . . . was renewed. . . . here the stranger of the 'big stick' made a demonstration, winked his right eye five times, and the Sheriff announced: \$205,000. (It seems that, with him, a nod meant 'go it, old fellow, at any figure.' A wink of the right eye, \$1,000; of the left, \$100.) . . . The 'nods and winks' were bravely responded to, till, at \$220,000, many began to wince, rather galled and jaded, and with the better part of valor, traveled towards the decanters, thus leaving the contest, single handed, between one of our wealthiest and cleverest planters--a son of the Old Dominion--and the imperturbable man 'of the cigarita and big stick.' . . . the 'man with the big stick' winked and winked again until

²⁸Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, July 19, 1858.

²⁹Ibid.

at \$204,500, one wink from that left eye, lighter than any feather, broke the camel's back, and the 'big stick' had it.

Routed and beaten at all points, our friend turned to that last and sole solacer of all sorrow, the sideboard. . . .³⁰

Not all planters were able to continue expending regardless of the price of land or the over-valuation of plantations. Some who became involved in the race for more land allowed their liabilities to become so great that they were forced to sell their plantations to meet their obligations or lost it when they could not meet them. One factor advised his client not to complain about having to take land for the money owed to him, for the property along the Black River was "by the by good speculation . . . [and] if I were you, I believe I would keep it for good lands in your part of the world are getting higher & higher every day."³¹

At times planters who were over burdened with debts found that they could not dispose of their property for prices they considered fair, and in these instances the debtors held out as long as possible hoping to sell at figures that would permit them to square themselves with the world. One Teche planter started talking about the

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ N. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, March 7, 1856. Liddell Papers.

absolute necessity of selling his land as early as 1852,³² but in 1856 he still owned the property and was still talking of selling.³³ When in 1855 his attempt to sell for a high price failed, a river planter advised that he take what he could get, for he owed too much to merchants who were "not fond of waiting long for their dues."³⁴ Later in 1856, this land-rich, money-poor planter could no longer hold out, and he decided to sell to anyone who would buy so that he could pay off "some" of his debts and perhaps have enough left to transfer his planting activity to the banks of the Texas River.³⁵

Another small planter, knowing St. John R. Liddell's interest in land speculation,³⁶ informed that Black River planter that he had decided to sell his land for approximately five thousand dollars, an amount which would give him enough money to move to the "City."³⁷

³²F. D. Richardson to Henry Marston, July 25, 1852. Marston Papers.

³³F. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, April 11, 1856. Liddell Papers.

³⁴John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, September 12, 1855. Liddell Papers.

³⁵F. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, April 11, 1856. Liddell Papers.

³⁶Johnson Jordan to St. John R. Liddell, May 7, 1856. N. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, March 7, 1856. Liddell Papers.

³⁷Unknown to St. John R. Liddell, January 15, 1853. Liddell Papers.

The insatiable desire for more and more land was based on more than a foolish ambition to appear prosperous or to race with more affluent planters. The Louisiana planter was striving toward what he thought to be the optimum condition under which he could make more money. The aristocrats among the Louisiana agriculturists were hard-headed, if not wise and thrifty business men, and they believed that the possession of more land on which to grow more cane and cotton would enable them to make more money to buy more land to make more money. The planters had no desire to balance agriculture with industry; they might not have opposed the plan, but they were not going to turn their attention from their money crops to invest in industry. *W.W. when by*

Assuredly the planter knew that his expansion would sooner or later have to cease, and he was undoubtedly aware that a point of diminishing returns could be reached. Certainly the thinking agriculturist realized that a day would come when he could no longer purchase good alluvial soil at any price, but in all probability he thought that this day was far in the future.

The ante-bellum Louisianian, unfortunately, was not able to read the twentieth century historians and economists who have defined the limits of profitable plantation operation; however, had he been accorded the opportunity, he probably would have ignored the warning. For the two mile radius, a radius beyond which U. B. Phillips thought

successful plantation operation could not be maintained, was a figure yet to be attained by the majority of Louisiana planters.³⁸

Actually the problem of area or radius of the plantation was of no immediate concern to the planter, for he did not restrict his purchases of land to the fields adjoining his plantation, but bought land wherever he could get it. In reality, he preferred to acquire land in the vicinity of his plantation, but even when such an acquisition was made, it was often staffed with a separate labor force under the general supervision of a manager or an overseer.³⁹ Also it should be noted that only a very few of the great sugar plantations approached the size limits set by Phillips; the large majority of Louisiana plantations were well under one mile in radius.⁴⁰

The plantation records of ante-bellum Louisiana planters reveal the constant attempts made by the planting class to acquire more land. Since the most preferred land was located in the well-developed plantation areas, an unsavory competition arose among the planters one which steadily drove land prices upward. Some of the blame for

³⁸Phillips, Life and Labor, 136.

³⁹Based on a study of the plantation records in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁴⁰Phillips, Life and Labor, 136.

the exorbitant prices can undoubtedly be laid to the actions of the land speculators,⁴¹ but in the areas where the plantation system was firmly entrenched the principle cause of over-valuation of plantation land should be placed where it belongs, at the door of the planter class itself. In a state where not only planters, but also some villagers felt that agricultural diversification meant the cultivation of half of one's acreage in cotton and half in cane,⁴² there can be no difficulty in ascertaining why fertile soil was at such a premium.

As vital to the enlargement of a planter's operation as the acquisition of land was the necessity for an increase in his labor force, for without additional slaves to work the newly acquired land, the planter had accomplished nothing. Unfortunately for the planter, slave prices just as land prices surged upward throughout the decade of the 1850's.⁴³

From the later thirties, when a prime field hand could be acquired for approximately \$850 or the equivalent of twenty-one bales of cotton, until the late 1840's when a slave could be purchased for only slightly more,⁴⁴ a

⁴¹Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 81-85.

⁴²Alexandria Red River Republican, January 11, 1851.

⁴³U. B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (New York, 1918), opposite 370.

⁴⁴Ibid., 371-373.

slave could be obtained without too much financial strain by the average planter. But due to the increased number of planters in the Southwest, the heightened competition of selling cotton and buying slaves,⁴⁵ and the competition offered by the sugar planters, slave prices climbed out of all proportion to cotton prices which seldom rose beyond twelve cents.⁴⁶ Some Louisianians felt that the cause for the rise in slave prices were the improvements in agricultural equipment and methods and the use of better seed which they thought made plantation economy more profitable,⁴⁷ but whatever the real reason for the rise in prices, the situation had been reached where only the prosperous could attempt to greatly enlarge their slave holdings.

By 1860 one field hand sold for \$1,800 dollars at New Orleans, a price that equalled the proceeds from the sale of forty-one bales of cotton and nearly double the equivalent of 1830.⁴⁸ In the Red River region, prime field

⁴⁵U. B. Phillips, "The Economic Cost of Slave-holding in the Cotton Belt," Political Science Quarterly, XX (1905), 268.

⁴⁶Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 652. Phillips, American Negro Slavery, opposite 370.

⁴⁷"Minority Report of the Committee on Federal Relations," Legislative Documents, 1858, 7-15.

⁴⁸Phillips, American Negro Slavery, opposite 370.

hands sold on occasion for as high as \$2,200.⁴⁹ These high prices caused some Louisianians to feel that it would take three full years of productive labor by an able hand to return to the master his outlay for the purchase of the slave.⁵⁰ In actuality few, if any, slave owners could hope to receive such a rapid return of the capital invested.⁵¹

Too often the expenses involved in the purchase of a slave embodied much more than just the selling price of the slave, for at times the owner had to pay the cost of transportation from the point of purchase to the plantation as well as take the risk of accidents occurring on the trip or the slave's dying before becoming acclimated. One planter wrote that "I have been truly unfortunate in my purchase of Negroes having lost one of the four women two days ago of fever of a typhoid nature after weeks illness. This makes a man and a woman out of the 10 that I bought; several of the others new ones have been taken in a similar manner but have recovered. I work them quite light, letting them go their own gait."⁵²

A Teche country planter while on a trip to St.

⁴⁹ Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 87.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See pages 214-216.

⁵² John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, July 7, 1853. Liddell Papers.

Louis decided to purchase several slaves as they were selling at a very good price. He bought a supposedly healthy field hand for eight hundred dollars which should have been an excellent bargain in 1852; however, the Louisianian had been taken in by the former owner for "The day after we left St Louis, the boy Daniel got drunk fell overboard and was drowned. On finding out the particulars, & that he had been sold by his former master for being a drunkard I notified N & C⁵³ to refuse this acceptance to the draft unless a credit of \$400.00 was entered upon it at the same time I wrote to Lynch⁵⁴ informing him of the facts of the case & offered to compromise by loosing [losing] one half, other wise he would be held to his guarantee and the full value of the boy insisted on."⁵⁵

The hazards of purchasing slaves from out of the state led one planter to conclude that it was wiser to spend several hundred dollars more for a Louisiana Negro than to purchase a Virginia-bred slave at a lower price and to wish that he had refrained from purchasing slaves in

⁵³Nalle and Cox were proprietors of a commission house located in New Orleans.

⁵⁴The former owner of the slaves.

⁵⁵F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, September 28, 1852. Liddell Papers.

New Orleans.⁵⁶ Later he discovered that he could have secured all that he wanted near his home for "one fourth cash on the day of sale, the ballance payable in two equal instalments in Moh. 18754 & 18755."⁵⁷

Evidently many of the slaves bought in the markets of New Orleans were from parts of the South other than Louisiana, for had they been natives of the state or at least acclimatized, there would have been fewer complaints about their inefficiency and poor health. It appears that some planters bought slaves in New Orleans only when they could not obtain them in the country, for as indicated it was sometimes regretted when slaves were purchased in that city instead of in the rural areas.

Slaves were valuable not only for their service as laborers, but also as liquid capital, for the great demand for them made it possible for a man frequently to liquidate his immediate debts by the simple method of disposing of one or more slaves.⁵⁸ However, after the payment of debts a planter would sometimes immediately borrow money to purchase new slaves to replace the ones he had sold. One small-scale agriculturist, after dickering with a merchant

⁵⁶ John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, July 7, 1853. Liddell Papers.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, November 21, 28; December 12, 1853. Gurley Papers.

for the sale of two slaves in order to enable him to meet his indebtedness of \$2,100, found that after the sale of the slaves and the settlement of his account he had one hundred dollars left; so he immediately began to arrange for the purchase of at least one slave.⁵⁹ The question in this man's mind was not whether or not he could afford a slave, but whether or not he should purchase a male or a female slave. He wrote: "In regard to a young negro we would be glad if you would be on the look out for one say an orphan girl of eight or nine years of age, they are frequently offered, Lucy thinks she would prefer a girl to a boy. I should if one might be had for something like \$500."⁶⁰

Before mailing the letter, however, the man and his wife discussed the situation further and came to the decision that "if a boy can be had at as low price as a girl it will be better to get the former as he can be of equal service in the house while young and be of much more value out of doors as he gets older."⁶¹ Further discussion of the "young nigger question" caused the couple to again change their minds, for in the next letter to their merchant, they asked the agent to "be on the look out for"

⁵⁹Ibid., and December 23, 1858.

⁶⁰Ibid., December 19, 1858.

⁶¹Ibid.

a young girl. They had decided that a girl would be more valuable in the long run or as the husband wrote, "Lucy quotes Christine with her six or seven children as an example and I think with her that in after years a girl would prove the most valuable. so a girl let it be."⁶²

Although this couple did not hesitate to go back into debt to purchase slaves, one planter realized that land without slaves was valueless and slaves without land were equally as useless; he refused to buy either for a while for, as he wrote, "By taking a part of Richardson's place it would stop my operations here, as I would not be able to buy the place near [sic] in addition to the one I have already bought, and buy negroes to put upon Richardson's place as I would have to do."⁶³

The activity of one father so enraged a son that he wrote that his father's plunging into debt for the purchase of western slaves "is enough to make me repent the day my birth gave me the name human."⁶⁴ He stated that his father had been "upon his own responsibility" for nearly twenty-three years, and not once except for the past

⁶²Ibid., December 23, 1858.

⁶³John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, September 12, 1855. Liddell Papers.

⁶⁴Charles Batchelor to Mrs. A. A. Batchelor, January 16, 1860. Batchelor (A. A.) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

year had he been out of debt, but instead of remaining free from obligation, he allowed "liquors to stimulate him to such rashness" as to pay ten thousand dollars for a set of "Western negroes" without even stopping to consider that the nation was on the "brink of a/ Civil war" that would greatly diminish the value of the slaves and in reality make them "the greatest expense imaginable to him."⁶⁵

The son, who was at Kentucky Military Institute, was selfish in his anger, for it appears that his main concern was not so much his father's indebtedness to the slave trader, but his father's indebtedness to him. Assuming a dignified and pious air the youth considered it his "duty in the sight of God to correct him when" he blundered, and to warn him that "I can not wait upon him always to pay up his debts & to have what he owes me combined with his other debts . . . so he had better keep out of debt & be ready to settle with me."⁶⁶ Continuing in the same hypocritical strain, the student wrote that he had found it hard to "blame a father who has always been so kind to me" and that he did not want his father to "pay me what he owes me until he is free from his debt so that his property will not be diminished therefore I warn him first in order that

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

he may not be able to blame me for getting what is mine."⁶⁷✓

Plantation economy involved more than just the purchase of land and slaves for the slaves had to be fed and clothed, and the land had to be worked. Particularly on the sugar plantations, a large amount of capital was expended on the purchase of the equipment necessary for the manufacture of sugar. The money invested in equipment on a sugar plantation was many times that invested in equipment on a cotton plantation of comparable size.

Food and clothing for the slaves was in most cases not a burdensome expense for the rations given the slaves while substantial were not expensive, and to a large extent the Negroes supplemented their diets with home grown vegetables, game, and fish.⁶⁸ Clothing for the hands was also inexpensive. There were instances when planters had the women weave some of the cloth used on the plantation,⁶⁹ but usually the material was bought, and during periods of bad weather when it was impossible to work in the fields, the women made the clothes. "The total cost of maintenance when all food and clothing was bought was never more than

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 51. Solomon Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave. . . . (Auburn, New York), 200-201. Palfrey Plantation Diary, May, 1853. West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, June 2, 1860.

⁶⁹Maraton Plantation Diary, December, 1825. Comite Plantation Diary, December, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

fifty dollars per hand, and less for those who did not work. Only on rare occasions was it necessary to buy all the food and clothing for slaves on a plantation."⁷⁰

The costly sugar house, its equally costly equipment, and the maintenance of that equipment often became a heavy load for the planters.⁷¹ Actually when the failure of machinery caused a delay in grinding and therefore sometimes a loss of part of the crop, the loss could be attributed to the same expense account as the cost of maintenance of equipment.

Most of the planter's money went for land, slaves, and the expenses of running the plantation, which included all of the necessities of life for all of the residents of the plantation, as well as transportation costs, and interest or fees paid to factors for the sale of crops. The planter did spend a relatively large portion of his income for travel to and from New Orleans and to recreation centers, but a study of the plantation records reveals that the planter, while not abstaining from all of the pleasures of the table, did not throw away any large part of his money on food and liquors.⁷²

⁷⁰Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 129.

⁷¹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, March 19, July 7, 1853. Liddell Papers.

⁷²Based on a study of the manuscript collections in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

A true picture of the economic stability of the plantation system cannot be obtained from a cursory reading of the letters of planters to friends, families, and factors, for almost without exception, this agricultural group complained of lack of cash, poor crops, and hard times. In fact, they always appeared to be on the verge of bankruptcy. Perhaps the one thing proved by the letters of the ante-bellum Louisiana planter is that he was a chronic complainer, that he was never satisfied, and that he never would be. *not too different from today*

One disgruntled planter thought that he would put "up a saw mill . . . [as] it will make more money than planting."⁷³ A well established Teche planter became upset when he found that he needed an excellent sugar crop to meet his obligations, and he decided that probably he could have profited more by turning some of his attention to cotton, but he could not do so because that would have entailed the building of a gin and the conversion of his sugar land into cotton land. This he refused to do for sugar land was too valuable "to turn into cotton culture,"⁷⁴ and cotton prices did not justify the construction of a gin. One unhappy Bluff planter wrote: "Course we will have a sorry Christmas--Money is not to be had--I have lost

⁷³ McCollam Diary, August 1, 1850.

⁷⁴ Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, October 12, 1851. Liddell Papers.

several negroes lately and everything is out of sorts with me that I have a great reluctance in leaving home."⁷⁵

Another uneasy planter thought that: "The prospect for fair prices for sugar this year, seem bad, under the threat of reducing the Tariff, and the annexation of Cuba, by purchase or otherwise."⁷⁶

Perhaps most of the Louisiana planters wrote the truth when they said they were short of cash but not necessarily were their plantations and slaves unprofitable. There is no way to prove exactly how much the slaves earned for their masters, but it is possible to show that the slaves were earning profits for their owners.

It has been stated that the average Louisiana cotton lands yielded about 2,000 pounds of lint cotton to the hand, which was thought to bring in a return of seven per cent when the cotton sold for five cents,⁷⁷ a price which was lower than the average selling price for cotton in the years from 1810-1860.⁷⁸ When cotton went for eight cents,

⁷⁵A. Barrow to Mac, December 22, 1860. Barrow (W. M.) Papers.

⁷⁶John Buhling to Henry Marston, June 28, 1858. Marston Papers.

⁷⁷L. C. Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 (Washington, 1933), II, 709. Hereafter cited as Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States.

⁷⁸Phillips, American Negro Slavery, opposite 370.

the yield per hand would bring in a gross of \$160.⁷⁹

During the 1850's, according to Gray, each hand on a sugar plantation could cultivate approximately four acres of cane, and since each acre yielded on the average one hogshead,⁸⁰ for which the usual price was sixty-four dollars during the fifties,⁸¹ the gross return of each hand for sugar alone was \$256. Of course, the gross return in dollars was more than this as the planter also X profited from the sale of his molasses.

Since the slave population of the plantations usually was double the number of field hands, the actual figure for the gross earnings per slave on sugar and cotton plantations should be halved to get a true picture of the gross return. But even with the division by two, the gross returns were large enough to make the plantation profitable, and had the proprietor been satisfied with his profits as they came in he would not have been so constantly in debt. It was the planter's abnormal desire to continually expand that has sometimes led to the belief that slavery and the plantation system was not profitable.

The living conditions described by some of the

⁷⁹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 122.

⁸⁰Gray, Agriculture in the Southern United States, II, 751.

⁸¹Ibid., II, 1033.

travelers visiting Louisiana in the nineteenth century have led some to conclude that the Louisiana planter could not have prospered. Unfortunately the visitor was comparing what he discovered in a relatively new agricultural state to the conditions in the older settled agricultural areas. It should be noted that although some parts of the state, mainly along the Mississippi River Coast, had been settled very early by the French and Spanish, some parts of the state that were maintaining plantations in the 1850's had been settled for less than fifty years. While it is impossible to state definitely, it is probable that if the aristocrats among the Louisiana agriculturists had dwelled with their slaves on their plantations for as long a time as some of the Virginia planters and New England farmers had lived on their land, they would have acquired some of the things that the visitors found lacking.

Few will deny that Louisiana prospered during the 1850's, and no small part of the state's prosperity was due to the toil of slaves on plantations. There was no question as to whether or not the slave earned profits for his master; the difficulty was that the profits were not large enough. The men who should have known, the Louisiana planters, felt that slaves were not only profitable when used for common field work on the plantation, but also when employed in

semi-skilled jobs.⁸² After prolonged debate, the legislators of the state decided that the state would benefit more by the use of slaves on public works for unskilled as well as relatively skilled jobs.⁸³

There can be no doubt that slave labor was, at least to some extent, inefficient, but much of this inefficiency was overcome by careful supervision, and actually planters complained less of the inefficiency of their slaves than they did of their hired labor.⁸⁴ Further, there is evidence that the efficiency of slave labor was increasing toward the end of the slave period. Actually the value of the dollar production of the slave increased constantly from 1810 to 1860, and the amount of acreage that could be entrusted to the care of a hand also increased throughout the same period.⁸⁵

The complaints about the inability of the Negro to do skilled labor should not be taken too seriously, for there are numerous instances when slaves did much of the skilled work done on the plantation. In fact several planters even entrusted their slaves with the most intricate

⁸²Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 687-688. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 88.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Based on a study of the plantation records available in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁸⁵Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 122.

of plantation duties.⁸⁶ Actually any work of this type done by the slave, whether it were crude or not, was a saving to the planter and should be recognized as such, for undoubtedly the primary duty of a slave was field work, and when he was able to do something else, it was all to the master's benefit.

It must be remembered that the Southern planter had the only laborer in the United States who could not quit his job and move to the frontier, that he had the one workman who did not demand something more than food, clothes, and shelter, the only servant who could not insist on better treatment. Finally the master had the right to work the slave as long and hard as he wished, and this above all else helped to make slave labor the most profitable that could have been used on the plantations.⁸⁷ Actually the Louisiana cotton planter could produce, if necessary, at levels which cost little more than the expense of maintaining the slaves, and obviously, there was no way in the world

⁸⁶Ibid., 77-117.

⁸⁷Charles Lyell, A Second Visit to the United States. . . . (New York, 1849), II, 162-163. Hereafter cited as Lyell, A Second Visit. Phillips, "The Economic Cost of Slave-holding in the Cotton Belt," 275; L. C. Gray, "Economic Efficiency and Competitive Advantages of Slavery," Agricultural History, IV (1930), 41.

for free labor to meet this competition.⁸⁸ Since it is generally accepted that the issue of profit on the plantations rested on the institution of slavery, there can be little doubt that the plantation economy of ante-bellum Louisiana was profitable.

The reason for the financial insecurity of the Louisiana planter class was the inability of the Louisiana planter to live within his income. It was not the fault of the institution that the planter refused to be satisfied with what he had. Certainly the plantation system was not wholly responsible for the unceasing ambition of the planter to become a larger planter, and thus squander his profits in attempts to make larger profits.

Since a not uncommon characteristic of the Louisiana planter was to spend more than he made, he had to have a source from which he could obtain money. He was not particular; he would borrow any amount from anyone. One small planter who was "much annoyed for a Small Debt" of ten dollars that he owed to a "free man of C.," wrote to his brother trying to borrow the amount to settle the account.⁸⁹ Of course, this was an unusually small amount,

⁸⁸Gray, "Economic Efficiency and Competitive Advantages of Slavery," 41.

⁸⁹Lewis Moore to John Moore, July 5, 1850. Weeks Collection.

but the brother seemed to be financing the planting operation, and the planter did not hesitate to ask for what he needed. However, the pesterings of the planter evidently bothered the financial backer, for in 1851, he decided to try to sell the sugar equipment he had bought for his brother, a fact which much upset the planter for he thought that if he were allowed to work one more year, he would be able to pay all of his debts.⁹⁰

Most of the loans obtained were backed by mortgages against the land, slaves, or houses of the planters, but if all other resources were exhausted, the crops were sometimes pledged.⁹¹ Not rarely, however, money was obtained on a note or parole d'honneur.

The readiness with which many of the Louisianians endorsed the notes of their neighbors and relatives, along with their generosity in lending money to members of their families and acquaintances, helped to no small extent the financial discontent of the Louisiana planters.⁹²

Undoubtedly the best source of extra capital was from the purse of a friend or a member of the family as money from these sources was less likely to be recalled

⁹⁰Ibid., February 16, 1851.

⁹¹Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 110.

⁹²Based on a study of the Weeks, Gurley, Randolph, and Barrow (W. M.) papers; Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow.

at inopportune times. One planter informed a friend: "As I hear your crop was a failure this past year, I wrote to say that beg you will not consider your note to me as payable until it is perfectly convenient to you. It can lie over another 2 years if you may so desire."⁹³ Another creditor told a planter that he did not have to pay his total indebtedness (\$5,354.49), but that one thousand dollars was needed "at your earliest possible convenience."⁹⁴ This planter, however, was not given any definite period of grace but was told that he would be informed when more was required.⁹⁵

Some planters, after experiencing a "short year," asked to be permitted to refrain from paying on the principle and to be allowed to pay only the interest. One such planter requesting "indulgence" said that his incidental expenses had been very large and that he had bought some new sugar house machinery and that if required to pay on the principle, he would have to borrow in New Orleans at excessive interest rates.⁹⁶

⁹³John C. Jenkins to St. John R. Liddell, January 1, 1851. Liddell Papers.

⁹⁴John W. Prescott to Dr. John F. Leigh, July 28, 1860. Weeks Collection.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶W. F. Weeks to John Moore, February 29, 1860. Weeks Collection.

There were times when the planters could not borrow through a bank or from friends, and then it became necessary to sell some property, land or slave, or to borrow from or through a factor or a merchant. Often when this was done the factor simply arranged for a bank or commission house to accept the note of the planter. In June, 1856, one cotton planter who desperately needed money turned to a commission house for a loan. His request was given due consideration and then he was told by the merchants that they, themselves, would lend him \$11,000 if he would turn over all of his business to them. The merchants assured him that they were not trying to take anyone else's customer or to solicit his business, but they were merely telling him the only conditions under which they could lend him money.⁹⁷ This deal was never closed for the planter refused to transfer his business to their firm.⁹⁸

After failure to obtain money in June, the planter turned to his regular factor for help. The agent told him:

I have made further enquiries to raise money for you. I think I can get for you in a few days @ 9 per % & $\frac{1}{2}$ per % brokerage. This is only 1 per % more than short paper sells for; it is not in one year in 10 that long paper can be sold for that.

⁹⁷Elijah Peale to St. John R. Liddell, June 28, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁹⁸Based on the invoices, letters, and records of St. John R. Liddell in the Liddell Papers.

In fact for years past the regular rates for long paper has ben [sic] 10 per % $\frac{1}{2}$ per % brokerage & 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ for accepting of course I will make all your negotiations and accept or endorse without any charge and if I can get what you want @ 9 per %, my opinion is that it is in all probability better than we can do in the winter.⁹⁹

This letter indicates the service sometimes rendered by the factor as well as the high interest rates charged on both long and short term loans. Interest rates of nine and ten per cent along with brokerage and acceptance charges help explain why the planter was always involved in the paying off of one type of note or another.

At the same time that this Black River planter was working on a loan through his factor, he was attempting to raise money through the sale of a part of his inheritance, stock in a railroad; however, he was unsuccessful for the cashier of the road told him that he probably would not be able to sell the stock because the company had used all of its profits to repair the rolling stock of the line.¹⁰⁰

In 1858, one small planter wrote his factor telling him that he wanted to come to New Orleans and asked to be kept informed as to the health of the city as he was unacclimated. He finished his letter by saying: "If we do

⁹⁹M. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, September 10, 1856. Liddell Papers.

¹⁰⁰T. H. Dyer to St. John R. Liddell, September 10, 1856. Liddell Papers.

not hear any thing from you to the contrary we will come down next friday afternoon, I will have to become your debtor still more as we have no money to pay travelling expenses."¹⁰¹ Toward the end of the decade money became more scarce, and by 1860, it became virtually impossible for a person to get a note accepted in New Orleans for any amount.¹⁰² In December of that year one factor reported that "We cannot raise a dollar except by sacrificing Cotton at the lowest figures, and yet it may be that the sales we have now made may turn out to be very good ones for the future got gloomier every day & We fear we have not struck bottom yet. Over 30 factors are now suspended. . . . Your [sic] can rely on nothing except the very dollar in Gold you hold in your hands; for even the strongest names go by the board every day."¹⁰³

Although much money was borrowed from the families, friends, and factors of the planters, by far most was obtained from the banks through the factors, and by the end of the 1850's, Louisiana planters owed some eight million

¹⁰¹E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, November 5, 1858. Gurley Papers.

¹⁰²M. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, December 29, 1860. Liddell Papers.

¹⁰³Ibid., December 8, 1860.

dollars to approximately forty factors who had received the money from New Orleans banks on the collateral of mortgages, crop privileges, and notes.¹⁰⁴

CHAPTER IX

The forgotten people of ante-bellum Louisiana were the residents neither prominent nor prosperous enough to be classified as planters. This group, the common people of the state, earned their living in many ways, none of which permitted them to live on a scale opulent enough to attract the attention of the "moonlight and magnolia" school of literatists who have done so much to entrench the plantation tradition in the minds of present-day Americans.

Although no longer regarded as "poor white trash," these people and their children have too long borne that misnomer which in all fairness was absolutely wrong. Actually a much more fitting descriptive title would have been "the struggling majority." Unfortunately this less affluent group of Louisianians were largely inarticulate and the twentieth century scholars are forced to rely primarily on traveler's descriptions, complaints of planters, and newspaper editors to reconstruct their mode of life.

The generally accepted conclusion is that Louisiana was divided among the great planters on the best bottom land, small planters on the less desirable bottoms, yeoman slave holders in the Oak Uplands, and non-slaveholding

farmers and poor whites on the pine hills and flats of the state.¹ This conclusion is not entirely accurate, for nearly all of the parishes of the state had inhabitants of all agricultural classes. This is easily understood when it is remembered that in most of the parishes of the state, the land make-up is varied.² This factor made it possible to find small farmers, planters, and yeoman farmers all residing in the same parish, but the farm of the yeoman with his one, two, or five slaves was prevalent in the good Oak Uplands, particularly in the parishes of Jackson, Bienville, Claiborne, and Bossier;³ while many of the non-slaveholders lived on the remote ridges in the pine hill regions of the state and interspersed among the plantations of the Alluvial, Bluff, and Prairie regions.⁴

Perhaps the most colorful of the small agriculturists of ante-bellum Louisiana were the Acadians or as they were generally called, "Cadians" or "Cajuns." These people were especially numerous in the Attakapas Region and

¹New Orleans Crescent, May 7, June 13, 1860.

²See pages 14-15.

³New Orleans Crescent, July 30, August 6, 14, 1860.

⁴See J. G. Belisle, History of Sabine Parish (Many, Louisiana, 1912), 71-77; Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 394-395; Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 332-333; Augusta to Sarah W. Simpson, February 10, 1851. Anonymous letter.

along the bayous and swamps of the Sugar Bowl.⁵ The descriptions of the Acadians vary greatly. One writer who was unfavorably impressed with them thought that they were lazy, ignorant, improvident, as well as dirty and unhealthy. He pictured the Acadian as living in a dilapidated, moss roofed, wooden cabin that was surrounded by a decrepit rail fence which might enclose a few brindle cattle or creole ponies.⁶ Another observer, although enchanted with Bayou Lafourche, mentioned "A continuous line of dilapidated time-worn cottages-giving it [Bayou Lafourche] something [of] the appearance of an Indian village. These are chiefly owned by the French whose ancestral pride will not induce them to sell."⁷

Another traveler thought that the Acadians were simple, virtuous, illiterate peasants who spoke no language other than their own patois and who were entirely dependent upon peddlers for news of the outside world.⁸ Another visitor felt that they lived much as they had a century before, comfortably and sleepily, undisturbed by ambitions.

⁵H. M. Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana. . . . (Pittsburg, 1814), 178. Sitterson, Sugar Country, 50; Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 394.

⁶G. A. Coulon, 350 Miles in a Skiff through the Louisiana Swamps (New Orleans, 1888), 34-35.

⁷Hilliard Diary, February 2, 1850.

⁸Richard Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction. . . . (New York, 1879), 105-106.

for wealth.⁹ He found many chickens, cows, pigs, and ponies, as well as carefully tended gardens that yielded enough vegetables to complete a satisfactory diet after the woods had supplied game and the streams fish.¹⁰

Olmsted was told by a slave that the non-slaveholding Acadians were "very good people," orderly and industrious, who lived comfortably and worked as hard as they ought for their living. The slave felt that no better sort of people existed than the Acadians.¹¹ However a different opinion was voiced by one planter who lived near a hamlet of Acadians. The planter thought them vagabonds who did little work and who spent most of their time hunting, fishing, and playing. Although the planter admitted that one was a very good mechanic and one an excellent brick-mason who had helped to build his sugar house, he said that he "was willing to pay them two or three times as much as their property was actually worth, to get them to move off."¹² These Acadians grew a little corn and rice.

Little is known about the details of the life of small farmers in ante-bellum Louisiana, but there is a description of a prosperous non-slaveholding farm family

⁹New Orleans Crescent, May 25, 1860.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 342.

¹²Ibid., 332.

that lived in the vicinity of Opelousas. This family lived in a small low cottage constructed of wood and plastered with mud which had three rooms, a long center room with a wooden floor used for living quarters, and two dirt-floored rooms used for cooking and sleeping. The proprietor was hoeing in the field alongside the five slaves that he hired every Sunday, and the wife was milking some skinny cows at the cottage door when the visitor approached. The observer found that the man and his wife could speak some English but that their children seemed to speak only French. There was little furniture in the house, but there was a Connecticut clock, two mirrors, and a few cups and saucers probably purchased from a Yankee peddler. Besides growing all of its own food, this family also produced some cotton, and it was from the sale of the cotton and the proceeds from the sale of cattle to drivers for the New Orleans market that the family gained its cash income. This family, which might be regarded as more-or-less typical of the yeomen of Louisiana, served the visitor a supper of bread, molasses, fried eggs, bacon, sweet potatoes, and milk and a breakfast of bacon and potatoes.¹³

The plantation home of a small planter in the Red River region which was visited by a northern traveler was described as a small square, one room, log cabin about

¹³Based on Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 402-405.

twenty by sixteen feet with a broad open shed or "peazza" in front and with a chimney made of sticks and mud leaning against one end. The house had one door and no windows and was furnished with a table, a "kind of a dresser," a bureau, a four poster bed, a small "camper bed," and two deer skin chairs. The slaves, chickens, and dogs had free access to the house.¹⁴

One of the slaves told the traveler that the master would take him in for the night,¹⁵ but the wife of the owner refused to serve any food to the visitor until she had finished her ironing, and then she "placed upon the table a plate of cold, salt pork; a cup of what to both eye and tongue seemed lard, but which she termed butter; a plate of very stale, dry, flaky micaceous corn-bread; a jug of molasses, and a pitcher of milk."¹⁶ For this she charged one dollar.¹⁷

Evidently living conditions west of Natchitoches were not entirely satisfactory, for although much of the land had been cleared, much of it had been abandoned to the pines, and the region was given a "desolate air" by the

¹⁴Based on Ibid., 46-48.

¹⁵Ibid., 46.

¹⁶Ibid., 49.

¹⁷Ibid., 52.

many deserted cabins.¹⁸ Perhaps one reason there were so many deserted cabins was the poor soil which gave up produce not commensurate with the efforts expended in production; thus after a period of struggling, the people moved on and the land reverted to wilderness.¹⁹

Frequently wherever a farm or a small plantation remained in the region, and they were usually three or four miles apart located along some small creek or pond that overflowed its banks, there could be found signs offering food and provisions for sale. Usually the signs were misspelled, but understandable, and it was not impossible that the major portion of some of these people's income was derived from "fleecing" travelers. The same conclusion may be reached concerning the smaller hamlets in the region, for as on the farms, all prices of provisions were fully one hundred per cent over those in New Orleans.²⁰

The meals offered to travelers were nearly always the same, usually pork, fresh or salted, cold corn bread, and boiled sweet potatoes; however, the fresh pork and sweet potatoes were frequently missing. There was always,

¹⁸Ibid., 62.

¹⁹Ibid., 64.

²⁰Ibid., 62.

however, "the black decoction of the South called coffee, than which it is often difficult to imagine any beverage more revolting."²¹ The bread was always made of corn meal.

On many of the plantations and farms of the pine and oak hills, the proprietors made attempts to grow all that they needed for subsistence including sugar cane from which they often produced enough sweetening for home use.²² In fact, one optimistic newspaper editor thought that sugar cane could "be cultivated as successfully [sic] in this Parish [Concordia] as upon the Coast below."²³ In a similar vein, the editor of the Red River Republican of Alexandria considered it wrong to think that cotton could not be profitably grown on the pine hills, and he cited the crop of one hill farmer as proof that it could be done.²⁴

The fertility of the soil in the pine hills and Oak Uplands was a matter of discussion among the residents of the state, with the newspaper editors of the richer sections seemingly trying to convince the residents of the less favored areas that upland soil was satisfactory.²⁵

²¹Ibid., 61.

²²Ibid., 63.

²³Concordia Intelligencer, November 8, 1851.

²⁴Alexandria Red River Republican, May 14, 1853.

²⁵Concordia Intelligencer, November 8, 1851. Alexandria Red River Republican, May 14, 1853.

On the other hand the editor of one Attakapas newspaper took a different tack because he believed that his area needed more inhabitants, and instead of bragging about the possibilities of the pine and oak hills, praised the energy of the residents of the regions, and suggested that settlers move to the "beautiful prairies and . . . [to] our fertile alluvial and timbered lands."²⁶ This propagandist claimed that the good land of the Attakapas Region was easier to obtain and cheaper to purchase than the poor land in the "West and North-West."²⁷ A creole of the area would have readily argued that point for he said that "he didn't know what was going to become of poor folks, [as] rich people are taking up the public land so fast."²⁸

Most of the problems faced by the larger and more prosperous planters of Louisiana also beset small planters and farmers. Without doubt some of the difficulties that confronted these less fortunate Louisianians were every bit as perplexing as those hindering the planters. Too often, however, these less affluent people had not the money nor the property to overcome the problems, for when the planter was faced with transportation and other difficulties, he was able at least to wait until conditions improved, but in some

²⁶Opelousas Patriot, August 11, 1855.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 404.

instances, the stopping of the steamboats and other minor problems caused the poorer agriculturists not only to endure hardship, but also absolute suffering.²⁹

When faced with the prospects of a bad crop, the farmers had very little to fall back on, and since they often owned little really valuable land, they could seldom borrow any appreciable amount of money on it. Since it took most of the money that the farmers had to acquire the little acreage that they possessed, a shortage of cash caused them to pledge their crop, their only collateral, for a loan. To obtain provisions for the coming year, they purchased supplies from the country merchants on six or ten month credit at considerable amounts above the regular selling prices, and sometimes for this credit they were required to pledge their crop.³⁰ If they suffered a bad year there was no way for them to pay their obligations or to secure provisions for the following year. This practice was the precursor of the high interest rates and the constant necessity to produce money crops that was to develop after the Civil War. These evils were not readily recognizable in ante-bellum Louisiana because the small agriculturist had less occasion to go into debt; he could always

²⁹J. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, January 9, 30; April 8, 1856. Liddell Papers.

³⁰New Orleans Crescent, August 20, 1860.

turn from commercial to subsistence agriculture and eke out an existence from the abundant supply of timber, fish, game, and furs and the necessities that could be produced on his small acreage.³¹

The small farmer and planter of the state had to pay more for supplies than did the larger planter who could order directly from New Orleans and thus avoid paying an added profit to the rural middleman. Along the same line, the choice of products was not as wide in the more isolated hill areas as in the lowlands because less money was available in the hills and because of the higher transportation costs demanded by the inaccessible location of some of the areas.

A good idea of the mode of life of a small planter can be obtained from the following letters

. . . we are doing right smart work we have borrowed 230 pounds of meet of Mr Barefield and it will last untill Wensday I can get 70 pounds more that will make out three hundred and that will last untill the 20 of May . . . Mr Raines has had to plough up both corn and cotton every boddy is complaining of the cut worm and chinch bug the frost cut down my Irish potatoes but they came out again and look verry well the mole eat up verry near all my beans and squaches we have some turnips and mustard that will do to eat the corn is coming verry well

³¹ See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 111-112; DeBow's Review, XXI (1856), 361-369.

. . . the grass is verry fine Cattle and Horses be gin to look well My mare dos not come up except I wanten her and go after her. . . .

I hant planted aney more corn but will plant ten acres more next week by turday Thursday? night I will finish cutting all the in side of the fence which a bout 40 acres exclusive of the yard and garden

I have fierd a grade deal of cane some burnt verry well and some would not burn at all verry little burnt off clean but it killed the most of it

. . . we are all well and the country healthly Mr Rains went to New Orleans and had his freight landed at Monroe and has to haul it rownd by Marus he come sixty five miles

One reason that I hate to borrow Mr Bearfields meat is it is intierly clean of bone and of corse he will expect the same kind. . . .

PS as for making soap I dont know what we would make it out of the meat has no bones and the dogs eat up all the dish water³²

Describing the health on his place the small planter wrote:

we are well except Ben and he is much better he was firs taken with the common chill and fever he had it four days before he let me know it I broke it and he was taken with the new money and on the secon day after I perceived he had the new money I seed he shoed simtoms of tipoed new money and as I had no medeson to soot his case I went after Dr Stinson he came three time, and has in tirely broke the disease he has had no fever for three days. . . .³³

In July, 1855, he wrote:

³²J. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, April 28, 1855. Liddell Papers.

³³Ibid., June 1, 1855.

. . . the corn is very good in places where it
 ant shaded and ware it is shaded too much it is
 very sorry the pumpkins is doing very well so is
 the peas the sweat potatoes is not doing much the
 garden has done very well we have had vegetables
 for all hands evry day we have had plenty peas
 bean mustard turnips squashes & cucumbers but
 they are all most gone we have plenty milk but-
 ter fish turtel and some times a squirrel and
 plenty young chickens I hant eat but one chicken
 yet I dont get aney eggs I live just as well as
 I want too I have corn enough to last us five
 weeks with what Mr Doming owes us and more too

I have enough of corn in the hous to for bread too
 last untill the middle of August and I dont feed
 the horses a bit of it if I use them the minet I
 turn them out they go strate over the river in Mr
 Doming's old field I dont use the horse at all
 the mare is too fat and I want to reduce her the
 Coon is just beginning to brake down our corn I
 expect we will have plenty of coon meat in the
 corse of a week I shall hunt them every night
 from now on I opend a nother barrel of meat and
 it apeard a little sour and a little tendered
 than ushal I took it all out of the barrel and
 cut it up in alowence and hung it up it apears
 to do very well now I can get plenty of paper at
 Ion [?/. . . . they have plenty fish hooks and
 lines too the salt I got there was very good
 clean and white and full sack each one fild a
 pork barrel . . . I have not cleand the well out
 yet all tho it gives plenty of water and I think
 it is much better than when you ware hear we use
 it to wash and for the calfs and it never apears
 the least carce every one that drinks it says
 it is the best water in the country some say it
 makes their teeth? ake but it never hurts
 mine. . . .³⁴

It appears that the small planters did not suffer
 the terrible existence that some travelers have indicated.
 One traveler thought that new slaveholders lived much from

³⁴Ibid., July 13, 1855.

hand to mouth and often in extreme destitution,³⁵ but in fairness, this statement does not appear to be true. It is probably true, however, that none of the smaller planters and farmers had much cash, but from the descriptions given by J. D. Richardson³⁶ it does not appear that the life was miserable.

A study of the manuscript census returns of one sugar parish reveals several small landholders with far less land than Richardson, who appeared to be living under conditions that could not be called miserable or destitute, although certainly the standard of living was far from luxurious. One of these people, a widow, owned only fifty acres of land valued at \$1,500, but she also possessed four horses, two cows, and two other cattle valued at two hundred dollars. On her land she grew 1,500 bushels of corn and ninety bushels of sweet potatoes.³⁷ Another owned land valued at \$1,500 (forty acres), and cattle worth \$150; and still another, who may well be considered a small planter, owned land valued at \$12,000, eighteen horses, ten cows, eight oxen, and twenty-five other cattle worth \$1,000

³⁵F. L. Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom. . . . (New York, 1861), II, 44.

³⁶J. D. Richardson, the author of the letters quoted above lived on a small Boeuf River plantation of approximately seven hundred acres of which only a small portion was under cultivation.

³⁷Manuscript Census of 1850, Schedule IV.

and produced 1,800 bushels of corn, 200 bushels of sweet potatoes, and seventy hogsheads of sugar.³⁸

In the upland regions of the state not a few of the farmers made no cotton at all, and of those who did, many made only one or two bales. Practically all of the farmers raised some corn and sweet potatoes, and nearly all owned a few cattle, although the number was never large. Swine were numerous as they demanded little attention.³⁹

An idea of the way some of the people in the lower income brackets lived can be gleaned from Parish Succession Records. One small planter left to his widow an estate valued at \$10,739, which consisted of land having a one-third arpent frontage on the river and extending forty arpents in depth valued at \$5,000, seven slaves valued at \$4,900, and movable property which included a small carriage, a "lot" of glassware, a "lot" of crockery, a "lot" of sheets, and 200 barrels of corn worth \$396.50. The widow also obtained other movables valued at \$442.50.⁴⁰

A farmer of less wealth left to his heirs a house valued at \$50 and furniture worth \$100, but it should be noted that this man owned real estate valued at \$1,295,

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Iberville Parish Succession Records, Book 5, Entry 289.

cattle at \$283, and movable property at \$265.⁴¹

Perhaps more can be understood about the home life of these people by listing some of their household effects. One, at the time of his death in 1853, owned land valued at \$200, a bureau valued at \$6.00, one bed and bedding at \$8.00, one mirror at twenty-five cents, one armoire at \$2.00, three pictures worth twenty-five cents, two trunks valued at fifty cents, one safe at \$1.00, one lot of crockery and tinware at \$3.00, one lot of cooking utensils at \$1.00, one table at fifty cents, six chairs at \$6.50, five bottles of wine at \$1.25, and \$254.80 in gold and silver. This man also held a note for \$150 bearing eight per cent interest.⁴²

A prosperous Oak Upland yeoman owned over three thousand acres of land of which only about one-fifth were improved and on which he raised 4,000 bushels of corn, 1,000 bushels of sweet potatoes, and 150 bushels of peas, beans, and oats. He also owned some sheep and produced butter from the milk of thirty cows. His whole plantation was valued at \$16,000.⁴³

Although cotton was the chief money crop of the small farmers of the state, it is impossible to determine how much

⁴¹Ibid., Book 7, Entry 358.

⁴²Ibid., Book 5, Entry 288.

⁴³Manuscript Census of 1850, Schedule IV.

of this crop came from farms rather than from plantations.⁴⁴ The majority of these small producers of the fleecy staple lived in the uplands where there were small planters, yeomen with a few slaves, as well as non-slaveholders producing cotton. These small producers undoubtedly contributed a sizable percentage of the total cotton production of the state.⁴⁵

Although the plantation was the dominant agricultural unit in the production of sugar cane, it should not be thought that no sugar was produced on the small and medium-sized farms of the sugar belt, for although the production figures of the farms with fewer than one hundred acres were not large or important, a few small farmers refused to part with their sugar land, and continued to make sugar with their own horse drawn mills or at the mills of their neighbors.⁴⁶

All of the petty agriculturists and small planters did not rely on sugar cane and cotton for their money crop, but some grew rice, a few produced a little tobacco, and some living near New Orleans or close to the many small villages

⁴⁴See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 102.

⁴⁵The Oak Uplands and pine hills and flats contributed 21 per cent of the total production of the state. See Agriculture in 1860, 67.

⁴⁶Gitterson, Sugar Country, 50.

of the state produced vegetables for sale in the markets.

Louisiana was not as important as a producer of rice before the Civil War as it was after the war. The entire production of the state was 6,331,257 pounds in 1860 with Plaquemines Parish being the leading producer with 4,635,000 pounds. Only four other parishes exceeded 100,000 pounds, and only two others produced more than 50,000 pounds.⁴⁷

Rice was produced on small farms, many of which fronted on the Mississippi; however, rice was grown by many people along bayous Lafourche, Teche, Terrebonne, and other small streams of South and Southwestern Louisiana. The majority of the rice was produced on farms less than fifty acres in size with very few if any larger than 200 acres.⁴⁸ Usually without the help of slaves, the fields were plowed in March, and then unselected seed was sowed. The land was flooded by a crude system of ditches and water gates. The rice was threshed by flailing with sticks or by having animals trample it under foot, and it was hulled by hand in wooden mortars. The surplus was sent to New Orleans where

⁴⁷Agriculture in 1860, 67. Those producing more than 100,000 pounds were St. Charles, 821,385; Lafourche, 381,550; St. John the Baptist, 134,600; Terrebonne, 131,016; and those growing more than 50,000 pounds were St. Landry, 59,640; and Assumption, 50,800.

⁴⁸DeBow's Review, XVI (1856), 290-292.

it sold for lower prices than the superior South Carolina product, although it was said that the Creoles preferred the Louisiana rice because it was sweeter.⁴⁹

The small landholders in the vicinity of New Orleans had little difficulty in earning from one hundred to four or five hundred dollars annually from the sale of vegetables, while those living nearer to towns and villages such as Opelousas, Franklin, Donaldsonville, Thibodaux, Shreveport, Alexandria, and Houma could also earn cash through the marketing of their truck.⁵⁰ Some of the residents of St. James Parish, which was noted for its culture and cure of perique tobacco, could make fairly large returns on their investments due to the demand for this product.⁵¹ Most of these tobacco farms were very small with usually from two to fifteen or twenty acres improved and under cultivation.⁵²

In parts of Louisiana, particularly the Attakapas Region, but also in the easternmost and westernmost sections of the state, many people earned their living

⁴⁹See DeBow's Review, VI (1848), 53-57; XVI (1856), 290-292; Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 682; C. Nordhoff, The Cotton States. . . . (New York, 1876), 69.

⁵⁰Opelousas Patriot, Opelousas Courier, Houma Ceres, Thibodaux Minerva, Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, Baton Rouge Gazette or any of the other ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁵¹DeBow's Review, I (1866), 172.

⁵²Manuscript Census of 1850, Schedule IV.

from raising cattle. In 1833, the immense prairies in the western part of the state supported large numbers of cattle, and at that time there were several men with over 15,000 head of cattle and over 2,000 horses and mules. Although the majority of the people subsisted by raising horses and cattle, some also raised sheep from which they obtained excellent mutton but poor wool. At that time, the majority of the horses were of the Andalusian and Numidian breed--sleek, slender and elegantly formed, and spirited in movement.⁵³

By the 1850's the range in the cattle producing area of western Louisiana was much poorer than it had been earlier and was considered so crowded that it was thought that grazers would have to find another place for their cattle within a few years or their animals would starve.⁵⁴ One resident said that the cattle had degenerated within his recollection and that no pains were taken to improve the breeds. The reason given was that, "People, now-a-days, had got proud, and when they had a fine colt would break him for a carriage or riding-horse, leaving only the common, scurvy sort to run with the mares."⁵⁵ This assertion may have been right for by the middle of the 1850's the horses

⁵³Prichard, "Some Interesting Glimpses," 35-36.

⁵⁴Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 404.

⁵⁵Ibid.

were "wretched in appearance and the grass short and coarse."⁵⁶ Although the prairie was thought crowded, the number of cattle grazing there was probably less than formerly for many of the herders had moved into the better range lands of Texas.⁵⁷

There was some truth in the statement made by Olmsted concerning the movement of Louisianians to Texas, for the editor of an Opelousas newspaper, after writing a glowing description of the beauty and agricultural wealth of the Attakapas Region, added:

. . . it has always appeared to us very strange that so many Louisianians have migrated to Texas, that much overrated and magnified State. Texas is, doubtless, a superior country for grazing stock, but in every other respect Louisiana has the preference. We hear on every hand our good citizens journeying to this Land of Promise. And indeed, to such an extravagant height has this disposition been carried, that with some Texas is looked upon as a kind of Canaan, where the turmoils, sufferings and sorrows that human flesh is heir to in every clime will cease to be realities, but become numbered with things that were.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the observation that the people were not interested in the bettering of the blood lines of their cattle does not seem to be absolutely accurate, for in 1860, for example, one Kentuckian came into the Opelousas area with a herd of pure-blooded cattle and horses which were

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 63-64.

⁵⁸Opelousas Patriot, April 28, 1855.

successfully offered for stud.⁵⁹

But there can be little doubt that the Attakapas Region was declining in importance as a cattle producing area. Not many years before the 1850's the wealth of the Opelousas country had been in the "immense herds of cattle" which roamed over the rich pastures, and at that time a few gins were sufficient for all the planters along the bayous; "no sugar house set up its volumes of smoke [and] One little steamboat, in a short period of time . . . did all the carrying trade" of the area,⁶⁰ but "Today [January, 1860], these immense herds of cattle are slowly fading from the prairies, and our citizens are turning their attention to agriculture. Erelong what was once called a grazing country may justly be denominated an agricultural one. Even now . . . the golden grain ripens in many well-tilled fields; the cotton whitens over many a broad acre; the spears of tall sugar cane wave."⁶¹

In 1860, it was thought that if the residents of the Attakapas Region would pay more attention to their fruit trees, they would produce crops that would "compare favorably with those of any part of the United States."⁶² If

⁵⁹Opelousas Courier, February 18, 1860.

⁶⁰Ibid., January 14, 1860.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., August 18, 1860.

the publicists of the region had achieved their goal, the prairies of Louisiana would no longer have been "one of the meadows of America."⁶³

The families residing in the Attakapas Region and on the pine hills and flats of the extreme eastern and western portions of the state, although relying on livestock as their principal means of subsistence, did try to follow the rule of self-sufficiency by producing small crops of sweet potatoes and corn as well as cattle. Many also produced a few pounds of rice, but fewer raised cotton.⁶⁴

In addition to the above population groups, there were many poor Louisianians living along the fringes of the Gulf Coast dredging for oysters and fishing for a livelihood. Along the banks of the streams lived swampers or woodsmen who earned their living by chopping drift from the streams and trees from the woods into fuel for the passing steamboats and to sell to planters. Residing along these rivers and bayous were fishermen of whom one New Englander has left an interesting description: "There is a kind of fish caught here called cat fish which nobody thinks fitting to eat but the Spaniards over the river, and there they sit with their dogs all day long in the sun, close to the water's edge, fishing and singing at their

⁶³Darby, Geographical Description, 86.

⁶⁴Manuscript Census of 1850. Schedule IV.

work. I love dearly to hear them; in the evening they build large fires all along the bank for decoys, they look beautifully in a dark night."⁶⁵

Some of the Louisianians who made their living from lumbering were in reality law-breakers as they cut cypress and other logs from the swamplands which belonged to the state. It has been said that the cypress lumber industry started with the passage of federal legislation in 1849 which granted to the state all of the swamp and overflowed lands which were not suitable for cultivation.⁶⁶ By 1855 the swamplers had become so brazen in their violation of the law that the state legislature enacted legislation which imposed a fine of \$500 and imprisonment not to exceed one year for cutting timber from the swamplands of the state.⁶⁷ In spite of the penalties the woodsmen continued to cut logs and float them in the bayous and rivers of the state; lumbermen ignored the warnings of the officials and refused to pay any attention to letters asking them to take up title to the lands. The refusal to comply with the laws caused the government to confiscate many of the logs on the

⁶⁵Augusta to Sarah W. Simpson, February 10, 1851. Anonymous letter.

⁶⁶Rachel Norgress, "The History of the Cypress Lumber Industry in Louisiana," 13, an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1936.

⁶⁷Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1855, 209.

Calcasieu River and to send boats on the Atchafalaya River and its tributaries to try to force lumbermen to take title to the land.⁶⁸ In March, 1855, the state legislature enacted a law providing for the sale of the swamp and overflowed land, but due to the inaccessibility of the land and the ease in violating the law little of the land was taken up under this law until after the Civil War.⁶⁹

What were the prospects of this "struggling majority" of Louisiana ruralists? Truthfully, the future seemed dim for with advancing land prices and the rise of the value of slaves, it appears that the yeomen slave holder and the non-slaveholder had little chance to obtain the land and slaves necessary to climb the agricultural ladder to the position of prosperous planter and slaveholder.⁷⁰ Most of the really fertile land that was not under cultivation or owned by planters had been obtained by speculators who held it waiting for the building of a railroad or for the opportunity to unload it on some ambitious small planter.⁷¹

⁶⁸Franklin Planters' Banner, May 10, 1851.

⁶⁹Norgress, "The History of the Cypress Lumber Industry in Louisiana," 50.

⁷⁰See pages 204-208, 218-219.

⁷¹Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 26, 1857. Olmsted, A. Journey Through Texas, 404. Unknown to St. John R. Liddell, January 15, 1853. Liddell Papers. N. Gillis to St. John R. Liddell, March 7, 1856. Liddell Papers. Johnson Jordan to St. John R. Liddell, May 7, 1856. Liddell Papers. New Orleans Picayune, January 8, 1860.

Actually what happened in many instances when the valuable land was removed from the reach of the small agriculturist was that he turned to the inferior public land that was available at prices less than one dollar, but unfortunately this was usually unsuited to staple agriculture because of its infertility or location in dense woods or undrained swamps.⁷² Therefore, what land the non-slaveholder and the yeomen slaveholder could afford could often not be used for financial gain. Olmsted commented on the number of deserted cabins and "plantations" in the western part of the state and explained that the former residents had given up their land and moved elsewhere in the state or into Texas.⁷³ The same traveler told of people leaving the prairies of the state for Texas, and this fact was unhappily admitted by the editor of the Opelousas Patriot.⁷⁴

Some residents of the Opelousas region said that land in that area was being sold for cheaper prices than land in the northern and northwestern parts of the state,⁷⁵ but if it were cheaper it was still beyond the financial

⁷²See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 82-83.

⁷³Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 62.

⁷⁴Ibid., 63-64. Opelousas Patriot, April 28, 1855.

⁷⁵Opelousas Courier, January 14, 1860. Opelousas Patriot, April 28, August 11, 1855.

means of those wanting to acquire land.⁷⁶ Further, some people who were trying to sell sugar lands of inferior variety complained that thirty dollars an acre was too little to ask because one hundred dollars could be made from the soil each year,⁷⁷ but as with the allegedly cheaper prairie land what good was the seemingly good bargain if the smaller agriculturist could not raise enough money to purchase the land.

The 1850's saw the yeoman excluded from the plantation system not only by the lack of means to acquire land, but also by his inability to purchase slaves. By the middle of the fifties, slaves were worth more money than the average farmer had or could borrow. It has been said that with five slaves, a yeoman was lucky to clear \$150 annually from his cotton⁷⁸ and although this was a low estimate, it can be readily seen that with slaves costing up to \$1,500 and even to \$2,200 for each prime hand that not many slaves could be purchased by the yeoman. Another factor hindering the advance of the farmer into the planter ranks was the rising cost of hiring slaves, for by 1860 the annual cost of an additional laborer had mounted to a point where the expense

⁷⁶See pages 191-193.

⁷⁷Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 82.

⁷⁸Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, I, 18.

was equal to fifteen or twenty per cent of the selling price of the slave.⁷⁹

Therefore, there were two reasons why many residents and immigrants were leaving parts of Louisiana for Texas and other states: the exorbitant price of land and the prohibitive selling price of slaves. However, one newspaper editor of New Orleans took issue with the belief that slavery was the basic factor driving immigrants from Louisiana; he thought that the primary cause of the movement from and through Louisiana was the high cost of land alone, for he felt that these people left the South in general and Louisiana in particular because they could buy rich productive lands in the North for a very cheap price.⁸⁰

Many Louisianians never bothered to purchase any land at all; they simply squatted on the public domain or on the swamplands in the rear of some of the larger landholdings or on the unoccupied portions of land in various parts of the state.⁸¹ The lot of the squatter was not a

⁷⁹Frederic Bancroft, Slave-Trading in the Old South (Baltimore, 1931), 160-161.

⁸⁰New Orleans Crescent, June 15, 1860.

⁸¹See Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 392; Belisle, History of Sabine Parish, 77; S. Marchand, The Story of Ascension Parish (Baton Rouge, 1931), 100. The problem of the squatters is still important in parts of Louisiana, and some of the lumber companies often send out agents to collect a token rent from the squatters on their land.

happy one, and he often had his home sold out from under him. Some of the land upon which these people squatted was of great agricultural value,⁸² but most of it, except where valuable timber was located, was valued at from twenty-five to fifty cents an acre.⁸³

Since the census did not count the people occupying land without title or lease, it is not possible to determine the number of squatters, but "If it is assumed that every agrarian property in rural Louisiana was either operated or supervised by one free family, then three out of five families owned no land in 1860."⁸⁴ Actually this proportion is excessive, for there can be little doubt that many who owned no land were hired laborers or self-employed persons who were not squatters at all, but "the landless proletariat must have been numerous indeed."⁸⁵

Obviously the decade of the fifties was not one of opportunity for the farmer. The possibility of purchasing land and slaves, the two essentials required for the satisfactory production of staple crops, was denied him by the excessive cost of these necessities. Further, the possibility of earning enough cash to purchase slaves in the future

⁸²The Houmas Grant in Ascension Parish, an alluvial parish.

⁸³Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 392.

⁸⁴Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 86.

⁸⁵Ibid.

was lessened by the rising price of hired slaves. It would appear that the farmer had been effectively prevented from entrance into the planter class. The question of what was to be done by this unfortunate many was obvious, either they were going to submit to the system as it was operating or they were going to remove themselves from its strangle hold on their future. Those who moved to the swamps and hills and who turned to strictly subsistence farming had given up, while those who remained in the plantation areas had hopes of some way, some day, acquiring the wherewithal to advance; the chances of their success were slim. Others with more foresight, thinking that the system was stronger than they, moved out of the state to try their luck in other regions. Some took their slaves to newer agricultural areas where they thought they could prosper better on the more easily obtainable land,⁸⁶ but the truth seems to be that the farmer had had his day in ante-bellum Louisiana before the 1850's, and if he were going to remain in the state, his position, which in many instances was far from miserable, was bound to deteriorate.

⁸⁶See pages 17-21.

CHAPTER X

The problem of hired labor on Louisiana plantations has been discussed from the viewpoint of the employer, but such a discussion does not present the complete picture because the employee himself was confronted with problems and difficulties that affected his efficiency.

It has been claimed that the most important of all hired laborers, the overseers, received extravagant salaries,¹ but actually the wages seem to be anything rather than excessive. One historian who made a comprehensive study of sugar plantations felt that the overseer was "well paid for his labors" since he received on the average \$500 to \$700 for supervising a labor force of from fifty to one hundred slaves, \$800 to \$1,200 for overseeing the routine on a plantation worked by 150 to 200 slaves, and in exceptional cases as high as \$1,500 annually for his efforts on the larger plantations of the Sugar Bowl of Louisiana, with \$1,000 being the most common salary received.² In addition to a salary the overseer was given a house, some

¹Frederick L. Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country (New York, 1863), 57.

²Sitterson, Sugar Country, 198.

of the produce of the plantation, vegetables, milk, butter, sugar, and molasses.³

Without considering the complex responsibilities of the overseer, these wages would seem adequate, but when the multitudinous duties⁴ and responsibilities of this administrator are kept in mind, it would seem that they were hardly adequate. Furthermore it must be noted that only nine per cent of the Louisiana slaveholders held from 50 to 1,000 slaves while thirty per cent of the slaveholders possessed from ten to forty-nine slaves, and sixty-one per cent held from one to nine of the sable bondsmen.⁵ Thus of the 17,864 rural slaveholders in 1860, only slightly over 1,600 held enough slaves to pay over \$800 per year to their most important assistant.⁶ Therefore, the majority of the overseers must have earned several hundred dollars less than \$1,000 per year. In one of the sugar parishes there were eighty-one overseers in 1860 but only twenty-two slaveholders with more than one hundred slaves, and of this twenty-two, twelve possessed less than one hundred and

³Ibid.

⁴See Chapter IV.

⁵Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 320.

⁶Computed from Agriculture in 1860, 230. There were 2,989 overseers in the state of Louisiana in 1860. Eighth Census, 197.

fifty slaves.⁷

One large sugar planter, who owned land along the Mississippi River and who possessed 175 slaves in April, 1857,⁸ paid to his overseer only four hundred dollars in 1856, although he had paid as much as three hundred dollars in 1842 when he had only twenty-seven slaves.⁹ During the years from 1842 to 1857, the salaries paid to overseers on this plantation were little affected by the number of slaves supervised. In 1848, the planter paid to one overseer slightly over \$600 for his services, in 1849 he paid to another \$700, and in 1851 yet another received \$800.¹⁰ The highest wage paid to an overseer on this plantation was \$1,200 which was paid in 1861 when the planter owned over 190 slaves.¹¹

A Teche country planter hired an inexperienced overseer to supervise the cutting and loading of the cane on his plantation during the grinding season at a salary of \$50 per month. The planter felt that the man, though completely inexperienced in the cultivation of cane, could safely be

⁷Computed from the Manuscript of 1860. Schedules I and II.

⁸Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 192.

⁹Plantation Book, 1856. Randolph Papers. Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 182.

¹⁰Based on the plantation books for the years mentioned. Randolph Papers.

¹¹Plantation Book, 1861. Randolph Papers. Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 183.

recommended for any overseeing job paying \$600 annually and requested that if any such opening occur, he be notified.¹² At the same time he hired for himself an experienced overseer--one with an excellent reputation as "a man of business" for the same salary, \$600 per year. This new overseer was replacing one who had been paid \$600 for one year's service. The newly hired overseer was a married man without a family--he had lost his children through sickness--and he was to "furnish his own servants in all except what is raised on the place in the way of vegetables & meal."¹³ Actually this planter was very fortunate as the overseer agreed to allow the employer to hire his "No. 1 negro man @ \$150.00."¹⁴

A planter who contemplated selling his plantation wrote: "In answer to your inquiries I can State that I keep a Strict account of the Expenditures and income from my plantation situated on Bayou Teche near Franklin St Mary, I work nominally thirty Seven hands including all above 13 years old. . . . My income for 1848 was \$9041.93 1849 \$12835.16 The commission of Sales-Insurance & navigation and the usual charges on Sales with the Exchange deducted or added as the case may have been--I do not live on

¹²F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid. A price which was much less than average for a year's service from a prime field hand.

the plantation and pay my manager \$800. and furnish him with house & provisions &c."¹⁵ This planter in two years netted over \$22,000 from a plantation on which he did not live or in any way supervise. The overseer apparently had complete charge of the entire operation, and was responsible not only for successful planting, but also for all of the plantation activities. For this he received \$1,600, a house, and some provisions. The payment received by this obviously capable man in no way approaches what may be properly termed "extravagant," nor can it be called adequate. Managerial ability, as displayed by this overseer, was worth far more than this Teche planter paid. Of course, the planter did own the land, and he did carefully check the records of "Expenditures and income."

The owner of several plantations along bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne usually paid to his overseers salaries ranging from \$1,200 to \$1,500 per year, but this planter seldom remained on his plantation, and with the exception of a brief period of two years the plantations were operated on an absentee basis until 1856. Contact with the work done on the plantations was usually maintained through correspondence with the overseers, although attempts were made to visit the plantations during the grinding

¹⁵John Moore to John F. Miller, October 10, 1850. Weeks Collection.

seasons. If however there happened to be any fever in the region, the planter would forego his visits even during this the most important of all periods on sugar plantations.¹⁶

When it is noted that overseers who managed the plantations as well as supervising their routine were in charge of not only the slaves, but were also sometimes responsible for the hiring and firing of carpenters, engineers, sugar boilers, and brickmasons as well as ditchers and other unskilled labor, the importance of their position is more readily recognized.¹⁷ The duties of the overseer-managers were made more difficult by the necessity of keeping a rather complete record of everything that was done so that their efforts could be judged by the employer. This record often included the number of plows working, the number of Negroes engaged at all of the various jobs, and the amount of work done.¹⁸ Not only was this chore time consuming, but also it caused trouble for the employee because the planter could not possibly understand some of the reasons for failure to accomplish more than was completed when he was not on the plantation. It is possible that some of the

¹⁶Based on Wingfield, "The Minor Plantations," 29-30, 49-50.

¹⁷William Lourd to John Moore, September 2, 30, 1859. Weeks Collection. E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, March 5, 1860. Gurley Papers.

¹⁸Plantation diaries and journals of the Weeks, Randolph, and Minor papers.

overseers discharged from their jobs were fired because of such misunderstandings. Often, too, the overseer was not the most articulate of ante-bellum Louisianians, and his attempts at explanation may have caused more confusion and dissatisfaction than anything else.

Since the overseer did not usually have the authority to purchase what was needed for the plantation, his job was sometimes made more difficult by the employer's failure to send or purchase what was needed. For example in September, 1860, one overseer wrote his employer that "no negro clothing came as I expected. it is so late in the season that I am anxious about the clothes. please let me know if you have ordered them."¹⁹ Earlier in the same year he had complained that "The Ploughs, & hoes you promised to send me have not come yet. Please send me Pork also, I have only enough for this week & part of the next."²⁰

Another factor that must be taken into consideration when discussing the competence and efficiency of the overseer was his position in regard to the slaves. "He did not have the prestige of the property holder; and none

¹⁹William Lourd to John Moore, September 16, 1860. Weeks Collection.

²⁰Ibid., January 3, 1860.

recognized the fact sooner than the slaves whom he was expected to direct."²¹ At times, the overseer had to maintain his authority by force or threats of force, and the slave always had the right to appeal to the master. However a good overseer would not be checked too often by an employer,²² but there were instances when the complaints of the slaves led to the discharge of overseers. Sitterson cites an excellent example of the dismissal of an overseer due to complaints of the slaves. The incident occurred early on a Saturday morning in July, 1857. The overseer ordered one of the slaves, John Smith, "to hurry up more or I would take the responsibility of helping him to do so with the cowhide." Instead of hurrying, the slave told the overseer that he did not "care a dam for any white man and would not do any more until his master . . . came home." The overseer who realized the significance of this statement called some of the other slaves to help him with the recalcitrant laborer, but the slave struck his fellow bondsmen and forced them to release him. The slave then turned his attention to the overseer and grabbed at his throat but was thrown off and was struck several times with a paddle. The overseer said, "and had I of killed him I

²¹Moody, "Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations,"
 21. See also DeBow's Review, XXX (1856), 277.

²²Russell, My Diary North and South, 92-107.

should not of felt eney conscientious scruples on the matter."²³ Unfortunately for the overseer, the employer regarded the action taken as improper, and he discharged the overseer several days after the incident.²⁴

Another undesirable feature about overseeing was the inferior social status that went with the position.²⁵ This relegation to a lower social status was made more difficult because of the close contact between the overseer and the family of the planter. However when a man of good family background decided to try overseeing for a living, his family connections aided him to obtain a job but did not usually allow him to move in the same social circle as did his employer. The career of a young man of good family who turned to overseeing can be vaguely traced by following the movements of T. K. Metcalfe, a somewhat shiftless, unstable cousin²⁶ of Jane Liddell Randolph, the wife of John Hampden Randolph and the daughter of Judge Moses Liddell of the Teche country.

²³Based on Residence Plantation Journal, July, 1857, as quoted in Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 196-197.

²⁴Ibid., 197.

²⁵Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country, 57. Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 199.

²⁶The statements concerning Metcalfe's character are not the opinion of the writer, but are those of St. John R. Liddell, another cousin of Metcalfe. T. K. Metcalfe to St. John R. Liddell, November 5, 1851. Liddell Papers.

This young man after piling lumber in a saw mill for "four-bits" a day and laboring in a carpenter's shop at the same rate of pay, overseered for a small planter for one dollar a day.²⁷ By virtue of this experience and the fact that he had helped Randolph take off his crop,²⁸ Metcalfe obtained a job as overseer on a sugar plantation for \$600 for the first year.²⁹ Exuberant over his new job the young man wrote to his cousin that "most overseers on sugar plantations dont make anything for one or two years. . . . [But] I am willing to bet half a dime that I will get a thousand or twelve hundred dollars the second year. Some planter[s] here give as much as three thousand dollars per year."³⁰

Young Metcalfe was able to move with complete freedom in the homes of the Randolphs and the Liddells, but there is no mention of his visiting the homes of any of the planters surrounding the plantations of his employers.³¹ Metcalfe's social position was different from that of the great majority of the overseers, but perhaps it was indicative of the separation between planter and overseer, regardless of family connections.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., October 16, 1851.

²⁹Ibid., November 5, 1851.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., October 16, November 5, 1851.

There remains the important question of the overseer's future; what could he expect hard work and faithful service to bring to him? Actually very little, for if he did not own a few slaves before 1850, the possibility of his getting many after the opening of that decade were few. If he possessed no land, he certainly could not have afforded to purchase much of the good land that was so demanded by the planters. The overseer could be certain of one thing, and that was that he would always have some type of job as long as plantations were worked by slaves. His was the one position for which the slave could not be satisfactorily trained, although some planters did use drivers instead of overseers and some went so far as to use Negro overseers.³²

The attempts of an overseer to turn to a more profitable occupation is clearly depicted in the letters of Jefferson McKinney. In February, 1850, McKinney decided to quit overseering and to buy a livery stable in Alexandria for \$1,125, \$750 down and three years to pay the balance.³³ In March of the same year he told his brother that he had "bid on the Natchitoches and Opelousas [Opelousas] male routs which if I git one or both I wish you to go in with

³²See Opelousas Patriot, March 29, 1856; Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 40-41; Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 103-104.

³³Jefferson McKinney to Jephtha McKinney, February 20, 1850. McKinney (Jephtha) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

me."³⁴ Two months later the ex-overseer was "yet living in Alexandria tho not making but verry little at present as times in hard money scarce and corn and hay verry dear tho I think that I can make money this fall as there is no other stable kept in this plase."³⁵

Less than a month later he was "intirely ruined;" he had lost his house and livery stable in a fire that destroyed much of the area surrounding his place. He moved his family from Alexandria to Harrisonburg in Catahoula Parish and requested that his brother lend him money to add to that given to him by some of his friends so that he could start anew in another business.³⁶

After moving to Catahoula Parish he obtained the contract to carry mail once a week from Harrisonburg to Monroe, but dissatisfied with this, he petitioned to be allowed to carry the mail three times a week.³⁷ He insisted that all of his misfortunes had not caused him to lose heart. In December, he was awarded the contract to carry the mail three times a week as he had requested, and also he was granted the job of carrying the mail from Columbia to Homer

³⁴Ibid., March 30, 1850.

³⁵Ibid., May 31, 1850.

³⁶Ibid., June 25, 1850.

³⁷Ibid., August 7, 1850.

once a week. Due to this additional work he moved his residence to Columbia because he felt that the move would out his expenses.³⁸

In February, he happily recorded that he was delivering the mail to Homer twice a week and had been appointed "Debuty post master of this plase."³⁹ He was certain that he was on his way to better days because he could see no reason why he could not make "one thousn dollars per annum" after he got his family in good health.⁴⁰ In November, 1851, he was elected constable of his ward,⁴¹ and in February of the following year, his mail route was enlarged, and he was appointed controller of the public ferry.⁴² He felt so prosperous he bought a house in town.⁴³ But for some unknown reason, Jefferson McKinney, who had appeared to be doing very well in Columbia, decided in July, 1852, that he was "going to leave this country" and was moving to "red river to live."⁴⁴

³⁸Ibid., December 15, 1850.

³⁹Columbia is located in Caldwell Parish.

⁴⁰Jefferson McKinney to Jephtha McKinney, February 21, 1851. McKinney Papers.

⁴¹Ibid., November 4, 1851.

⁴²Ibid., February 5, 1852.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Jefferson McKinney to Mrs. S. A. McKinney, July 4, 1852. McKinney Papers.

Two years later in reply to his brother's request to return home,⁴⁵ he answered: "I wish I was able to do so but for me to return their and settle and go to farming and hav to use the plough and hoe my self I cannot think of such a way of making a support for my family as long as I can git a situation as an overseeor in the first place my constitution will not admit of it I would be verry glad if I could git a situation any where in that section of conty to oversee and if you can ingage me a place for \$500 or 600 a year I wil willingly return home or to any of adjoining parishes."⁴⁶

The next year (1855) McKinney was back at his old trade of overseering and was employed in Natchitoches Parish where he was very discontented because he felt that his employer gave him "every thing to atten to my self."⁴⁷ By July, he decided to give up overseering once more, and thought that he would "establish a grocery store in Alexandria where I am convinced that I can make more than I can at overseeing if I was shore that I could git a buisness in St. Helena I would willingly return home but that I am not as to overseeor I can get a recermendation from

⁴⁵St. Helena Parish.

⁴⁶Jefferson McKinney to Jephtha McKinney, June 4, 1854. McKinney Papers.

⁴⁷Ibid., May 27, 1855.

more than 20 men here that is acquainted with me but it is a buisness that does not suit me I prefur buisness that is more active such as trading for diferant reasons unworth relating."⁴⁸

However, he changed his mind and decided to stay on the plantation in Natchitoches Parish for a year or two more. He purchased a "negro girl" for which he agreed to pay \$1,000, "one third cash and the balance one and two years from the first of May."⁴⁹ He believed that he was paying a high price,⁵⁰ but he saw that he had been trying to save money for several years and never had anything at the end of the year; therefore he optimistically concluded that going into debt to acquire something useful instead of spending his hard-earned money on things he could "do without" would help him in the future. The slave was sixteen years old and "wel grone," and it was his opinion that if she had children she would "be cheap in a few years and if she does not she wil always be a deer negro." He further rationalized, "Besides it is getting time that I should begin to think of ole age as my hed is fast

⁴⁸Ibid., July 22, 1855.

⁴⁹Ibid., April 21, 1856.

⁵⁰He was getting no bargain as the selling price of a prime field hand varied from \$1,200 in the southern part of the state to \$2,200 in the area north of the Red River. New Orleans Crescent, November 17, 1859.

silvering and if ever I can git her paid for and then git a boy I intend then to quit Red river and return to St Helena or sumwhere East of the Mississippi river and settle my self for life which I hope I will be able to do before many more year roles aroun."⁵¹

Nine months later, his hopes for the acquisition of a male slave and his dreams of an easy life during his old age forgotten, McKinney resigned his overseering job and moved to Alexandria to open a store. He had no idea how long he would remain a store-keeper, but he had hopes of remaining in business for at least one year and perhaps longer if his venture were successful.⁵² By May, 1857, the former overseer was so pleased with his business that he added a supply of dry goods to his inventory,⁵³ and in August he expanded further when he added a bar to his establishment.⁵⁴

Sometime between August 6, 1857, and September 20, 1860, McKinney lost his business and started to earn his living by serving as acting constable and deputy sheriff. He was deeply dissatisfied with this situation and thought, "if I can git a situation for next year I am going to

⁵¹Jefferson McKinney to Jephtha McKinney, April 21, 1856. McKinney Papers.

⁵²Ibid., January 24, 1857.

⁵³Ibid., May 13, 1857.

⁵⁴Ibid., August 6, 1857.

overseeing again."⁵⁵ He complained that public service "does not more than suport my family and I wish to try and make something more than a suport as my hed is geting grey."⁵⁶ Unfortunately he was unable to get a position as an overseer, and by January, 1861, he was having a difficult time because he had lost his position as constable and had only his income as deputy sheriff.⁵⁷

The story of this overseer's search for security and advancement might well be similar to that of others trying to make a start in business during the decade of the 1850's. The series of letters very definitely shows that this overseer considered himself a cut above the farmer who worked with his hands, for the idea of a return to farm life was repulsive to him, and although he claimed to dislike overseeing, he much preferred it to toil in the fields. Also is seen the desire to own slaves, a yearning that was not only foolish, but impossible, for this man who was willing to take a job for five hundred or six hundred dollars a year was attempting to buy slaves when the selling price of a young female in his locality was one thousand dollars, an amount equal to approximately two full years of

⁵⁵Ibid., September 20, 1860.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., January, 1861.

his pay. Undoubtedly, many of his troubles were due to his ambition, but it would appear that satisfaction would have forced him, as it would any other person, to remain in the rut of overseeing or whatever else he was doing.

The statements made regarding the problems and difficulties confronting the overseers, paint a darker picture than actually existed, just as the complaints of the planters lead to erroneous conclusions concerning the reliability of the overseers. It should be noted that, in all probability, many of the planters that were fortunate enough to have capable overseers failed to record their faithful service, but those with the less competent aides rarely passed an opportunity to inform their relatives and friends of the difficulties that they faced. It is probable that the true picture of the life of the overseer in Louisiana rested somewhere between that of the successful man who saved a little money and bought a small amount of land and men like McKinney who tried and failed.

There were overseers who were able to better themselves financially and socially during the decade of the fifties,⁵⁸ but the advancement of these workers was not as easily accomplished as in the years before 1850.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Manuscript Censuses of 1850 and 1860, Schedules I.

⁵⁹Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 76-120.

Furthermore, most of the gains made during the ten years between 1850 and 1860 were not large, although it cannot be denied that any acquisition of land and slaves or even one slave was an advance.⁶⁰ Some of the overseers who purchased slaves bought them with the idea of hiring them to their employers, for by doing this they could secure additional capital with which to keep expanding their holdings.⁶¹

Some of the overseers who called themselves planters with plantations were nothing more than yeomen farmers owning a few slaves and very small acreage. In 1852 one overseer petitioned his employer for a leave of absence to enable him to put up the seed cane growing on a place that he had purchased. This place, "a small sugar plantation," was to be worked with the two slaves owned by the overseer. The overseer had no difficulty getting released because the planter had realized the necessity of his being on his new plantation and had already planned to grant to him a leave of absence for the remainder of the season.⁶²

The overseer was, in general, however, an underpaid,

⁶⁰Manuscript Censuses of 1850 and 1860. Schedules I.

⁶¹F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, September 28, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers. Franklin Planters' Banner, February 10, 1848.

⁶²F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, September 28, 1852. Liddell Papers.

underprivileged necessity on the plantations of the state. His position, next to the owner's and sometime not even preceded by the employer's, was the most responsible on the plantation. He had not the benefits of the social prestige or the security that should have been allotted to one with such supervisory and managerial authority, and at times the word of the valuable human chattels was given precedence to his in elementary matters of discipline and supervision.

Also vital to the successful production of sugar were the sugar boilers and engineers. These hired laborers were part-time personnel, and for that reason were usually paid wages that were slightly higher on a monthly basis than were those of the overseers.⁶³ Seldom were these two skilled employees on the plantations for more than three or four months of the year. Both the sugar boiler and the engineer were technicians who could not be easily hired, for although there were more sugar boilers toward the end of the ante-bellum period than earlier, really skillful sugar makers were never over abundant, and the engineers were usually not native Louisianians but residents of other states who came to Louisiana.⁶⁴

In rare instances, the engineer was mechanic and

⁶³See Weeks Collection and Randolph Papers. Sit-
terson, "Hired Labor," 201.

⁶⁴See pages 76-80.

sugar boilers,⁶⁵ but usually he was hired simply to keep the machinery going, and often it was stipulated in the agreement between the planter and the worker that no salary would be paid if the equipment did not perform satisfactorily.⁶⁶ When the engineer served in the dual capacity, he received slightly higher pay, \$125 to \$150 per month for the grinding season, but in most cases his salary ranged from seventy-five dollars to one hundred dollars monthly.⁶⁷

With the development of more complicated machinery for use in the manufacture of sugar, the position of the engineer became more and more important, but at the same time the more delicate machinery required more skilled attention than even skilled midwesterners could give to it. This led to the practice of sending more and more of the broken parts to New Orleans for repair and replacement.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the less skilled of the engineers, the mechanics, found it increasingly difficult to obtain and hold positions on the larger plantations, although their skill had been more than sufficient to meet the requirements on the smaller

⁶⁵Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 201.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Plantation Book, 1847-1848. Randolph Papers. F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers. Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 201.

⁶⁸Postell, "John Hampden Randolph," 191.

plantations.⁶⁹

The position of the engineer was rather secure for extant evidence reveals no slave who acted as an engineer on any of the important sugar plantations of the state,⁷⁰ although undoubtedly some were working as aides in the sugar houses and probably learning enough to be of assistance to their masters in times of emergency. Since most engineers came to Louisiana during the grinding season, the plantation was a boon to them for it offered extra employment. They probably were not overly concerned with the price of land or slaves in Louisiana, and therefore their futures were affected by the plantation system only so far as it provided extra income.

When the knowledge of sugar making became more widespread, the wages paid to the sugar boilers began to decline.⁷¹ By the 1850's their wages averaged from seventy-five cents to \$1.25 for each hogshead of sugar manufactured with a maximum set at around \$400 or \$500 per year.⁷²

⁶⁹G. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection. Ibid.

⁷⁰Based on a study of the plantation records in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. See Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 77-117.

⁷¹In the early nineteenth century sugar makers were paid as much as \$1,000 to take off a crop. Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 200.

⁷²Minor Plantation Diary, 1855. Minor Papers. Ibid.

However, on some of the smaller plantations, the sugar boilers were paid as little as fifty cents per hogshead with no limit being set on the amount that could be earned.⁷³ One large planter also paid less than one dollar a hogshead and although his crops usually exceeded 400 hogsheads, seldom paid his sugar boiler much over \$300 a grinding.⁷⁴

The practice of hiring "kettle hands" who were paid small monthly salaries to act as assistant sugar boilers was not unknown. At least one planter employed a kettle hand for a longer period than the grinding because he found him useful as a brickmason and carpenter.⁷⁵

The sugarmakers and the engineers as the overseers were subject to immediate dismissal, but it was not as probable that this would happen to them for it was very difficult to hire these workers during the grinding season when they were most in demand. However there were instances when the planter became angry and dismissed these highly skilled laborers.⁷⁶ Most of the time the sugar boilers and

⁷³F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1853. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁴Plantation Books, 1847-1857. Randolph Papers.

⁷⁵F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, November 6, 1852. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁶Plantation Book, 1847. Randolph Papers. C. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection.

engineers held a job for at least one season, although there was much moving around from plantation to plantation after each season.⁷⁷

Since most of the sugar boilers lived in small villages or on small farms in the sugar bowl, the ability became fairly well known, but the least competent ones often found it necessary to write to planters, managers, or friends requesting aid in securing positions for the coming season.⁷⁸

Obviously the sugar boilers could not earn a living for themselves and their families by working three or four months of the year; therefore, some of them labored on their own farms or in the villages, and some hired out the rest of the year as overseers.⁷⁹

The sugar makers considered themselves professionals, and it appears that they regarded their sugar making activities the most important work that they did;⁸⁰ therefore, they probably did not look upon the plantation and the planter with any distaste. The largest part of their cash

⁷⁷Plantation Books, et passim, Randolph Papers.

⁷⁸Ernest Naquin to John Moore, March 30, 1859. Weeks Collection. William Lourd to John Moore, September 30, 1859. Weeks Collection. A. C. Innis to St. John R. Liddell, May 5, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁹Sitterson, "Hired Labor," 202.

⁸⁰C. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection.

income came from the making of sugar, and for this reason the plantation could be considered an absolute necessity to them. The greatest danger faced by the sugar boiler was scientific advance, for with the introduction of scientific methods the making "by knowing" method practiced by the sugar boilers was gradually replaced by chemically proven methods, although it is true that some of the descendants of the ante-bellum sugar boilers still demand high wages to discover and correct mistakes that chemists somehow fail to solve.

There were many jobs available on the plantations for the carpenters, painters, brickmasons, coopers, and blacksmiths who lived in the villages or who were itinerant artisans traveling from plantation to plantation stopping wherever work would be found.⁸¹ The wages of these skilled laborers varied according to their ability and to the job. Some were hired by the day, some by the month, and some by the job, with the amounts paid varying from a dollar or two a day, thirty-five or forty or fifty dollars a month, to much higher wages when employed on highly technical projects. One planter paid a Negro blacksmith \$1.50 for a day's work in 1843,⁸² but in all probability that was a little higher

⁸¹Journal of the Senate of the State of Louisiana, 1850, 31.

⁸²Plantation Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, July 26, 1843.

than the usual wages paid for that type of service. A skilled carpenter employed by one planter was paid only \$75 for five months' work in 1856.⁸³ Another planter paid \$330 to a cooper for seven months' work,⁸⁴ \$387 for work on a building and \$380.37 for slating the roof of a sugar house to a brickmason, and \$182 to an itinerant mechanic for repairing his sawmill.⁸⁵ It is impossible to determine exactly how long it took the brickmason to slate the roof and build the walls of the building, but it is highly probable that it did not take a year, and in that case, he was paid at the rate of nearly \$100 per month, however it is probable that the artisan hired assistants whose pay cut into his income.

Although there was some prejudice against brick homes in the South,⁸⁶ there was much work for the skilled brickmason in Louisiana. One planter, although well aware of the supposed dangers of a brick home, decided to build one of brick anyway because "according to any estimate I can make the house will cost less on the present plan of all brick than the first one of a frame story above & will

⁸³Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 93.

⁸⁴Plantation Book, 1847. Randolph Papers,

⁸⁵Plantation Books, 1853, 1856, 1859. Randolph Papers.

⁸⁶F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, September 10, 1850. Liddell Papers.

be a more permanent & valuable improvement."⁸⁷ However, the planter could not secure enough masons to complete more than the first story before he was forced to withdraw some of the hands helping with the building to work in the fields.⁸⁸

Most of the brick construction was not done on the homes of the planters⁸⁹ but was done on foundations for homes and in the building of sugar houses and out-buildings on the plantations. Furthermore, many cisterns were set up on high raised brick platforms which also gave work to the masons.⁹⁰ The masons demanded and were paid amounts that seem quite adequate for some of their jobs; one charged a planter forty dollars just for firing a kiln of bricks. This man was not paid cash and had to ask the overseer to write the planter for the money. The overseer wrote: "The plantation owes Charles Knight \$40 for setting & burning a Kiln of Brick. He is going on to Virginia to join the army, & needs the money to help pay his expenses. If you can let him have it- be kind enough to let me know

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Travel through the countryside of Louisiana reveals that most of the ante-bellum homes were constructed of wood.

⁹⁰William Lourd to John Moore, September 2, 1859. Weeks Collection. This letter contains an excellent example of this.

by Friday mail. he wants to start by Thursday."⁹¹

One brickmason who had run out of work wrote to a former employer: "i take this oppertunity of riting to you and i send Jim down to your house with this i would like it very much if you could get or recomend me to the planters or if you have got any work to do yourself i would like to do it as i have no work at present and i do not like to be idle . . . for i cannot live without it nor can i make a bricklayer of Jim if i dont get some thing to do."⁹²

The skilled workers were not in a secure position, for many planters had much of this work done by their slaves. Even the most skilled workmen faced the possibility of their places being taken on the larger plantations by the slaves as they became more proficient.⁹³ As one foreigner who had come to America wrote:

. . . you must not believe that everyone finds his fortune here, for there are many professions which do no count here at all, so that a person would not earn a thing. It is best here for cabinet makers and carpenters. . . . a worker earns a dollar a day, and there is enough work.

I must tell you that conditions are not good for single men, for if he boards and must also pay for laundry he does not get far, since service here costs much more than board. If you

⁹¹Ibid., September 3, 1860.

⁹²Richard Sale to John Moore, April 16, 1859. Weeks Collection.

⁹³Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country, 180-181.

have a wife who does her own housework, you can live much better and cheaper. Best Friend, if perhaps anyone of you would take the chance and come over here, bring one along at once. Except in northern America a wife is not to be found.⁹⁴

One man--a jack-of-all-trades, mechanic, carpenter, and engineer--wrote to a planter in Catahoula Parish that he was gravely dissatisfied with the conditions under which he had to work in Rapides Parish. The trouble was not that there was no work but it was that the planters wanted him and others to work on credit. He said that planters would "tell a Mechanick, after waiting with them for years Unhesitatingly and with out Blush. Sir you Know I am broke I have nothing, but if I get able, you will be paid, but they will never think themselves able enough to pay Me."⁹⁵

Other than the crafts calling for the highest skills in which the free artisans were superior,⁹⁶ there was only one kind of work where the labor of free people was preferred to that of the slaves, and that was the work that endangered life and limb.⁹⁷ Slaves were much too valuable property for their lives to be risked on jobs which could

⁹⁴Karl Arndt, ed., "A Bavarian's Journey to New Orleans and Nacogdoches in 1853-1854," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIII (1940), 488.

⁹⁵Richard Seagars to St. John R. Liddell, May 13, 1850. Liddell Papers.

⁹⁶Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 589.

⁹⁷Russell, My Diary North and South, 104, 106.

be accomplished by the immigrant Irish and German laborers whose death would in no way affect the finances of the planter. These laborers were usually paid no more than a dollar a day to work on the levees or in the swamps, and they were sometimes paid five dollars an acre for digging ditches to drain the fields.⁹⁸

Any of the least safe jobs were left to the free man, for instance, the clearing of swamps, steamboat roustabouts, and firemen on the Mississippi River Steamboats.⁹⁹ In 1853, the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western Railroad wanted to hire either "natives of the soil, or negroes, to work in the Swamp,"¹⁰⁰ but the natives of the soil got the work, since no master would hire his slave for this job. It should not be thought that the residents of the area along Bayou Lafourche were the first choice of the railroad, for in August, 1853, fifty or sixty Irish and German laborers who had been working on the railroad fled the area in fear of the yellow fever. They headed for New Orleans, and although the residents of Thibodaux told them that they were going to the most dangerous place in the state, they did not listen,

⁹⁸New Orleans Crescent, December 5, 1859; May 26, 1860.

⁹⁹Tyrone Power, Impressions of America, 1833-1835 (Philadelphia, 1836), II, 149-153. Russell, My Diary North and South, 104.

¹⁰⁰Thibodaux Minerva, December 17, 1853.

and it appeared that "Providence had destined them as food for the yellow fever."¹⁰¹

During rush times on the plantations of the state, proprietors did not hesitate to hire white people living near the plantations to help in the fields. In the sugar regions, it was not unusual for "Cajuns" to be hired to cut cane, and aid in the cotton picking season was often obtained from white laborers for from fifty cents to one dollar a day.¹⁰²

If these unskilled laborers were satisfied with their meager earnings and poor living conditions, they had no fear for their future so long as slavery existed, for as long as the white man owned the Negro laborer for life he would not put him on jobs for which the poor white worker was considered so ideally suited. However, if he had aspirations to become something more than he was he would have probably been better off out of the plantation region completely because he could never hope to earn enough to purchase land or even a home. It would appear that he was doomed to continue draining fields and cutting timber for the rest of his life or for as long as he had strength to do so.

¹⁰¹Ibid., August 13, 1853.

¹⁰²DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 606.

CHAPTER XI

On the small and medium-sized plantations of the Old South the slave quarters usually stood near the home of the master, but on the larger plantations they were usually farther removed.¹ The generally accepted conclusion is that slaves living on larger plantations dwelled in better cabins than those residing on small plantations, and the large planters usually occupied houses that were superior to those of the small planter; therefore, it can be said that in all probability, the better the planter's home, the better the slave's cabin.²

Many of the slave cabins are still standing, which has led some to believe that the houses of the slaves were substantial, but this assumption is wrong, for only the best constructed of the cabins have survived the decades since the abolition of slavery. Not a few of the cabins standing to-day are constructed of brick which was by no means typical.³ Slave housing was not equally good in all sections of the state, and it is probable that the best

¹Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 310.

²Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 629-630. Ibid., 240-241. Lyell, Second Visit, II, 155.

³The ante-bellum southerner believed that houses built of brick were dangerous to the health.

slave quarters were in the older settled sections because it is generally believed that slave housing improved as frontier conditions were overcome and a more stable society was developed.⁴

One of the best periodicals of the era, DeBow's Review, published many articles concerned with slavery and slave life, and in one of these a planter stated that each slave family should live in a well constructed wooden cabin which had at least 288 square feet of floor space. He believed the cabin should be at least two feet above the ground and have a wooden floor, a brick chimney, and a shingle roof, but no loft or cabinet space, and be furnished with a bedstead and the bed clothes necessary for comfort.⁵

Few cabins would have met these specifications. Most of the slave residences in the Red River area were small, wooden, floorless cabins provided with chimneys of mud and sticks. Usually those huts were one-roomed, but when they were two-roomed, the house was often inhabited by two families. All light and ventilation was obtained through doors, chimneys, or cracks that had not been plugged with rags and mud. The cabins were sparsely furnished

⁴Taylor, "Negro Slavery In Louisiana," 144.

⁵DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 370.

having only a crude stool or two and a dirty bed.⁶ However cabins on the large cotton plantations in Concordia Parish were generally neatly built and completely white-washed.⁷ Usually the cabins on most of the larger plantations north of the Red River were comfortable though cheaply constructed, were sufficiently large, and had brick chimneys and broad galleries across the front.⁸

In most cases then, slave housing was not too good, and one planter who claimed to have great interest in the welfare of his slaves paid as little as twenty-five dollars each for the construction of some of his slave cabins.⁹ Although there were planters who allotted the slave family two rooms,¹⁰ it was not usual, for in the majority of cases the families were each given only one room.¹¹ Planters who owned only a few slaves (under ten) sometimes made one large cabin serve for all except in those instances when some of

⁶Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 283.

⁷Lyell, Second Visit, II, 155.

⁸Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 283. See also Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 241; Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 145.

⁹Palfrey Plantation Diary, March, 1857. Palfrey Papers.

¹⁰deGrummond, "St. Mary Parish," 36. Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 241. Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 168.

¹¹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 145. This can be still seen by visiting some of the quarters still standing.

the slaves slept in the house of the master.¹²

It is difficult to determine how many slaves inhabited each cabin, but one of the larger sugar planters along Bayou Lafourche housed 218 slaves in sixty-five cabins on one plantation and 125 in twenty-four cabins on another.¹³ It is stated by one student of Louisiana slavery that the general rule was for four or five slaves to occupy one cabin.¹⁴

Since the working efficiency of the slave population depended greatly on its health and attitude, most planters endeavored to supply enough food and clothing to allow "crude comfort."¹⁵ Either the slaves prepared their food in the cabins or received it from a central kitchen. Many agriculturists preferred the central kitchen because there the food was properly cooked, and no time was wasted on food preparation.¹⁶ There is some evidence that the children of the slaves were in a few instances fed from common troughs.¹⁷

The basic ingredients of the slave diet were cured

¹²Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 146.

¹³Wingfield, "The Minor Plantations," 61.

¹⁴Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 146.

¹⁵Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 296.

¹⁶DeBow's Review, X (1851), 326.

¹⁷John Gade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," Journal of Negro History, XX (1935), 300.

pork and corn meal;¹⁸ however, it should not be thought that the slaves ate nothing but cured meat and corn bread, for the planters realized that their slaves needed additional food staples to be effective field hands. On some plantations the slaves were allowed to cultivate garden patches whose produce supplemented their diet because it was realized that the consumption of vegetables was necessary for good health.¹⁹ At other times, the planter, in order to insure the addition of vegetables to the slave diet, had the hands cultivate gardens for the use of the entire plantation.²⁰

The easily obtainable fish and game offered welcome variety to the slave's diet, and many planters took it for granted that the slave would supply part of his food from this source. The flesh of the raccoon and opossum was the favorite meat obtained from the fields and woods.²¹ The streams of the state offered an abundance of fish, and

¹⁸Based on a study of the invoices of the planters of ante-bellum Louisiana on file in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. See also DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 370; Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 276-279; Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 137-138.

¹⁹Wingfield, "The Minor Plantations," 71. Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 31-32. Moody, "Slavery on Louisiana Sugar Plantations," 65.

²⁰DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 370.

²¹Howard Corning, ed., Journal of John James Audubon. . . . (Boston, 1929), 110. Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 203.

since any addition to the plantation larder reduced operating expenses, the planters had fish traps and wharves constructed to facilitate the acquisition of this needed food,²² and at times parsimonious planters attempted to supply the major percentage of the food requirements from this source, an activity which caused much dissatisfaction among the slaves.²³

The failure of masters to supply slaves with adequate supplies of meat sometimes led to the appropriation of additional meat from the supply of the planter. One overseer, for example, noted the disappearance of four pigs, and since the skin of one was found, he came to the conclusion that the hands had done away with the animals.²⁴

Some planters were criticized for the way they fed their slaves, and it was thought that the reason for the loss of so many slaves to the dreaded cholera was because they fed their Negroes very badly, forcing them to live "entirely on fresh fish and . . . River Water."²⁵ A Teche newspaper carried the letter of one disgruntled citizen who

²²Palfrey Plantation Diary, May 26, 1853. Palfrey Papers. West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, June 2, 1860. Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 203.

²³West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, June 2, 1860.

²⁴Comite Plantation Diary, June, 1857. Kilbourne Papers.

²⁵Mrs. Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, May 31, 1855. Morris and Sibley Papers.

told a slave owner: "I suppose, sir, you regard yourself as a very good master. . . . you give them . . . plenty of fat meat to eat with little or no lean in it . . . [and] As for his bedding, he does not need much, you think, and if he is not well housed in winter that is his look out and not yours."²⁶ It has been claimed that Creole planters did not feed their slaves as well as did the Americans, but at the same time it has also been said that slaves did not work as hard on the plantations of Creole owners;²⁷ however, one observer noted that the majority of Creole planters were stock raisers and provided their slaves with beef from their own plantations.²⁸

J. G. Taylor states that the cost of food eaten on the plantations was not excessive even when the cost of production for the vegetables and other home grown produce is considered.²⁹ This is borne out by the belief that a charge of twenty-five cents a day for board of a slave was exorbitant because it was claimed that a white man could be boarded at that price and a profit be made. It was agreed that a fully grown male slave could be properly fed

²⁶Franklin Planters' Banner, August 2, 1849.

²⁷Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 306.

²⁸F. D. Richardson, "The Teche Country Fifty Years Ago," Southern Bivouac, IV (1886), 593.

²⁹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 140.

for less than thirty dollars a year.³⁰

There was great variety in the amount and kinds of clothing issued to slaves,³¹ but men were usually given two shirts and two pairs of cotton trousers for summer wear, and the women were supplied with two cotton dresses. For winter wear men were given heavier trousers as well as some type of top coat. Usually both men and women wore heavy horsehide shoes in winter, but in summer they often went barefooted. Most of the time each adult slave was issued at least one blanket every year. In the summer the men wore some type of straw hat for protection from the sun while in the winter they wore woolen caps; women covered their heads with head cloths all year round. There was no standard rules governing the amounts of clothing given by planters to the slaves, but just as housing conditions became better as a more stable society developed, so did the amounts and quality of the clothing.³²

The routine work of slaves on the large and small plantations of the cotton and sugar regions of Louisiana is well known and is often described in accounts of slave

³⁰Helen Catteral, Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro (Washington, 1929-1933), 111, 557-558.

³¹Based on a study of the advertisements for run-away slaves.

³²See Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country, 14; DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 370; Wingfield, "The Minor Plantation," 61-64; Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 141-144.

life in the ante-bellum South. However, many of the slaves of ante-bellum Louisiana did not do the routine tasks that were so closely related to plantation life. Some slaves, although not many, worked on land that produced rice, and on those farms and plantations usually eleven or so acres were turned over to the care of a slave. From these acres could be produced over fifty barrels of rice.³³ In the Prairie Region of Louisiana where the cattle grazing industry was centered were a few slaves who worked as cattle herders,³⁴ but most of the Louisiana cowboys were of Spanish or French descent, and the slaves in the region were used mainly as house servants.³⁵

All slaves engaged in work on Louisiana farms were not used to cultivate staple crops, and there is evidence that some slaves worked on subsistence farms. However, the number of slaves that were attached to such agricultural units was insignificant during the 1850's.³⁶ It is likely that slaves and masters worked side by side in the fields on the small farms, and it may be that the slaves served not only in the fields but also in the houses as domestic servants.³⁷

³³DeBow's Review, XVI (1856), 290-292.

³⁴Darby, Geographical Description, 76-77.

³⁵Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 628.

³⁶Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 101.

³⁷Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, II, 35-40. A. A. Parker, Trip to the West and Texas (Concord, New Hampshire, 1835), 115.

Some slaves of more than ordinary ability and trustworthiness were employed in supervisory positions, and the most common position of this type was that of driver. This slave was usually a little older than the average field hand and possessed traits of character and temperament that demanded respect from his fellow bondsmen. This was a position given solely on ability, and appointment as driver gave no slave the right to loaf. Manuscript diaries and plantation journals record more than one demotion from driver to field hand.³⁸ Often drivers carried a whip and in some instances used it,³⁹ but some slave owners felt that the driver should not be allowed to discipline his fellow slaves by whipping.⁴⁰

At least one Louisiana slave reached the responsible position of overseer, although the achievement of such distinction was far beyond the attainment of the great majority of the most capable slaves. One Louisiana lady sadly wrote: "I have lost poor Leven one of the most faithful black men [who] ever lived. . . . He has overseed the plantation nearly three years, and done much better than any white man

³⁸ McCollam Diary, November 1, 1849. Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, June 22, 1829. Weeks Collection.

³⁹ Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country, 14-15.

⁴⁰ Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes,

ever done here. . . . Poor Leven has left a promising crop."⁴¹

Of course every plantation had specialists ranging from the lowly water boy to skilled coopers, carpenters, and bricklayers.⁴² The most simple skill was highly valued, and any ability beyond that of the simple field laborer was a factor in increasing the selling price of the slave.⁴³ At times old slaves who were too feeble for field work were assigned tasks that required more brain than brawn,⁴⁴ but in these instances the selling price of the slave was not increased because the laborer was too far past his prime to attract the attention of prospective buyers.

By tradition the elite of slave society were the house servants. This group lived in much closer contact with the master and his family and therefore attracted the attention of envious field hands as well as articulate visitors. One student of Louisiana slavery feels that it would be "no exaggeration to say that in many instances

⁴¹Rachael O'Conner to Mary C. Weeks, September 4, 1840. Weeks Collection.

⁴²Based on a study of the manuscripts collections in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁴³Slave dealers were careful to inform all interested parties in the extra ability of any slave.

⁴⁴Afleck, Record and Account Book, No. 2.

they were emotionally a part of the family."⁴⁵

The mistress of the plantation came to rely on the house servants for many things but particularly for the care of the children. According to tradition, the plantation "mammy" was one of the best-loved figures of the ante-bellum South, and this affection was in all probability deserved. However, there were some Louisianians who felt that the association of white children with Negroes was not good, and one planter requested that his son be kept from the Negro children around the plantation home because they made the child "too wild & uncontrollable [sic]--not to say very dirty and careless with his clothing."⁴⁶ This is no direct reflection on the "mammy" herself except so far as she failed to keep her own brood clean, for undoubtedly some of the slave children around the house belonged to the nurse.

However, in many instances the real reason why the Negro nurse became so indispensable was not her great ability or her great love for children, but the attitude of the aristocratic planter parents toward their offspring. There is no doubt that the nurses were capable and that true affection often developed in the white child for his "mammy," but all of this was made possible by the white

⁴⁵Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 109.

⁴⁶St. John R. Liddell, to Moses Liddell, November 7, 1852. Liddell Papers.

mother who preferred to have little to do with the rearing of her children.

A visitor on the plantation of Bishop Polk envied her hostess because she had a faithful nurse to whom she abandoned her children whenever she desires; the mother saw them only when she had "a fancy to caress them."⁴⁷ The wife of another Louisiana planter wrote to her New England relative that "we would not hesitate about coming on to see you if I could bring my servants but I would not bring my baby without assistance she is a great deal fonder of her Mammy than she is of me she nurses her--and it would be a great trial to go without her."⁴⁸

Of course, the attitude of the upper class Southerner in the 1850's was no different than that attributed to the upper class in the twentieth century. It is maintained that one of the characteristics of aristocracy is to leave the care of children to nurses and other paid personnel.⁴⁹

Some of the Negro artisans working on the plantations belonged to residents of the towns and villages of the plantation regions. Some were owned by carpenters,

⁴⁷Hilliard Diary, February 4, 1850.

⁴⁸Mrs. Hiram Tibbetts to Mrs. Sophia Tibbetts, January 23, 1853. Tibbetts (Hiram B.) Letters, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁴⁹See Allison Davis, Burleigh Gardener, and Mary R. Gardener, The Deep South. A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class (Chicago, 1941), 84-100.

coopers, or brickmasons, but this was not always the case, and when the masters were not artisans they let the slaves hire themselves out on their own time. However, before the end of the slave period this practice had fallen into disrepute.⁵⁰ Although during the 1840's and 1850's, the whites were rapidly replacing the blacks as skilled laborers in New Orleans,⁵¹ this was not the general rule in the rural sections of the state.⁵² The quality of the work done by the slave artisans was probably not quite so high as that done by the skilled white workers, but evidently the work of the black artisans was satisfactory or their services would have been dispensed with and they would have been returned to the field.

While most of the skilled slaves were employed as blacksmiths, carpenters, painters, coopers, and brick-masons, others did types of work that required other skills. It is known that slaves worked in tanneries,⁵³ as seamen,⁵⁴ as hunters,⁵⁵ and as engine room helpers on ferries.⁵⁶

⁵⁰Franklin Planters' Banner, May 27, 1847.

⁵¹Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 589.

⁵²Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 107.

⁵³Opelousas Courier, January 22, 1851.

⁵⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, June 1, 1844.

⁵⁵Franklin Planters' Banner, December 26, 1850.

⁵⁶Baton Rouge Gazette, April 24, 1852.

Some of the truck farmers used their slaves not only as field workers, but also as peddlers of produce in the towns. In fact this practice became so widespread that laws were passed to prevent abuse of this privilege.⁵⁷

One of the peculiarities found in the attitude of the Louisiana planter toward slave labor was the acceptance of the idea of working slaves on internal improvements. There was little difference between this type of work and the cleaning of swamps and ditching on the plantations, jobs for which it was felt that the Irish and German laborers were better suited. It was required by law that the masters supply slaves to work on the roads and levees of the state,⁵⁸ and although it would seem that the masters would have objected strenuously to this practice, there is little evidence that they did. Perhaps, their dissatisfaction was indicated by the fact that it was necessary to pass laws imposing penalties on masters who did not comply.⁵⁹ Another idea of the attitude of the owners toward using their slaves on public works might be obtained from their

⁵⁷Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 28, 1857.

⁵⁸See pages 137-140.

⁵⁹An idea of the difficulty encountered in attempting to obtain compliance with the road and levee laws of the state can be obtained by a reading of the Police Jury Minutes of the parishes.

successful attempts to get the state and the parishes to purchase slaves of their own to work on roads and levees.⁶⁰ Regardless of their attitude there is evidence that some masters did hire their slaves to railroad companies when there was a shortage of cash for plantation purposes. Toward the end of the 1850's, at least one newspaper editor felt that the Negro was rapidly replacing the white man as a laborer on the railroads.⁶¹

It was maintained that slave labor was more economical than free labor on internal improvements,⁶² but to the Louisiana planter this referred to slaves owned by the state not to the slaves of the planter. The planter preferred to have the state purchase slaves to do the work because it was believed that it was cheaper than to hire free workers. Evidently many of the improvement, navigation, and transportation companies believed the same, for they purchased slaves for this type of work.⁶³

It is difficult to determine whether slaves worked harder on farms and small plantations than on large plantations. It is also difficult to ascertain whether or not slaves worked harder on sugar or cotton plantations. It

⁶⁰Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 8, 1859.

⁶¹West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, July 17, 1858.

⁶²Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 89.

⁶³Thibodaux Minerva, July 16, 1853. West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, April 25, 1857.

would seem logical that the slaves probably turned in a better day's work on the smaller holdings of the yeomen than on the large plantations, for on the smaller agricultural units the master often worked side by side with them, and under such close supervision there would be much less opportunity for loafing.⁶⁴

Tradition has it that slaves worked much harder on the sugar plantations, but there is little evidence to defend the tradition, and perhaps this was a "bogey man" tale made up to scare the slaves in other parts of the South into more efficient work. Actually many visitors to the Sugar Bowl found that the supposedly "man-killing" grinding season was the period of greatest joy on all of the sugar plantations. One twentieth century writer called the grinding a period of great "jollification,"⁶⁵ and an ante-bellum observer thought that although the hands worked eighteen hours a day on the plantation during the harvesting and manufacturing season, they liked grinding and worked with more cheerful during this period than during any other period of the year.⁶⁶ Several reasons are offered for this situation; one is that the hands were given more liberal

⁶⁴Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 111.

⁶⁵Prichard, "Routine on a Louisiana Sugar Plantation," 66.

⁶⁶Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 668-669.

amounts of food and stimulants, and another is that the slaves had more freedom for social pleasure and were allowed to do a wider variety of jobs.⁶⁷ Another factor causing the slaves not to regard grinding season as intolerable was the practice of dividing among them amounts of money equal to a dollar or two for each hogshead produced on the plantation, and some times this amounted to over two dollars per slave.⁶⁸ There is no tradition other than joyful anticipation concerning grinding in the Sugar Bowl of Louisiana, and it was not too many years ago that many Negroes could not be retained in their jobs as domestic servants and laborers during this period. It was and is still understood in many cases that jobs will last until grinding begins, at which time the employees will leave to work in the field to return in late December or early January.⁶⁹

Furthermore, people who should know claim that there is no harder "hand work" in agriculture than the production of cotton.⁷⁰ On all of the plantations of ante-bellum Louisiana the routine was much the same except for the manufacturing season on sugar plantations, and the attitude

⁶⁷Ibid., 316-317, 668-669.

⁶⁸Ibid., 316-317.

⁶⁹Based on personal observation and experience.

⁷⁰See Vance, Human Factors in Cotton Culture, 84.

of the slave himself should be used to determine whether or not the work on the sugar plantations was more burdensome than that on the cotton plantations, for it is not always the amount of work that makes the task disagreeable, but it is sometimes the attitude of the worker and the environment in which the work is done that makes the chore unacceptable.

One of the most vital of all concerns of the slave owner was the health of his slaves, and in most instances, he did as much as he could to protect his investment in human property. The slaves were subject to the same ills that plagued the whites and considering that they usually lived under crowded conditions, it is remarkable that their death rate did not exceed greatly that of the whites of Louisiana. However, it was only one-third greater than the mortality rate of the whites in the alluvial lowlands, and it was nearly equal to the rate of the whites in the uplands.⁷¹ This, of course, can be attributed to nothing other than the care taken by the masters to protect their labor force. Slaveowners called in a physician whenever needed, and some hired physicians by the year and paid extra for surgery and special work.⁷² Some planters set aside buildings as hospitals with slaves assigned as nurses, and one

⁷¹Southern Medical Reports, II, 152-155.

⁷²Minor Letter Books, May 18, 1855. Minor Papers. McCollam Diary, January 7, 1849.

visitor thought that the treatment of the hands was so good in these hospitals that once the slave entered he preferred to remain forever.⁷³

The planters of the Lafourche-Terrebonne area had at their disposal a "Hospital of Diseased Negroes" to which they could send their slaves for the best of professional care⁷⁴ and while there is no direct evidence as to the number of planters taking advantage of this establishment, it is certain that some of them did send slaves to New Orleans and other points for specialized treatment.⁷⁵

Some of the planters realized the necessity of keeping their slaves as clean as possible and made every endeavor to do so. This was no light task for the masters and overseers,⁷⁶ for it was claimed that some Negroes wore the same clothes so long that they became stiff with the filth from their bodies and their surroundings.⁷⁷ To prevent this it was sometimes necessary to inspect the slaves as they reported for work and to punish the hands who appeared in unclean clothes. This punishment was sometimes whipping.⁷⁸

⁷³Russell, My Diary North and South, 105.

⁷⁴Thibodaux Minerva, June 11, 1854.

⁷⁵Palfrey Plantation Diary, July, 1855; February, 1858. Palfrey Papers.

⁷⁶DeBow's Review, XXV (1858), 572.

⁷⁷Franklin Planters' Banner, August 2, 1849.

⁷⁸Ledoux and Company Record Book, January 18, 1857, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

One rural Louisianian once wrote that he was "putting up a bathhouse with shower bath and Tub for them [the slaves] as I have taken it into my head that the cold water system is the best cure of fevers--I have seen it tried out several instances and it succeeded admirably."⁷⁹

The slaves had to bear with all of the cures and pseudo-cures that the whites used for themselves, and it is likely that had they not been endowed with such strong constitutions, their death rate would have been much higher. The master who dosed himself with what he considered the proper amount of medicine attempted to save the life of his slave through the belief that a double dose would do twice the work. This practice led one Louisianian to say that the planters gave the hands as "much calomel, alloes, and quinine as they can [could] stand when sick, in fact twice as much as you [they] would take yourself [themselves] under similar circumstances."⁸⁰

Most of the slaves were given some sort of religious instruction, but in most cases the instructions seem to have been superficial. The type and quality of religious training allowed the Negroes depended mainly on the attitude of the master, and it is known that many masters were not

⁷⁹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, August 11, 1851. Liddell Papers.

⁸⁰Franklin Planters' Banner, August 2, 1849.

overly interested in the spiritual education of their hands. When the planters were interested, their interest was not always one of Christian humility for some believed that the slaves became better servants when they were properly instructed, and some church leaders were happy to use this belief as an opening to spread their influence among the bondsmen.⁸¹

Sitterson maintains that by 1850 most of the sugar planters encouraged religious instruction among the slaves,⁸² and while it may be true that there was a growing interest in the religious life of the slaves, one itinerant preacher thought that there were over forty thousand slaves in the "sugar delta of Louisiana" in 1857 who were not ministered by the church and who had never entered a chapel or heard a sermon.⁸³ This traveling preacher was impressed, however, by a Negro who had walked eight miles to have a child baptised because no missionary had ever been on the plantation where he worked.⁸⁴

Although the Baptist and Methodist churches, because of the informality of their methods of worship, held the greatest attraction for Negroes, there were some Negro

⁸¹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 92. Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel (London, 1838), I, 250.

⁸²Sitterson, Sugar Country, 100-101.

⁸³DeBow's Review, XXIX (1860), 367-368.

⁸⁴Ibid., 368.

communicants in the Episcopal, Catholic, and Presbyterian churches.⁸⁵ Generally the procedure was for the slaves to follow at least nominally the religious choice of their masters, a fact which accounted for most of the slave members of the Catholic, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches.

The references to church services on plantations are numerous. On one plantation north of New Orleans, church services were held every Sunday for the slaves, and although the owners were Episcopalians, Methodist ministers were permitted to preach to the slaves.⁸⁶ On the Polk plantation on Bayou Lafourche the slaves were preached to by a young minister who was paid a yearly stipend of three hundred dollars.⁸⁷ After the church services on this plantation the young Negroes always assembled to be catechized.⁸⁸

When the services were Baptist or Methodist there was a possibility that the preacher might be colored, but this was not so for the other faiths. The Catholics and Episcopalians had no colored priests or ministers, and there was only one Negro Presbyterian minister.⁸⁹

⁸⁵Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 179.

⁸⁶John Pipes, Life Work (Nashville, 1888), 88.

⁸⁷Hilliard Diary, February 3, 1850.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Charles B. Bell, Presbyterianism in North Louisiana to 1929 (Shreveport, 1930), 32. See also, Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 187.

During the 1840's, the movement to remove Negroes from white churches gained momentum. Although racial prejudice probably played an important part in the acceleration of the movement, it was not the only factor of importance. The Negro was not educated enough to understand the sermons that were prepared for the literate whites, and the behavior of the slaves in church was distasteful to the white communicants. Perhaps if someone could have told the Negroes "when to groan," they would have been more welcome in the white congregations.⁹⁰ Another important consideration is that the slaves preferred to have a minister of their own who would understand their highly emotional approach to religion. The attitude of a North Louisiana editor reveals some of the bitterness of the whites toward Negro participation in religious services. This bigoted editor wrote:

If there is anything under the sun that is calculated to clog up, and stagnate the good opinion manifested towards the pulpit, it is certainly that odious and obnoxious practice of negro preaching! The idea of allowing a 'buck negro,' without common decency, learning, or even the use of plain language to rant, rave and stamp like a mad-man, in the sacred and serene desk of God's holy sepulchre, is a base and malignant fraud upon truth, the church of God, the laws of State, and the general morality of a well-informed intelligent community. . . . a feeling deepy tinged with shame and disgust, mars . . . our reverence and respect, when we see an uncouth, surly savage and

⁹⁰Franklin Planters' Banner, March 21, 1850.

untutored 'buck negro' mount the sacred stand The idea of a negro, ranting, raving, frothing and stamping mad-manlike in the pulpit is a burlesque upon common decency

. . . . It is beyond the reach of any negro to fit himself as capable for the teaching of the pulpit. It is not all men, even white, that are fully capable of filling that important station.⁹¹

Among the most important reasons why religious instruction of the ante-bellum Negroes was not more successful was that the churches often did not consider the work among the slaves nearly as important as some of their other functions,⁹² and therefore through their spasmodic efforts the churches were not successful in attaining their goal. Another consideration was the attitude of the planters who were not all religious enough to be overly concerned with the religious life of their slaves so long as they did not come under the influence of some preacher who might read from the wrong gospel.

Probably one consequence of this faulty religious background was the instability of slave marriages. Of course, religion alone could not have made this institution stable among the Negroes, for marriage among slaves had no legal sanction in Louisiana. Actually there was little protection offered to family life by the slave code of Louisiana. Wife and husband could be sold apart, although

⁹¹Bellevue Bossier Banner, August 19, 1859.

⁹²Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 189.

there was a law stating that mothers could not be sold from children under ten years of age and that old and disabled slaves who had children had to be sold with the child of their choice.⁹³ Thus, the slaves themselves were not fully responsible for lack of family ties and affection. The truth is that it is remarkable that any familial affection existed at all under the slavery regime where the parents had very little if any control over the children and where few if any of the fundamental conditions necessary for stable marriages existed.⁹⁴ Yet it is known that real family ties existed, and in some instances whole families ran away together, and husbands more than once ran away to be with their wives and families on other plantations.

When slaves were permitted to marry some sort of ceremony was usually held. This might be nothing more than obtaining the consent of the master, or the traditional ceremony of "jumping the broomstick,"⁹⁵ or it could be some sort of religious ceremony. When it was a religious ceremony, the couple might be married by a Negro preacher⁹⁶ or by a white minister, and on some plantations where the

⁹³Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1857, 229-234.

⁹⁴Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 159.

⁹⁵Gade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," 303-304.

⁹⁶Mrs. L. S. Tibbetts to Mrs. Sophie Tibbetts, January 13, 1851. Tibbetts Letters.

master was a Catholic, the parish priest performed the ceremony.⁹⁷ However, the use of a religious personage to solemnize a marriage was not standard practice,⁹⁸ and in all probability the most used procedure was that of asking the master's permission and then simply "jumping the broom" or just "taking up."

The preferred practice was for slaves to marry on their own plantation, but in some instances masters permitted slaves to chose mates from a neighboring plantation. When this was allowed the visiting days were usually Saturday and Wednesday, and in most sections of the state the slave was required by law to have a pass signed by his master; this pass was usually good for one month.⁹⁹ Sometimes a slave took a wife on another plantation without the consent of the owner of the place, and in such instances difficulties arose. A planter was told that one of his slaves had taken a wife on another plantation and was informed that the boy had misbehaved. He was notified that the slave would not be allowed back on the plantation until his actions were "explained, and I have the word of his Master that he is an honest upright Boy-- With this assurance

⁹⁷Roger Baudier, *The Catholic Church in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1939), et passim.

⁹⁸Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 158.

⁹⁹Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 2, 1851.

from you my dear Sir I have no objection to the Boy visiting his wife once a week but without this assurance of his uprightness and honesty, I must ask that you give the Boy orders to not go on the place, as I shall direct my overseer not to permit it."¹⁰⁰

Another disadvantage of allowing a slave to marry off the plantation was that it encouraged running away in order to visit the wife, and when the wife lived on a plantation located at a distance from the husband this running away sometimes lasted much longer than the time required for a visit. Some slaves thought that running away would cause their masters to sell them to planters residing nearer to the plantations of their wives,¹⁰¹ and other slaves who did not run away tried to persuade their masters to buy their wives or to sell them to the planters owning the women.¹⁰²

The life of the Louisiana slave was not all work and no play, for he was able to have time to enjoy himself in many ways. Perhaps among his favorite diversions were hunting and fishing. In a relatively newly settled state

¹⁰⁰George W. Jones to John Baptiste Landry, June 9, 1850. Landry (Severin and Family) Collection. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

¹⁰¹Opelousas Courier, January 7, 1854.

¹⁰²E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, March 18, 1860. Gurley Papers.

where there was much small game and fish, the slave made the most of his opportunities. This form of recreation was not usually frowned upon by the master because it was not only good relaxation for the slave, but it also added to the plantation supply of food. It was against the law for the slaves to own firearms, and it is probable that not many possessed guns of their own, but there is much evidence to show that they had the use of shotguns and rifles.¹⁰³

Music perhaps offered the greatest pleasure to the slaves, and many owned some type of music making instrument. It was not unusual to hear the slaves singing the popular airs of the day as they worked in the fields.¹⁰⁴ However, the slaves' great love for music was best seen through their almost universal attendance at dances and balls given on the plantations and in the villages. One Louisianian once wrote crudely that "an excellent question for a debating club would be--"Which is the happiest a negro at a dance, or a hog in a mud hole?"¹⁰⁵

The governing bodies of the parishes apparently felt that slave dances were dangerous to the safety of the white residents, for in many of the parishes there were ordinances against such entertainments. One of the strictest

¹⁰³Franklin Planters' Banner, December 26, 1850.

¹⁰⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, October 15, 1842.

¹⁰⁵Opelousas Patriot, July 3, 1858.

of these ordinances was that of Jefferson Parish where it was unlawful for anyone to give balls or other amusements or to tolerate such amusements for the slaves. A slaveholder could not allow the slaves on his place to have a dance unless he had the "express permission of the President of the Police Jury or of the syndics." Violation of this law made the offender subject to a fine of not over one hundred dollars. If permission were given, all slaves in attendance had to have a written permit from their owners, and the patrols had to be present at such balls to "arrest and chastise" all slaves found without authority and "to denounce the owner of the place to any court of competent jurisdiction."¹⁰⁶ Of course, these laws as so many other laws were broken, and the masters were continually allowing their hands to have dances which were enjoyed by whites who frequently came to amuse themselves.¹⁰⁷

Christmas was the period of the greatest number of holidays on the plantations. On the cotton plantations, the slaves usually stopped routine work the day before Christmas and often would not resume it until New Year's Eve and occasionally not until January 2, but sometimes they were given only two or three days of relaxation.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

¹⁰⁷Cade, "Out of the Mouths of Ex-Slaves," 334.

¹⁰⁸pre Aux Cleres Plantation Journal, December, 1852, 1853. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

On the sugar plantations the slaves were given as much time off, but if grinding ran late, their holidays were postponed until that important work was done.

On most of the plantations where the hands could be let off from work, dances and feasts were held;¹⁰⁹ however, some planters gave more freedom than usual to their hands and allowed them to go about the countryside visiting friends and in general having a merry time.¹¹⁰ The editor of the Concordia Intelligencer described the Christmas of the slaves in his vicinity in 1854:

. . . It poured--the rain did, and mud in full profusion abounded. But the dashing showers could not cool Africa in the ripe enjoyment of his annual holiday season. They came dashing, mounted in wagons, carts, astride donkeys, lean horses, or on foot-back: with wide mouths full of grinning ivory and an eye cut for all manner of fun and excitement. The banjo-professors, helping their rain-soaked instrument strings out with their mellow voices, were the centre of many a dancing circle at the street corners. What cared Africa for rain when he was on a jump for pleasure!

. . . they will doubtless close Christmas week on Saturday night with the memory of fun enough to last the whole of another year without spoiling.¹¹¹

Christmas time was the period when the master's true feelings toward his slaves were best displayed, for at this time, he

¹⁰⁹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 164.

¹¹⁰Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 218.

¹¹¹Concordia Intelligencer, December 29, 1854.

could, if he so desired, make his slaves very happy by supplying all of the essentials necessary for a happy holiday season. It was traditional for the slaves to gather at the planter's home on Christmas morning and for the master and mistress to appear to receive the season's greeting from the slaves and to return the greeting with gifts. The presents ranged from straw hats for the men and dresses for the women to small gifts of money; children usually were given candy.¹¹²

Often the master presented the slaves with all of the requirements for a Christmas feast. The description of one such feast was left by an ex-slave who wrote:

The table is spread in the open air, and loaded with varieties of meat and piles of vegetables. . . . Sometimes the cooking is performed in the kitchen of the plantation, at others in the shade of wide branching trees. In the latter case, a ditch is dug in the ground, and wood laid in it and burned until it is filled with glowing coals, over which chickens, ducks, turkeys, pigs and not infrequently the body of a wild ox are roasted. They are furnished also with flour, of which biscuits are made, and often with peach and other preserves, and tarts, and every manner and description of pies. . . .¹¹³

It is probable that the plantation family got as much pleasure from watching the slaves as did the slaves from their bountiful meal. Certainly it must have been an entertaining

¹¹²Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 167.

¹¹³Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, 215-216.

and joyful sight to see the "eyes roll in ecstacy" and to hear the "Giggling and laughter and clatter of crockery."¹¹⁴

On some of the plantations where no such sumptuous feasts were prepared, the master gave the slaves two or three days off for Christmas although the slaves were put back to work on the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth of December and again released from work on New Year's Day.¹¹⁵

Other planters who did not give holidays during Christmas week because of the demands of grinding did allow the slaves a day of leisure on New Year's Day. In fact one overseer recorded that the slaves were given a holiday on December 31 so that they could kill and prepare the "beef" for their feast on the first of January.¹¹⁶ These slaves had their feast and invited the slaves of several nearby plantations. Their master attended the orderly celebration which lasted until after ten o'clock in the evening.¹¹⁷

Independence Day was also a day for celebration among the slaves, not so much for patriotic reasons but because it signified the end of active cultivation and the beginning of lay by.¹¹⁸ In reality, lay by seldom started

¹¹⁴Ibid., 216.

¹¹⁵Minor Plantation Diary, December, 1850. Minor Papers.

¹¹⁶Ledoux and Company Record Book, December, 1856.

¹¹⁷Ibid., January, 1857.

¹¹⁸DeBow's Review, XII (1852), 291.

on July Fourth, and in most cases this day of celebration had to be delayed for a period of time. On many of the sugar plantations, the hands were given one or more holidays just before entering the rigorous grinding season.

Many slaves were given a half-holiday on Saturday,¹¹⁹ and Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest on all plantations. However, there is evidence that slaves were worked on Sundays, although generally some compensation was given for this extra work, perhaps, in the form of subsequent holidays.¹²⁰ On the other hand many planters who over-worked their hands did so because they were confident that their neighbors would not report them for fear of making enemies.¹²¹ Olmsted thought the once universal practice of no work on Sunday was passing from the scene in Louisiana;¹²² however, on most of the better operated plantations of the state, Sunday was a holiday and work done on this day was primarily punishment for a wrong-doing. In many instances, the work was done to pay for something that the slave had stolen or had damaged through carelessness. Sometimes all hands were put to work when the actual culprit or culprits could not

¹¹⁹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 163.

¹²⁰Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, II, 47.

¹²¹Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 651.

¹²²Ibid. For a different opinion see Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 163.

be found,¹²³ but usually one or two slaves were set to ditching or cutting drains to pay for the articles missing or broken.¹²⁴

The more fortunate slaves were able to share some of the pleasures of their masters, and they were to be seen on the fringes of the crowds at outdoor celebrations,¹²⁵ as well as at the balls and dances of their social superiors. Their presence at some of the balls was so disturbing to some of the whites that many editors levied barbed complaints about their behavior.¹²⁶

Legislation of all types circumscribed the recreational activity of the slave population, but just as did their white contemporaries, the Negroes ignored as many of the laws as they could. The fact that such laws were necessary indicates just how much of the Negroes' activity was contrary to the wishes of the whites. For instance, legislative bodies passed innumerable laws prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages to slaves, but the repeated passage

¹²³Ashland Plantation Record Book, May, 1852.

¹²⁴Ibid., February, 1852.

¹²⁵Franklin Planters' Banner, December 13, 1849.

¹²⁶Ibid., June 13, 1850.

of such laws in itself shows that the Negroes were obtaining liquor.¹²⁷

Actually it is not necessary to rely on such negative information to determine that the slaves liked their liquor and obtained it. One newspaper editor thought that food and clothing meant nothing to the Negro if he could obtain a little whiskey,¹²⁸ and another wrote that it was not uncommon to see cursing and yelling, inebriated slaves staggering down the streets of his village.¹²⁹ It has already been stated that some Negroes who were allowed to hire themselves out on Sunday refused to work unless supplied with whiskey and that the employer planned to give them what they wanted.¹³⁰ The planters also helped their slaves to break the law by supplying them with the forbidden liquid; they not only gave alcoholic beverages to the slaves when they were ill,¹³¹ but also sometimes supplied them with whiskey on festive occasions.¹³²

¹²⁷Based on a study of the Police Jury Minutes of the parishes of the state.

¹²⁸West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter, December 6, 1856.

¹²⁹Franklin Planters' Banner, January 24, 1850.

¹³⁰E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, March, 1860.
Gurley Papers.

¹³¹DeBow's Review, XI (1851), 476. See Chapter VI for quotation.

¹³²Ledoux and Company Record Book, December, 1856.

Just as the laws governing dancing and drinking were ignored, so were the laws prohibiting gambling with white men. One slave who made a wager on a horse race with a white man was unfortunate enough to win as the enraged white proceeded to pay his debt with lead instead of gold.¹³³

It has been said that the Louisiana slaves "were, as a whole, not unhappy."¹³⁴ This belief is based on the fact that the slaves had elementary security, adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Although they did not live in luxury, neither did most of the white people of the period.¹³⁵ It would probably be more accurate to say that the slaves were as happy as they could be under the circumstances.

It does not appear that slaves were content under the slavery system, although it is true that the great majority of them did nothing to show their discontent, but neither did the great majority of the enslaved whites during the years of Nazi power. It is well known that a great number of slaves voiced their disapproval of the system by damaging crops and equipment and by running away. There are more ways of resisting than by open violence.

¹³³Opelousas Courier, April 2, 1853.

¹³⁴Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 168.

¹³⁵Ibid.

The old generalization that the Negro was content in his bondage has never been satisfactorily proved, and when it is noted that the highest reward ever given to a slave for meritorious service was freedom, it is easily seen that freedom was not beyond the comprehension of the Negro slave.¹³⁶ That the majority of slaves submitted to bondage only proves that men can be enslaved when they are kept ignorant and when all of the instruments of power are held by the members of the master class. If slaves were happy why were so many precautions taken to prevent their gathering even for religious purposes? The recreation of the Negroes shows that they had all of the likes and dislikes of the white men, and since they were human and could think as well as see, there can be no other logical assumption than they envied their masters and desired to remove from themselves the shackles of slavery. The normal "Negro slave took life as it came," forgot his sorrows as soon as possible, and enjoyed his simple pleasures to the fullest;¹³⁷ with few exceptions this is the behavior of all average human beings.

¹³⁶Kenneth M. Stampp, "The Historian and Southern Slavery," American Historical Review, LVIII (1952), 616-617.

¹³⁷Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 169.

CHAPTER XII

New Orleans or as Louisianians called it, "The City," was the only true urban center in Louisiana. However, there was a remarkably large number of small towns, villages, and hamlets in this agricultural state. Most of the villages that were large enough to demand attention in the 1850's and that have withstood the passage of time were located along the course of some river, bayou, or stream. Many were nothing more than river or bayou landings where were located a few stores, perhaps a post office, and possibly a few other buildings, mainly residences and saloons.¹

Why there were so many of these small settlements in the state is not difficult to ascertain. Since the state's transportation facilities were inadequate, many of the residents of rural Louisiana were forced to obtain their farm or plantation supplies from places other than New Orleans.² These small settlements, therefore, were trade centers for inhabitants within easy traveling distance, and in every one of them were stores that attempted to stock

¹Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers and on a study of the manuscript collections in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

²See Chapter V.

the necessities of their patrons.³ Most of them were no more than receiving and dispatching stations for supplies and produce, and their size and prosperity were determined primarily by their location and the size of their trade area.⁴

Perhaps the most important of the ante-bellum towns and villages were; Baton Rouge, the state capitol, located on the banks of the Mississippi River; Shreveport and Alexandria on the Red River; Monroe on the Ouachita River; Donaldsonville at the junction of Bayou Lafourche and the Mississippi River; Opelousas on the prairie; Plaquemine at the junction of the Mississippi River and Bayou Plaquemine; Natchitoches on Cane River; and Franklin, the port of entry for Bayou Teche. All of these localities were well situated for trade purposes except Natchitoches and Opelousas. Opelousas had to depend on the town of Washington for its water transportation, but its central location on the prairie made up for this to a great extent.⁵

³A reading of the travel volumes describing Louisiana before the Civil War will bear this out, but see particularly "Louisiana in Slices" a series of letters published in the New Orleans Crescent between April 30 and September 10, 1860.

⁴See New Orleans Crescent, November 17, 1859, April 30-September 10, 1860; Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853; Opelousas Patriot, April 7, 1855; Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852; Shreveport The Southwestern, December 20, 1854.

⁵See pages 102-103. Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 43.

Natchitoches, or Nackitoch as it was sometimes spelled and always pronounced, was on the Red River until 1839, but in that year the river changed its course, and by the 1850's the town was located along the old course of the Red River which had been renamed Cane River.⁶ By 1860, Natchitoches was open to steamers only when there was fifteen feet of water over the rapids of Red River, a circumstance that occurred about one month of every season. Since Natchitoches had been so recently removed from the water transportation facilities of the Red River, the town had not lost all of its significance as a trade center by 1860, but at that date it had lost much of its business, and its trade and commerce were mainly confined to its 1,500 inhabitants and to the planters and farmers in the adjoining countryside.⁷

Franklin, the most important town of the Teche area, was located sixty-five miles from the Gulf of Mexico. The editor of the Franklin Planters' Banner, who undoubtedly was prejudiced, informed his readers early in the decade that no inland southern town of comparable size "presents the business life-like appearance of Franklin."⁸ The same publicist reported that the merchants of the town could

⁶New Orleans Crescent, July 11, 1860.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Franklin Planters' Banner, March 29, 1851.

supply almost all a planter's needs because they imported goods directly from many northern cities.⁹ Much of the prosperity of this village was due to her port where ships from foreign as well as northern ports docked daily as early as the middle of the 1840's. Ships from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Richmond, Galveston, Jamaica, Bermuda, Mexico, Cuba, and other places unloaded supplies and loaded produce from her wharves.¹⁰

The importance of the port of Franklin to the often isolated sugar and cotton planters of the Teche and Attakapas regions can be easily deduced by a study of the lists of departures of ships as well as the correspondence of planters.¹¹ From the information published in the local newspaper, it appears that New York was the leading importer of Teche products. Other cities in order of their importance were Richmond, Baltimore, Mobile, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Charleston, Savannah, and Boston. It is important to note that throughout the 1840's and on into the fifties the exports of the Teche region through the port of Franklin always exceeded the imports.¹² Franklin also acted as a

⁹Ibid., January 3, 1846.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, November 4, 1850; January 4, 1852. Liddell Collection. Based on a study of Franklin Planters' Banner. See also Sitterson, Sugar Country, 168-169.

¹²deGrummond, "St. Mary Parish," 55-57.

distributing center for the products received at her wharves, and some of the goods were moved overland to the interior points that relied on the village for most of their supplies,¹³ but the largest part of the produce was transported on steamboats traveling up Bayou Teche.

Shreveport was especially fortunate for not only was it located on Red River, but it also was connected with the back country by a ridge "which relieves [sic] travel of the swamp which borders Red river from its mouth to its source."¹⁴ Shreveport, which according to the Bellevue Bossier Banner was the home of "pretty women and fast young men,"¹⁵ was peopled by merchants who conducted their business on fairly liberal principles.¹⁶ This "commercial emporium of Northwestern Louisiana" was "business mad," and J. W. Dorr¹⁷ was of the opinion that people did not really live in the town, but only stayed there to do business. He noted that they cared very little about the style of their homes but built "very spacious, substantial and expensive

¹³Franklin Planters' Banner, December 30, 1847.

¹⁴New Orleans Crescent, November 17, 1859.

¹⁵Bellevue Bossier Banner, July 15, 1859.

¹⁶New Orleans Crescent, November 17, 1859.

¹⁷Dorr was the business agent of the New Orleans Crescent who planned to visit every town and post office in the state. He was seeking business for the Crescent as well as health for himself.

stores of fine brick work" that were more numerous than residences.¹⁸

Baton Rouge, the political center of the state, was inhabited by approximately 4,000 residents the majority of whom were classified as "office holders and seekers" and gentlemen of leisure"; however, there were also seven hundred merchants, five hundred professional men (including many lawyers), and two hundred clerks.¹⁹

Regardless of occupation or profession, the majority of Baton Rougeans always considered the town a trade center and were determined to extend their business activity over as large an area as possible.²⁰ Since merchants of the town felt that they were losing trade that they had once controlled on the east side of the Mississippi River, they began a movement to gain commercial control of a large portion of the back country on the west side of the Mississippi River. This movement led to the promotion of the Baton Rouge, Grosse Tete, and Opelousas Railroad which on its successful completion not only enhanced the prosperity of the merchants of Baton Rouge, but also lessened the trade area of the

¹⁸New Orleans Crescent, July 21, 1860.

¹⁹Baton Rouge Daily Comet, September 15, 1852.

²⁰F. S. Allen, "A Social History of Baton Rouge: 1850-1860," an unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1936, 9. Hereafter cited as Allen, "Baton Rouge."

businessmen of Plaquemine.²¹

The citizens of the capitol city were also interested in railroad connections with New Orleans, and in 1860 a resident of the town was in New York trying to raise the needed money to finance a line from Baton Rouge to New Orleans. The hopes were also high for rail connections with Alexandria and Shreveport.²² The merchants realized that they could extend their activity southward if they could weaken the commercial influence of Donaldsonville in that part of Ascension Parish east of the Mississippi River, and the editor of the Baton Rouge Gazette informed them that all that was needed were slightly improved roads leading in that direction.²³

One of the great difficulties that beset the Baton Rouge merchants and perhaps one of the reasons why the town had lost a portion of its east side trade was the unsatisfactory condition of its wharf. The wharf at Baton Rouge had been "looked upon as the worst on the Mississippi, and many boats have [had] refused to land solely . . . [because] of the difficulty of doing so."²⁴ However this "serious

²¹John McGrath, "The Baton Rouge, Grosse Tete, and Opelousas Rail Road," 45-46. F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, February 18, 1855. Liddell Papers. Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, September 12, July 26, 1860. See pages 122-123.

²²Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 26, 1860.

²³Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852.

²⁴Ibid., July 13, 1850.

obstacle" to trade was removed by an energetic group of merchants who built in 1850 "an excellent and substantial wharf."²⁵

Alexandria by virtue of its location²⁶ was able to maintain more uninterrupted navigation connection with the outside world than the other Red River towns. When the water was too low for steamboat navigation, the planters living up the river were obliged to tranship their produce through the town, and merchants from down river were forced to do the same thing with their supplies. But whether or not the river was high enough for steamboats was of no great significance to some of the businessmen of the town. If the water were high they still were able to maintain a good business with the town's trade area, and if the water were too low for water traffic much of the business that would normally pass them by remained with them. The main difficulty caused by shallow water was that it required the merchants to keep larger inventories than they usually maintained.²⁷ However, just as important to the merchants of Alexandria as the Red River was the location of the town

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶The town was situated just below the rapids of Red River. In 1860 the upper limit of the town was the lower rapid.

²⁷New Orleans Crescent, June 12, 1860. See Chapter V for the difficulties caused planters by low water.

in the center of a "richly productive country."²⁸

Monroe, situated "in the garden spot of the Ouachita valley," was a village of only eight hundred persons and a small number of business establishments, but its true importance as a trade center was not indicated by the number of its stores for those there had a large flourishing trade.²⁹ The commercial importance of this village was increased by the large number of small planters and farmers along the bayous and rivers of North Louisiana who, although they preferred to buy from the larger merchants of New Orleans or Shreveport, were sometimes forced to purchase at higher prices from the Monroe businessmen because their landings could not be reached by the shallow draft steamers that plied the minor streams.³⁰ The residents of the town looked forward to the completion of the eastern section of the Vicksburg and Shreveport Railroad which they felt would greatly extend their trade area.³¹

Donaldsonville was exceptionally important to the residents living along bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne. Since much of the year Bayou Lafourche was closed to

²⁸New Orleans Crescent, June 12, 1860. Alexandria Red River Republican, et passim.

²⁹New Orleans Crescent, August 20, 1860.

³⁰F. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, January 9, 1856. Liddell Papers.

³¹New Orleans Crescent, August 20, 1860.

navigation,³² before 1854 Donaldsonville offered to these inhabitants their only connection with the Mississippi River and New Orleans. Thus, the trade area of this town varied according to the depth of water in the bayou, the shallower the water, the larger the trade area. When the bayou was closed to navigation, the residents of Thibodaux and Houma had to rely on a stagecoach line to maintain their connection with the outside world;³³ however, with the completion of the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western Railroad to Lafourche Crossing in 1854, this was no longer necessary.³⁴ The completion of this railroad from Algiers greatly reduced the trade area of Donaldsonville and the movement of her substantially constructed wharf,³⁵ and Donaldsonville in the 1950's is not a great deal larger than it was in the early 1850's when there were approximately 2,000 people residing there.

Plaquemine, the gateway to the Attakapas Region, had a comparatively large trade area due to the poor navigational facilities offered by Bayou Plaquemine, and until the completion of the railroad from opposite Baton Rouge to the

³²Thibodaux Minerva, et passim. Houma Ceres, et passim.

³³Thibodaux Minerva, July 22, 1854. Houma Ceres, February 28, 1856.

³⁴See pages 120-123.

³⁵New Orleans Crescent, May 7, 1860.

Maringouin-Grosse Tete area, served as the trade center for one of the larger and more prosperous agricultural regions of the state. The opening of that rail line along with the opening of the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western line took away from the village much of its business.³⁶ But as late as 1860, Plaquemine was considered a "thriving and bustling town" that maintained a "great business with a prosperous back-country."³⁷

Thibodaux, a small village on Bayou Lafourche about thirty-five miles from the Mississippi River, was the trade center for much of Assumption and Terrebonne parishes, and as such had no desire to see a railroad completed from Algiers to Donaldsonville and then inland.³⁸ The merchants of that town were correct when they stated that a railroad would cause them to lose much of their business in Terrebonne Parish, for with the completion of the line to Lafourche Crossing, many of the residents of Terrebonne turned away from Thibodaux.³⁹

Houma, on the other hand, welcomed the opening of

³⁶See John McGrath, "The Baton Rouge, Grosse Tete, and Opelousas Rail Road," 45-46. F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, February 18, 1855. Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, September 12, 1860.

³⁷New Orleans Crescent, May 7, 1860.

³⁸Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853.

³⁹Ibid., May 27, 1854.

the rail line, for she felt that it would reduce the importance of Thibodaux and would increase her own by allowing her an easier access to the markets of New Orleans. The citizens of Houma wanted to build a plank road to their once feared rival, Thibodaux,⁴⁰ while Thibodaux hoped to interest financiers in the construction of a railroad along the east bank of Bayou Lafourche connecting Donaldsonville, Thibodaux, and Lafourche Crossing, thereby giving to the village rapid and cheap transportation connections with the New Orleans merchants as well as an opportunity to acquire new business along the bayou.⁴¹

Another trade center of some importance was the village of Bayou Sara which controlled most of the business in West Feliciana Parish. Although there were not many stores in the village, those there were among "the most extensive and heavily stocked stores in Louisiana outside of New Orleans," and one store whose owners were direct importers could be surpassed by only few of the larger New Orleans establishments.⁴²

Aside from these more important centers of trade there were dozens of small landings along the rivers and bayous that sold food, drugs, and clothing to the poorer

⁴⁰Houma Ceres, December 6, 1855.

⁴¹Thibodaux Minerva, February 10, 1855.

⁴²New Orleans Crescent, May 21, 1860.

folk of the interior. Some supported wharves large enough to accommodate river steamers while others were little more than mail stops.⁴³

Always of importance, but not necessarily trade centers, were the parish seats which were the centers of government for the parishes. From an economic standpoint, some of these parish seats were poorly located because sites near the geographical center of the parish were chosen instead of localities easier reached by water transportation. In fact one seat of government was so small that it did not have a post office, and the residents had to receive their mail from the capitol city, Baton Rouge.⁴⁴ In this parish, West Baton Rouge, were three post offices all located at steamer landings, the most important of which was Brusle Landing, the largest settlement in the parish, situated on the Mississippi River six miles below Baton Rouge.⁴⁵ Of secondary importance was Lobdell's store which was twelve miles above Baton Rouge,⁴⁶ and from which a considerable

⁴³Ibid., May 7, 14, 1860.

⁴⁴Ibid., May 14, 1860. This parish seat was not located in the geographical center of the parish, but was completely overshadowed by its across the river neighbor, Baton Rouge.

⁴⁵New Orleans Crescent, May 14, 1860.

⁴⁶The small village located around Lobdell's Store is now called Lobdell and is the site of a large sugar refinery.

amount of agricultural produce was shipped.⁴⁷

A good example of the effect of poor location on the prosperity of an ante-bellum Louisiana village is Bellevue which was, in the 1850's, the parish seat of Bossier Parish.⁴⁸ This was a "scruggin" little hamlet of about one hundred inhabitants who supported a store, two bars, and a church. The location of the town was so disadvantageous that it was thought that had the court house not already been built, the seat of government would have been moved. The nearest steamboat landing, on the shore of Lake Bistineau, was located thirteen miles from the village.⁴⁹ The lake was open for steamboat navigation only three to six months a year, but in some years was not open at all.⁵⁰ Bossier, however, was a relatively new parish, and the object of its formation was not to supply the residents of the area with merchandise, but to provide them with government and justice,⁵¹ and if the town supplied the residents of the parish with those things it served its purpose.

Another parish seat located in an out of the way

⁴⁷New Orleans Crescent, May 14, 1860.

⁴⁸Today Benton is the parish seat.

⁴⁹See page 14.

⁵⁰New Orleans Crescent, July 30, 1860.

⁵¹Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1843, 17.

place was Sparta, the seat of government in Bienville Parish.⁵² This village of two hundred or so inhabitants which was badly located in a sand bed, was unfortunately "smartly in the woods," and its merchants had to move supplies overland eighteen miles from a landing on Lake Bistineau, and in the summer of 1860, the residents had to transport corn overland eighty miles from the Ouachita Valley.⁵³ On the other hand, Homer, the parish seat of Claiborne Parish, was also located at some distance from a steamboat landing,⁵⁴ and although Minden, another village in the parish using the same landing, had to transport goods only two miles, Homer was able to prosper⁵⁵ and has remained down to the present the parish seat.

Mansfield, the center of government of De Soto Parish, was located nearly in the center of the parish and was situated at a point equidistant between the Red and Sabine rivers.⁵⁶ The nearest navigable stream, Bayou Pierre, was ten miles away, but in many seasons of the year the village was approachable primarily by a rough and dusty "ridge road," and although there were nearly a thousand

⁵²Arcadia is now the parish seat of Bienville.

⁵³New Orleans Crescent, August 11, 1860.

⁵⁴Twenty-two miles from a landing on Bayou Dauchite.

⁵⁵New Orleans Crescent, August 6, 1860.

⁵⁶Seventeen miles from each.

people living in and around Mansfield, the traveling representative of the New Orleans Crescent said little about the business activity of the place.⁵⁷

Although the primary function of the parish seats was government, some of them were important as trade centers; these were Donaldsonville, Franklin, Plaquemine, Thibodaux, Shreveport, Alexandria, and Monroe. Some parish seats became fairly important trade centers even though they were not located on an important stream, and others were important as trade centers even though located a few miles from any stream. A good example of the latter type of trade center was Marksville, the parish seat of Avoyelles Parish. This village was supplied by two steamboat landings on the Red River, the nearest of which was three and a half miles away and the farthest four and a half miles distant, yet it did a thriving business with the residents of its back country.⁵⁸

Aside from serving the residents of Louisiana as centers of trade and commerce and government, these small villages and towns were important for other reasons. It was through these little settlements that the residents of the interior kept in contact with the outside world as well as with news of the events occurring in their immediate vicinity,

⁵⁷New Orleans Crescent, July 18, 1860.

⁵⁸Ibid., June 4, 1860.

for through them was distributed nearly all of the mail that after much delay made its way to the interior of the state, and just as important, it was in these towns and villages that most of the newspapers of ante-bellum Louisiana were printed. There were nearly one hundred newspapers published in the state outside of New Orleans in the ante-bellum period, and it was from these newspapers that the residents of rural Louisiana got most of their information, although some did subscribe to New Orleans newspapers.⁵⁹

In the small villages and towns lived most of the skilled laborers who were hired to work on the plantations and farms of the rural areas.⁶⁰ It was to these settlements that they returned between jobs, and it was there that many of them earned a part of the money required to support themselves and their families. Also in the settlements were located some small machine shops and foundries that were available to the planters when their equipment needed minor repairs.⁶¹

⁵⁹See Louisiana Newspapers, 1749-1940, A Union List of Louisiana Newspaper Files Available in Offices of Publishers, Libraries, and Private Collections in Louisiana (Louisiana Historical Record Survey, Division of Community Service Program, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Mimeographed, 1941) for a partial list of the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁶⁰See page 281.

⁶¹Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 22, 1857. Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, July 3, 1858. Thibodaux Minerva, May 17, 1850. M. Barrow to Anna Maria Johnson, November 11, 1850. Barrow (W. M.) Papers.

Another consideration that made the towns and villages important to the agriculturists was that the small town merchants purchased at least a part of their supplies from the small farmers and planters located around the towns. Not only did the farmers sell some of their food products to the storekeepers, but they also were able to sell some of their staple crops. The product of the plantation purchased most often was sugar which was usually obtained from the small planters, but some large planters did sell a small part of their sugar to the small town merchants.

One Teche country storekeeper wrote to a planter: "your servant informs me that you have all your sugar put up in Hhds. but that you told him to say to me you will put up two Barells [barrels] for me.- I have concluded to take of you one of your Hhds---of sugar as both Mr Hare & myself will want Sugar. So please mark one of good quality . . . and send it to this store the first time your cart comes.--and we will pay . . . the same price as you get for the ballance [balance] of your crop. Allso [also] 2 Bbls molasses please send in as quick as possible."⁶²

Also residing in the towns and villages were the doctors and dentists, many of whom were not permanent

⁶²J. B. Binsan to Lewis Moore, November 2, 1850. Weeks Collection. J. B. Binsan operated a small store in Jeanerette, Louisiana.

residents but visited the rural sections of the state each year.⁶³ Also of great importance were the lawyers of the parish seats.⁶⁴

The merchants of towns and villages provided the capital often needed by the small planters and farmers of the state. Since these agriculturists usually could not borrow through New Orleans factors or from New Orleans banks, they had to obtain what they needed from the merchants and storekeepers of the trade centers. Often this was to the merchants' great advantage, but in many instances it was the best that could be done.⁶⁵ In fact the need for an improvement in this situation led a group of planters in 1851 to consider the establishment of a bank in Trinity, a North Louisiana village⁶⁶ and caused one newspaper editor to complain that one of the difficulties of rural life was the lack of stable banking houses.⁶⁷

⁶³Chambers, Rowland Diary, 1859-1860. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. McCollam Diary, April 2, 1851. See also the advertisements in any of the rural ante-bellum newspapers.

⁶⁴Based on a study of ante-bellum newspapers and manuscript collections. See particularly Henry J. Heard to John Moore, April 11, 1852. Weeks Collection. Mrs. Mary Sibley to Mrs. Thomas H. Morris, December 2, 1854. Morris and Sibley Papers. Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 26, 1855.

⁶⁵See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 110-111.

⁶⁶Moses Liddell to St. John R. Liddell, September 7, 1851. Liddell Papers.

⁶⁷Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, December 23, 1854.

The towns and villages were the centers of recreation for the people of the surrounding countryside, for to them came the circuses, menageries, traveling theatrical troupes, and all other types of entertainment. Of course, this was of more importance to the residents of the town than to the dwellers on farms and plantations.⁶⁸

Not to be overlooked was the fact that the great majority of Louisiana churches were located in the villages. Few churches were in the isolated back country of the state, although some could be found in the remote corners of the pine hills and flats.⁶⁹ Similarly, most of the schools were located in the settlements. Excluding a few private schools and poorly run public schools, education was centered in the villages, and to obtain an education, it was necessary to go to the settlements or to be taught at home.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Based on a study of the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁶⁹New Orleans Crescent, April 30-September 10, 1860.

⁷⁰Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. Nearly every newspaper carried advertisements for private schools.

CHAPTER XIII

The economic life blood of rural Louisiana merchants was profitable trade with small planters and farmers residing in their trade areas. Although many rural storekeepers and merchants attempted to obtain orders from large planters, only rarely were they successful, and most of their sales to sugar and cotton planters were made when the large scale agriculturists could not wait for merchandise to be shipped from New Orleans.¹

Planters preferred to deal with New Orleans establishments because they could select from a wider variety of goods which were offered at cheaper prices than the rural merchants could meet. The small town merchants tuned their advertisements to the theme that they sold at prices nearly equal to New Orleans stores, but since they failed to attract the business of the large planters, it is obvious that they could not compete with the New Orleans merchants.

That the merchants of small towns did not offer as wide a variety of merchandise as did those of New Orleans did not necessarily mean that their stocks were in all cases

¹Based on a study of the invoices and business correspondence of Louisiana planters contained in the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

small. It was the boast of newspaper editors that their towns contained at least one store in which could be found nearly all that was needed, and these boasts were sometimes borne out by the list of articles offered for sale.²

Villages with population of less than 1,000 often contained five or more stores that sold all types of merchandise at both wholesale and retail prices. Evidently the establishments which offered supplies at wholesale prices were striving to attract planters and any other customers who could purchase in quantity. It is likely, however, that most houses sold at reduced prices to anyone who would place large orders.³ Proprietors often promised special attention to orders from areas where there was much competition; for example merchants of Iberville and East Baton Rouge parishes insisted that orders from the Bayou Goula and the Grosse Tete-Maringouin areas were strictly supervised and specially filled, and merchants in Monroe and Shreveport pledged the same services to inhabitants within their trade areas.⁴

²See the advertisements in any of the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

³Based on a study of the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. See New Orleans Crescent, April 30-September 10, 1860; Shreveport The Southwestern, September 6, 1854; Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, October 7, 1854; Monroe The Register, December 8, 1859.

⁴Based on the newspapers published in Baton Rouge, Monroe, Plaquemine, and Shreveport.

Few merchants of rural ante-bellum Louisiana could afford to specialize; therefore, most of them were proprietors of general merchandise stores that sold a wide variety of items. There were no grocery stores in one sugar parish as late as 1850,⁵ which indicates that none of the businessmen felt that they could earn a living by selling only food products, although by the end of the decade several merchants were listed as grocers.⁶ Since most planters and farmers were practically self-sufficient in regards to food, they purchased primarily meat and a little flour; therefore, the merchants could not hope to sell large amounts of groceries to many customers other than residents of the towns.⁷

The quantity and quality of the merchandise in some of the stores of rural Louisiana startled strangers, and one visitor along Bayou Lafourche was "surprised at the quality of goods kept in so small a village [Thibodaux] --excellent French works."⁸ No doubt the merchandise in the stores of Franklin and Bayou Sara was above the average quality of goods found in rural stores, for some of the storekeepers in these villages were importers who ordered directly from

⁵Manuscript Census of 1850, Schedule I.

⁶Manuscript Census of 1860, Schedule I.

⁷See pages 65-66, 234.

⁸Hilliard Diary, February 6, 1850.

from the markets of Europe.⁹

New Orleans merchants and itinerant peddlers competed with the village merchants for the patronage of the rural customers, and of the two, the New Orleans storekeepers attracted the most attention. There was not one rural ante-bellum newspaper that did not make attempts to induce its readers to patronize local businessmen instead of buying from New Orleans. The editor of the Baton Rouge Gazette, for example, advised: "We doubt whether any interior town in the valley of the Mississippi offers better inducements to purchasers . . . of plantation supplies, of all varieties, than Baton Rouge, and we respectfully take the liberty of advising the planters of this and adjacent parishes to call and examine home stocks before filling [Filing] city orders."¹⁰

Seven years later the editor of the Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet called the attention of the people living in the vicinity of the town to the local foundry and wondered why people did not look around home before taking business elsewhere. He informed the sugar and cotton planters that local machinists could make necessary repairs on sugar houses and cotton gins and that transportation of heavy equipment to Baton Rouge was easier and cheaper than shipping

⁹New Orleans Crescent, May 21, 1860. Franklin Planters' Banner, June 24, 1847.

¹⁰Baton Rouge Gazette, September 21, 1850.

it to New Orleans.¹¹ A similar message was given to the residents of Shreveport by one editor who advised that if they studied advertisements in his newspaper they would realize that all they needed could be purchased at home.¹²

The other nemesis of the country merchant was the peddler. It is probable that businessmen of the small towns in South Louisiana hated the trader as much as did the planter,¹³ but extant evidence gives no indication of the attitude of North Louisiana merchants toward the vagabond traders.

In the towns and villages the concern of at least the merchant portion of the population was that the itinerant dealers sold to farmers and small planters without purchasing a license and actually brought the merchandise to the people on their farms and saved the agriculturists a trip to town.¹⁴ The small peddlers who carried their stock on their backs or on pack horses furnished too little competition to arouse the village merchants, but traders who owned flatboats and wagons made inroads into their profits.

¹¹Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 22, 1857.

¹²Shreveport The Southwestern, September 20, 1854.
See also Monroe The Register, December 15, 1859.

¹³For the attitude of the planters towards the peddlers see pages 177-180.

¹⁴Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 4, 1855. Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

Furthermore, they did not have to undersell the grocers and general merchants, for when they arrived on a plantation they saved the ruralite the expense of transporting either himself to the store or his purchase from the village.

There seems to have been less animosity towards the transient merchant in Iberville Parish than in others, or perhaps it was that the parish fathers thought that by knowing where the visitor was they could at least keep tabs on him and collect a license fee. Whatever the reason, in October, 1860, a peddler named Thomas Johnson petitioned the Police Jury of the parish to be allowed to "Keep his goods and merchandise in the Court Room," a request which was allowed.¹⁵ It was agreed that he be rented the court room from the end of October until the first day of December "upon terms & conditions most advantageous to the Parish."¹⁶

The prosperity of the merchants largely depended on the crop situation in their sections of the state. If they lived in a sugar or cotton region, their business depended to a large extent on the prosperity of the planters even though they did not sell most of their merchandise to this group. When prices were good, money was plentiful, and

¹⁵Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, October 23, 1860.

¹⁶Ibid.

the sales of the merchants increased. For instance in 1854, much of Louisiana was prosperous, and everybody appeared to be doing well. It was thought that if crop prices continued to rise the "people would worry themselves to death studying what to do with the money."¹⁷ When money was not plentiful, the situation was blamed on poor agricultural prices, and during these recessions even supposedly sound businesses failed because merchants found it difficult to borrow small sums on a legitimate basis.¹⁸

Of great importance to the prosperity of the towns was the health of the people living within their trade areas, for with the arrival of an epidemic or the fear of the coming of an epidemic, business life came to a complete standstill. In nearly every recorded instance of the arrival of the "fever," not only did many men remove their children and wives from the stricken zone, but they also closed their businesses to try to escape death.¹⁹ In the

¹⁷Shreveport The Southwestern, November 19, 1858. Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 30, 1854.

¹⁸Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, December 23, 1854. See Lewis E. Atherton, "The Problem of Credit Rating in the Ante-Bellum South," Journal of Southern History, XII (1946), 542. Hereafter cited as Atherton, "Credit Rating."

¹⁹Virginia Powell to Jane Scarborough, September 30, 1853. Bosley (Hubbard S.) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 44. Thibodaux Minerva, September 3, 1853 are outstanding accounts of abandoning towns and businesses during an epidemic.

fall of 1853 in "business-mad" Shreveport, it was said that "Nearly every one left that could have but there was a good many whome could have left that wouldnot leave thinking that they could brave the Fever & A good many whome couldnot think of leaveing their Business undun for a Month or so. Whome are forced by Gods will to forsake all things on earth and to bow their high heads to their lowly tombs. . . . Our business is all closed in town. We have men hired to watch the Hotel and Stable. We all will remain out here until a white frost or so."²⁰

During the same year a "most malignant" type of yellow fever created a "panic among . . . [the] citizens [of Thibodaux] verging on frenzy," and people were "flying in every direction."²¹ Residents who had fled the epidemic in early September were beginning to return by the end of October,²² but some of the more courageous proprietors of houses of refreshment had reopened during the last week of September,²³ although it was not until October 8 that the

²⁰Virginia Powell to Jane Scarborough, September 30, 1853. Bosley Collection. Neither the Shreveport nor the Monroe newspaper gives much space to health conditions.

²¹Thibodaux Minerva, September 3, 1853.

²²Ibid., October 29, 1853.

²³Ibid., September 24, 1853.

courthouse could be used for anything save an infirmary.²⁴

Of course yellow fever or cholera did not have to strike to disrupt the business activity of the towns, for the mere rumor that there was a case of either of these two diseases anywhere in the state would cause people to demand that precautions be taken against the entrance of the killer into their midst. One of the first precautions was to closely supervise all of the produce and supplies brought into and through the towns.²⁵ During a period of fear in 1855, one Opelousas editor asked "would it not be advisable . . . [to] take steps to guard us against the importation of the disease into our midst? . . . we are sure the officers of the A. W. Glaze . . . would submit to any reasonable ordinances or requests."²⁶ Five weeks later no steamboats were allowed to dock in Washington, and passengers from infested districts were not permitted to enter the village; no citizen of the town could go aboard a steamer; and all goods landed below Washington and belonging to its

²⁴Ibid., October 8, 1853. The residents of Shreveport did not begin to return in large numbers until after October 12, 1854. Shreveport The Southwestern, October 18, 1854.

²⁵See pages 161-162 for an example of how the quarantine laws in one parish could affect the business of another parish or group of parishes.

²⁶Opelousas Patriot, August 18, 1855. The Alice W. Glaze was a packet on the New Orleans-Attakapas run.

citizens had to be aired and sunned before being brought into town.²⁷ The provisions made by this village were no stricter than those made in many of the other villages and towns of the state.

It is generally accepted that the rural storekeepers of the Old South sold "at least two-thirds to three-fourths" of their merchandise to small planters and farmers on credit,²⁸ and there is no reason to doubt that that was not the case in ante-bellum Louisiana. The evil results of continual buying on credit were twofold. Among the small agriculturists it was customary to purchase supplies from country storekeepers on credit which was extended for six to ten months--a practice which necessitated their paying prices considerably higher than cash prices.²⁹ If the farmer's crop were ruined, he had no way to procure supplies for the next year, and if he did manage to make enough money to settle his accounts for the year, he usually had nothing left with which to procure the following year's supplies. Thus, he was caught in a vicious circle if he wanted to produce a money crop, and this ante-bellum practice was the forerunner of the infamous crop lien system.³⁰

²⁷Ibid., September 29, 1855.

²⁸Atherton, "Credit Rating," 534.

²⁹New Orleans Crescent, November 17, 1859.

³⁰Ibid., August 2, 1860. See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 110-111.

The other unpleasant result, and it is often overlooked because interest is usually in the plight of the farmer, was that the merchants faced a similar dilemma. Since they had to sell most of their merchandise on long term credit, they had to purchase on the same basis, and the long periods for which credit was granted prevented the merchants from adapting themselves to changing economic conditions--fluctuations in the value of a product could so reduce their margin of safety that they were highly susceptible to ruin.³¹

Actually nothing was healthy about the whole system, for if the merchants of the state were too liberal with their credit, they were in all probability put out of business by the first depression. On the other hand, if the businessmen were too conservative with the extension of credit, the small agriculturists were unable to procure the supplies necessary for the production of money crops and were forced into subsistence farming. The Louisiana storekeeper relied on his ability to determine who was a good risk; he had no credit bureau to aid him in his selections. The problem of the credit stability and credit rating of the merchant himself would have been difficult enough if the Louisiana merchants had purchased all of their supplies from New Orleans, but that was not the case for merchants

³¹See Atherton, "Credit Rating," 542.

in some of the out-of-the-way places in the state bought directly from the New York market which further complicated the matter.³²

If the Louisiana merchants were careless in the extension of credit, the New York merchants were not, and Louisiana lawyers were hired to investigate the paying ability of many Louisianians who tried to buy from the New York market. A good example of the instructions to these lawyers were those sent to a Lake Providence³³ law firm; members of the New York credit bureau did not want to know whether or not the lawyers felt that the firm under investigation could pay, but they did want to know what other people thought; they wanted to know how much property the prospective customer owned and also a good deal about his personal and business habits. The New Yorkers did not want the opinions of the local lawyers, but they did want facts which would enable them to evaluate the financial stability of their prospective customers. The lawyers were advised to keep books in which they were to enter all information concerning the merchants in their district, and they were to

³²See Houma Ceres, January 24, 1857; P. Lefevre Letter File, 1856-1859. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University; Franklin Planters' Banner, et passim; Monroe The Register, December 29, 1859; Shreveport The Southwestern, et passim; Atherton, "Credit Rating," 552.

³³Carroll Parish.

send in semi-annual reports that were to contain information on every merchant in their district whether or not there was any change in his credit standing from the preceding year.³⁴

Investigations of this type could not be carried on without the merchants becoming aware of them. The editors of two Baton Rouge newspapers were definitely opposed to the idea and were not hesitant about saying so. They called the representatives of the New York firms "Paul Pry's" and hoped that no citizen of the town would allow himself to be hired for such ignoble work. The editors went on to inform the citizens that a New York credit firm had been sued for giving false information about a storekeeper and had been forced to pay damages amounting to \$10,000. To these Baton Rouge editors, the credit agencies were commercial inquisitions.³⁵

In 1854 the editor of the Franklin Planters' Banner predicted that no one would be safe from these inquisitive interlopers and that soon every man would distrust his neighbor, and fear would halt social relations. He requested that the merchants refrain from purchasing from the

³⁴Based on Atherton, "Credit Rating," 541-542.

³⁵Baton Rouge Gazette, January 3, 1852 and Baton Rouge Weekly Comet, July 2, 1854.

wholesalers who used mercantile agents.³⁶

Purchasing on credit was recognized as one of the main shortcomings of the business methods of the merchants, and it was thought that if small town storekeepers were going to make a success of their businesses they would have to purchase for cash, cut their profits, and advertise liberally. Furthermore, it was believed that since merchants depended heavily on satisfactory means of transportation and communication, they should aid in the building of roads and bridges.³⁷

Before these suggestions could be adopted, the retail and wholesale purchasers would have to pay cash for the goods and supplies obtained from the merchants, and the large wholesale houses selling to the merchants would have to pay cash for their goods so that they could pass on to the smaller merchants the savings thus made. What some of the proponents of internal improvements at the expense of the business class failed to realize was that the merchants often had as much of their capital tied up as did anyone else, and as one ante-bellum Louisiana railroad builder, James Robb, said, it was not that they were "too torpid and indifferent," but that the "tolling, diligent merchants"

³⁶Franklin Planters' Banner, July 6, 1854.

³⁷Thibodaux Minerva, March 29, 1856.

had not the means to aid public works. Robb maintained that all of their capital was absorbed by high rents, high interest, and by advances to planters, and that the burden of the support of internal improvements should fall not on the merchant class but on the "large property holders who lived upon the revenues of their estates by inheritance gained by lucky speculation or by long and successful business."³⁸

The usual practice was for the merchants to purchase most of their supplies from New Orleans, but some did buy directly from the New York market. L. E. Atherton thought that New York merchandise was usually bought on six months' credit without interest, and if the settlement of the account were delayed longer than one-half year, a moderate interest was charged.³⁹ This conclusion can be partially verified by a study of the records of one Donaldsonville merchant who operated a dry goods and grocery store.⁴⁰ Most of this establishment's business was done with French speaking people, for over a three year period less than twenty of the orders received by the proprietor were written in

³⁸Harry H. Evans, "James Robb, Banker and Pioneer Railroad Builder of Ante-Bellum Louisiana," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XXIII (1940), 207.

³⁹Atherton, "Credit Rating," 534.

⁴⁰Based on the letter file of P. Lefevre, 1856-1859.

English. The majority of the customers lived along bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne; however, some people living along Bayou Teche and in the Attakapas Region occasionally ordered from the firm.⁴¹

Most of the stock carried in this store was purchased from New Orleans, but in 1858, a letter was received from a New Yorker who wrote: "I beg leave to enclose you my card, and to solicit your orders for Spring goods- Should you confide any commissions to me you may rely on my studying your interest to the best of my ability, and from my long residence in New Orleans (11 years) I know well what style of goods will suit your taste My charge for selection &c, is 5 % com- sending you the original Invoice of the goods & not being confined to any one particular house but buying for you wherever I can do best - and at their usual terms of credit."⁴²

Evidently the information from the commission agent interested the Louisianian, for in April, 1858, a letter was received to the effect that the merchandise ordered was on the way to Donaldsonville. The agent wrote:

The Chapeaux for Messer Fisher & Plumpton are sold to you on their usual term of credit with 6 mos but as the amount is small if you choose

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²William McClure to Madam Malliette, January 28, 1858. Lefevre Letter File.

to pay it when you pay for the things I bought for you for cash, you can take off 1 per cent a month, for the term you pay in advance. If you come to New York in the autumn I can promise you credit in good silk and ribbon houses also at 6 mos- & I think you will find a great difference between prices here and in New Orleans- . . . You will please pay the amount of the bills to Mr George L. Nairne . . . Canal St Near Royal New Orleans who will receipt for the same- If you prefer to let Fisher & Plumpton remain till you get more goods from them you can do so- but the Dash bill please settle as soon as possible.⁴³

Evidently the quality of work of this establishment was high; in 1857 a Louisianian who was visiting in the state of New York wrote that she was returning to New Orleans and asked that some dresses be made for her. She informed the dressmaker that she would stop off at Donaldsonville for measurement, and when the dresses were completed they could be forwarded "to New Orleans as you have done before."⁴⁴

The residents of the towns and villages did not have to rely solely on the general stores for their food supplies, for in many of the settlements were either private or municipally controlled vegetable stands and markets. Some of these stands were not permanent establishments but were merely small shops or stalls which were opened by enterprising farmers during the fresh vegetable seasons.⁴⁵ Many

⁴³Ibid., April, 1858.

⁴⁴Mary Thomas to Madam Lefevre, October 13, 1857. Lefevre Letter File.

⁴⁵Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

of the village markets sold meat as well as vegetables, and one newspaper editor complained that although the markets of his town contained "excellent articles of beef," there was "much room for improvement in the vegetable department."⁴⁶

The presence of "excellent articles of beef" must not have been an everyday occurrence in some regions of the state for in one South Louisiana village the arrival of "very fine and fat beeves from Attakapas . . . made a most grand and imposing entre into the town, to the no small delight of all bons vivants and lovers of steak."⁴⁷ In fact it appears that in some areas the residents of the towns were unable to get as much fresh beef as they wanted.⁴⁸ The residents of Monroe were considered especially fortunate because they could get fresh beef and pork all during the year.⁴⁹

In some areas of the state, the vendors of fresh meat were the most restricted of all sellers of food products. In Lafayette Parish, the butchers were required to keep the hides of all animals that they had slaughtered, and a hide inspector was paid twenty cents for each hide

⁴⁶Thibodaux Minerva, April 26, 1856.

⁴⁷Ibid., October 29, 1853.

⁴⁸Shreveport The Southwestern, May 9, 1855.

⁴⁹Monroe The Register, December 1, 1859.

that he inspected.⁵⁰ The obvious purpose of this law was to prevent cattle stealing. In 1856 it was required that meat sold in the town of Vermillionville⁵¹ be dispensed from the "Butchery-hall" and that the merchants keep on display the hides of all animals sold or killed on that particular day.⁵²

In 1858 the Police Jury of Jefferson Parish resolved that any animal slaughtered in the parish had to be butchered in a slaughter house, not in the open air, and at the same time enacted strict laws governing the disposal of the remains of slaughtered animals.⁵³ In Franklin where for sometime after 1848, meats and vegetables for sale within the town limits had to be sold from the municipal market house, stalls were free for vendors of fresh vegetables, but the butchers had to pay stall rent.⁵⁴

There is little evidence that markets sold products of high quality, and the comment made by the editor of the Franklin newspaper might apply to the majority of such establishments. He wrote that the residents of Franklin

⁵⁰Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 20, 1851.

⁵¹Vermillionville is now known as Lafayette.

⁵²Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, March 3, 1856.

⁵³Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

⁵⁴Franklin Planters' Banner, June 8, 1848.

had a market, "but we have never heard of any one person's getting the gout by patronizing it. . . . Nothing is sold there that would make an epicure's eye glisten."⁵⁵

Aside from the general stores, vegetable stands, and meat markets there were many different types of specialty shops selling confectionery, candy, fruit, tobacco, wine, and other articles. Usually the shops that specialized in one or more articles of these types also sold many other products but slanted their advertisement toward one particular item.⁵⁶

Nearly every village had one or more hotels or taverns offering sleeping accommodations to travelers passing through. In fact, there were far too many of these establishments in rural Louisiana. In one small village of less than two hundred residents were two hotels of "considerable dimensions," one with an elaborately decorated dining and dancing hall. A visitor who entered the hotel gazed at the decorations in "speechless admiration" and then asked a "dingy looking and half fuddled or sleepy attendant" what they had done to the man who had painted the hall. The attendant replied: "'Give him two tree hundred dollar. He dead now, believe.'" "Served him right, muttered the tourist;

⁵⁵Ibid., January 25, 1849.

⁵⁶Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

'the evil men do lives after them- the good is often interred with their bones."⁵⁷ However, what puzzled the visitor more than anything else was what kept the hotels going.⁵⁸ This hotel was located at a steamboat landing, and the proprietor was hopeful that it would be patronized by planters on their way to or from New Orleans.⁵⁹

If the newspapers are to be believed, it would be assumed that every hostelry in the state was substantial and luxurious and was capable of providing its patrons with the best food in the land.⁶⁰ One proprietor informed the public that he offered rooms for summer and winter for "permanent and respectable transients" and "Cooking a la Italian et a la Francaise-having procured the best cooks."⁶¹ Another hotel keeper, after refurnishing his hotel, advised prospective patrons that "no efforts will be spared to render the accommodations and fare as pleasant and acceptable to its patrons as those of any hotel in the interior of the State."⁶² An Alexandria hotel owner informed the

⁵⁷New Orleans Crescent, May 7, 1860.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., and Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 20, 1850.

⁶⁰See especially the advertisements in the Shreveport The Southwestern, 1854-1858.

⁶¹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, April 28, 1855.

⁶²Opelousas Courier, February 11, 1860.

public that his "commodious and airy building" had comfortable rooms, and that it could offer customers a livery stable, a porter, all new furniture, and excellent food. He requested "The patronage of Ladies from the country as well as those traveling."⁶³

Actually the hotels were highly unsatisfactory, and the food they served was probably worse. One critic complained of a North Louisiana hotel because as he ate he had to avoid kicking the pigs resting under the table,⁶⁴ and another traveler described food at a Tallulah hotel as "the worst I ever saw for a hotel in any country and no hopes of it getting any better and I intend to quit as soon as I can."⁶⁵ Olmsted reported that hotel accommodations were little better than those offered on the road and that the proprietors seemed completely disinterested in serving the travelers.⁶⁶ Many of the hotels had no barrooms, and if a guest wanted to indulge in liquid refreshment, he was obliged to go to a saloon in the vicinity of the hotel.⁶⁷

Perhaps in no other Louisiana business were there

⁶³Alexandria Red River Republican, February 9, 1850.

⁶⁴New Orleans Crescent, July 30, 1860.

⁶⁵Chambers Diary, January 4, 1860.

⁶⁶Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 406. For the same traveler's opinion concerning accommodations on the road see pages 232-233.

⁶⁷Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 278.

such numerous changes in ownership, and notices were frequently published in the ante-bellum newspapers advising readers that hotels were under new management.⁶⁸ A hotel in Opelousas changed hands at least four times from 1853 through 1860,⁶⁹ and another hotel in the town went under new management at least three times during the same period.⁷⁰ Several of the supposedly excellent Shreveport hostelries changed owners several times in one four year period.⁷¹ In one parish where there were only three hotels all owned by native born Americans in 1850, there were five in 1860, all owned by persons of foreign birth, showing a complete turnover in ownership in the ten year period.⁷² Evidently many Louisianians felt that they could earn a living in this type of enterprise but after a few years sold out to others who had the same idea. The inn-keepers in most of the interior towns did only a moderate amount of business except during those periods when travelers were stranded waiting

⁶⁸Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁶⁹Based on a study of the Opelousas Patriot and the Opelousas Courier.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Shreveport The Southwestern, 1854-1858.

⁷²Based on the Manuscript Censuses of 1850 and 1860, Schedules I.

for the water to rise or when the courts were in session.⁷³

There were more than enough "grog shops" and coffee-houses in the villages of Louisiana; actually there was little difference between a coffeehouse, a "grog shop," and a saloon. Just as with the hotels, it was claimed that all of these establishments were excellent, and many were said to equal the best in New Orleans. However, it is likely that most of the complaints levied against the hotel-keepers could have been made against these proprietors. Along with the above named establishments were also found billiard parlors, ten-pin alleys, and gaming rooms.⁷⁴ People who attempted to earn livings following trades which served the pleasures of man were more restricted in their activity than were other businessmen of the period. Often their licenses were much higher; they were forced to close at certain times, and they were not allowed to sell to all prospective customers.⁷⁵

⁷³Based on a study of the newspapers of ante-bellum Louisiana. An idea of how the trade of a town was influenced by court sessions can be obtained in deGrummond, "St. Mary Parish," 59-60.

⁷⁴Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁷⁵This information is in all ante-bellum newspapers and Police Jury Minutes, but see especially Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852; Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 2, 1860 and June 5, 1854; Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, September 3, 1850; Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, October 4, 1858.

Of course, as has been indicated, some of the residents of the rural settlements earned their livings in skilled trades. Some of these artisans hired people to work for them at low wages, sometimes not over fifty cents a day,⁷⁶ but most of them worked alone most of the time, hiring people only when they embarked on a large project. Villagers welcomed the establishment of cooper, carpenter, and blacksmith shops because they felt that these businesses offered employment to citizens as well as bringing new business to the town.⁷⁷

Nearly every town and village had at least one such establishment of which its residents were proud. In Baton Rouge, the editors boasted about their excellent foundry and the fine workmanship of their gunsmith who received credit from them for the invention of the revolver.⁷⁸ The residents of Franklin and Monroe were overly boastful about their carriage makers.⁷⁹ The people of Alexandria were proud of their shoe manufacturer.⁸⁰ The list could be

⁷⁶T. K. Metcalfe to St. John R. Liddell, November 5, 1851. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁷Monroe The Register, January 5, 1860. Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 3, 1853.

⁷⁸Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 25, 1857.

⁷⁹Franklin Planters' Banner, June 8, 1848. Monroe The Register, January 19, 1860.

⁸⁰Alexandria Red River Republican, June 22, 1850.

continued indefinitely, giving at least one prized artisan or occupation for just about any settlement in the state, but in most instances, the praise lavished on the proprietor was not due to any great skill on the part of the artisan, but was due to the fact that the editor had been supplied with a fat goose or some other succulent viand.⁸¹

In a town of less than a thousand people it was not unusual to find several coopers, three or four carpenters, perhaps a carriage builder, a blacksmith or two, a tin and/or a copper smith, a watchmaker, a cabinet maker, a gunsmith, and one or more tailors.⁸² In some towns were such specialists as piano tuners and mechanics, book binders, photographers, horticulturists, and cistern makers.⁸³ There were barbers in many settlements, but most of them did not advertise in the local newspapers, and in Houma, for example, a village of some significance as a trade

⁸¹A careful reading of the columns of the newspapers reveals that the editor acknowledged most of the gifts, and a scrutiny of later editorials will reveal that the people praised by the editor often were the ones who had presented the gifts.

⁸²Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspaper advertisements.

⁸³Monroe The Register, December 1, 1859. Opelousas Courier, November 24, 1860. Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, June 19, 1854. Opelousas Patriot, January 26, 1856. Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, April 17, 1858. Shreveport The Southwestern, November 26, 1859.

center, there was no barber as late as 1855.⁸⁴ Sometimes the barbers did more than shave and cut hair, and one barber advertised that he was also in business to do cupping and bleeding and was "sure that none will be displeased who may require his services."⁸⁵

While not as numerous as the general stores and the coffee houses, there were a great many drug stores in ante-bellum Louisiana. These stores sold far more than medicine, and the better stocked rural establishments offered paints, oils, dye stuff, brushes, glass ware, perfume, stationery, tobacco as well as school books, novels, toys, pens, pencils, and magazines.⁸⁶

There were only a few rural ante-bellum Louisianians who thought that they could earn a living selling furniture, although many of the cabinet makers advertised that they were skilled furniture makers, and newspapers often carried advertisements for several New Orleans dealers. As late as 1860 the editor of the Opelousas Courier regarded a furniture store as "a desideratum long wished

⁸⁴Houma Ceres, May 8, 1856.

⁸⁵Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 5, 1854.

⁸⁶Shreveport The Southwestern, May 23, 1855. Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 3, 1859. Monroe The Register, December 8, 1859. The lists of products presented were compiled from these newspapers, but a similar list could be made from any of the rural journals.

for in Opelousas."⁸⁷

In a number of villages were people who earned their livings by selling jewelry, but they were few, for jewelers had to face stiff competition. Then as now, cheap jewelry could be purchased in many places; the general merchants sometimes carried a small stock, and at times it could be found in the drug stores.⁸⁸

During the hot summer, the ice dealer was one of the busiest businessmen in rural Louisiana. The residents of the towns and villages, aided by their editors, counted the days until the arrival of an ice ship. One Louisianian compared ten days of Louisiana summer without ice to "Ten Days in Purgatory."⁸⁹ When ice was available residents could enjoy ice cream sodas, and if they did not care to visit the public dispensaries, the necessary ingredients could be obtained at many drug and grocery stores.

Thus, the merchants and peddlers and artisans served the people of the towns and villages and the surrounding country-side. The merchants stocked and the peddlers carried the produce of the local area, goods from New Orleans and even staples and luxuries from far away New York. They

⁸⁷Opelousas Courier, February 18, 1860.

⁸⁸Based on a study of the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. See especially the Shreveport The Southwestern, February 6, 1856 and the Monroe The Register, December 1, 1859.

⁸⁹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 12, 1854.

carried English shaving soaps, Spanish shawls, French perfumes and liquors, Westphalian hams, and even the "very best Hungarian leeches;"⁹⁰ and with the advent of "patent" items they stocked and widely advertized such newly invented labor-savers as the Singer Sewing Machine⁹¹ and the "Knuckle of the Floating Ball Washing Machine."⁹² The artisans fashioned by hard work and with varying degrees of skill all manner of needed products. The other businessmen of the community completed the organization of the distribution of economic goods one which, though not entirely satisfactory, generally satisfied the simple needs of the rural and village folk of mid-century Louisiana.

⁹⁰Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 19, 1853.

⁹¹Monroe The Register, January 5, 1860.

⁹²Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 11, 1855.

CHAPTER XIV

The villages and towns of Louisiana were usually trade centers in a more or less advantageous location from which it was possible to carry on commercial intercourse with the surrounding back country. Many of these settlements contained only a store or two, perhaps a church, a post office, a grog shop or a coffee shop, and in the case of parish seats, a court house and sometimes a jail. In 1850, fewer than a dozen of these towns and villages were inhabited by more than a thousand people.¹

According to the Chambers of Commerce of ante-bellum Louisiana--the newspaper editors--every village in the state was either a "thriving, bustling" town or it was a village destined to be of great importance in a few years.² It was left to the editors of the newspapers in rival villages or perhaps to New Orleans newspaper men to expose the local propagandists. Two village editors, for instance, informed the world that their home town was a "delightful place," well built, thriving and doing a "great

¹Seventh Census, 474.

²Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

business" with a prosperous back country, "growing in all directions," and containing "undoubtedly" more gold and silver than any town of similar size in the state.³ A visitor from New Orleans who was interested in securing business for his newspaper agreed with most of what the editors proclaimed,⁴ but the editor of a Baton Rouge newspaper who was not so kindly disposed toward the village thought that the settlement's main claim to fame was that it was "caving-in," although it had never been entirely under water. The Baton Rougean told his readers that he could remember when Plaquemine had the "full proportions of a proper place," but that was no longer the case.⁵ Evidently there was much truth in the assertions of the Baton Rougean because the villager weakly replied that the neighbor was "too hard" and that the world would know where his town was "some of these days."⁶

Shreveport, the "commercial emporium of Northwestern Louisiana" was considered a certainty to become a great city by many of its enthusiastic residents,⁷ but the

³Based on a study of the Plaquemine Southern Sentinel and the Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel.

⁴New Orleans Crescent, May 7, 1860.

⁵Based on a quotation from an unidentified Baton Rouge newspaper published in the Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, July 3, 1858.

⁶Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, July 3, 1858.

⁷Shreveport The Southwestern, May 6, 1857.

traveling representative of the New Orleans Crescent could see no reason for going along with this belief. He thought that Shreveport would get no smaller and perhaps would grow a bit, but never into a great city.⁸

Life in the villages and towns of Louisiana was much the same regardless of the part of the state in which the village was located. Most of the residents dreaded the same things, desired the same things, complained about the same things, and did the same things. There were minor differences, but most of the differences were in degree not in kind.⁹

In no instances were the actions of the villagers more similar than in their reaction to the approach and presence of fever. With the news that Yellow Fever or cholera was in the state, most of the small towns began to talk about preparations to "secure the continual health" of the population. According to the villagers, all of their towns were healthy, and the disease had to enter for there was never any possibility of it starting in the town. The next step was to begin a movement for the profuse use of lime in the open ditches and the use of white wash on buildings that might be sources of disease.¹⁰

⁸New Orleans Crescent, July 21, 1860.

⁹Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

¹⁰Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853.

As the epidemic moved nearer the settlement, the residents began to talk of prohibiting the entrance of people and goods from infected areas and to hope that the evil scourge would not spread up or down the river from New Orleans which was more times than not considered the focal point of the epidemic. At this stage the newspaper editors stated that their villages were too clean to suffer the rages of an epidemic and that the residents should not fear.¹¹

The first case of fever in the village usually caused some residents to begin preparations for flight, and simultaneously the word was passed that none of the regular inhabitants of the town were suffering from the disease. Always at this stage, the principle sufferers were claimed to be foreigners, slaves, or unacclimated visitors; it was possible that some of the native inhabitants were feeling badly, but few were really sick.¹²

At this time, strong action was taken to institute quarantine laws that were to be enforced at all costs.¹³

¹¹Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. See particularly Alexandria Red River Republican, August 31, 1853; Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853; Opelousas Patriot, September 29, 1855. See also John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, September 12, 1855. Liddell Papers.

¹²The best example of this can be found in the Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 17, 1853.

¹³Franklin Planters' Banner, September 1, 1853.

The editor of one newspaper took his city council to task for recognizing the need for a quarantine law but refusing to pass one because it did not know how to enforce it.¹⁴ However, there were times when some villages whose residents were a bit more precautious not only talked of enacting a quarantine at an earlier stage in the sickness but did so, and the council of one village adopted quarantine regulations after it heard a rumor that Black Tongue had broken out a few miles to the north.¹⁵

Usually the residents did not flee their homes until several cases had been reported and at least a few residents had died, but in 1853 the exodus began from Alexandria with the knowledge that there were five cases of Yellow Fever in the town.¹⁶ At one time only 300 of the more than one thousand residents remained after the outbreak of an epidemic.¹⁷ In some instances only those who were forced to stay through business or duty did so; this group was usually composed of some ambitious merchants, the doctors, and other persons involved in the care of the ill.¹⁸ When the fever struck with its full force some of the churches

¹⁴Thibodaux Minerva, August 20, 1853.

¹⁵Opelousas Patriot, August 28, 1858.

¹⁶Alexandria Red River Republican, September 10, 1853.

¹⁷Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 44.

¹⁸Virginia Powell to Jane Scarborough, September 30, 1853. Bosley Collection.

and public buildings were used as hospitals,¹⁹ a condition probably necessitated by the lack of medical facilities and doctors to handle the many who were sick.

Although some people began to move back into the towns with the first signs of slackening of the epidemic,²⁰ the more affluent residents usually remained away from their homes until the first frost, although this could not be done by the majority of the population. Among the first back were the proprietors of the establishments that dispensed strong, refreshing beverages.²¹

Next to epidemics, the residents of the villages were most helpless when confronted by fire. Very few if any of the settlements in the state escaped from flames unscathed during the decade of the 1850's. Reports that fire had consumed much of the business part of a town,²² or that a village had suffered its first serious fire,²³ or that a block of residences had burned²⁴ were all too frequent in ante-bellum Louisiana.

¹⁹Thibodaux Minerva, September 24, 1853.

²⁰Shreveport The Southwestern, October 18, 1854.

²¹Thibodaux Minerva, September 24, 1853.

²²Alexandria Red River Republican, June 10, 1850.
Monroe The Register, March 15, 1860.

²³Thibodaux Minerva, November 19, 1853. This refers to the village of Houma.

²⁴Shreveport The Southwestern, October 4, 1854;
Houma Ceres, June 28, 1856.

In line with the general practice of making excuses for anything that might cause criticism of their towns, it was not uncommon for the villagers to blame many of the fires on unknown incendiaries,²⁵ and some of the towns took special precautions to prevent this type of crime.²⁶ There probably were some incendiaries in the state, but there can be little doubt that the majority of the fires were caused by carelessness and improper construction of chimneys, and at least one town council was aware that some of the destruction of property could be prevented by laws that controlled the erection of chimneys and the placing of stoves and stove pipes in relation to inflammable material.²⁷

Many of the towns and villages had no firefighting equipment,²⁸ and some of those that had were not suitably equipped to put out any fires other than small blazes. In one village the editor began an attempt to interest the citizens in the purchase of a fire engine in 1854,²⁹ but it

²⁵See particularly Shreveport The Southwestern, October 22, 1856 and Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, April-July, 1858.

²⁶Franklin Planters' Banner, November 8, 1851. Shreveport The Southwestern, January 3, 1855. Opelousas Patriot, April 21, 1855. Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, April 17, 1858.

²⁷Franklin Planters' Banner, June 8, 1854.

²⁸As late as 1853, Shreveport had no fire fighting company. Shreveport The Southwestern, October 4, 1854.

²⁹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, October 14, 1854.

was not until the spring of 1858 that the town acquired firefighting equipment.³⁰ Often when a village owned fire engines and hoses they were either inadequate or so poorly maintained that they were of little benefit to the community. One disgruntled citizen complained, "Our celebrated fire engine did not appear on the ground, being unserviceable for the want of less than a hundred dollars' worth of repairs,"³¹ and another editor, who in 1852 praised the "efficient service rendered by the engine,"³² in 1853 roundly condemned the poor equipment which caused the "excellent fire fighters" to fail in so many of their efforts to extinguish fires.³³

There were other instances of poor equipment causing failure in fire fighting, but some of the rules governing the use of fire equipment also were faulty; for example, any resident of Franklin could use the fire engine if he would send two gentle horses to the fire station and if he would apply to one of three places for the key to the engine house.³⁴ Probably much damage was done before the engine was obtained and put into use.

There was at least one instance when the parish seat was aided by the parish government in the establishment

³⁰Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, April 24, 1858.

³¹Opelousas Patriot, February 2, 1856..

³²Baton Rouge Gazette, May 15, 1852.

³³Ibid., January 8, 1853.

³⁴Franklin Planters' Banner, December 9, 1847.

of a fire fighting company,³⁵ but in another instance the Police Jury refused to appropriate money to help with the purchase of a fire engine.³⁶ It is probable that the governing bodies of parishes felt that it was not their function to protect the residents of incorporated towns from fire.

One conflagration that consumed nearly all of the business section of Alexandria started so slowly that it could have been extinguished with a few buckets of water, but the people were so busy trying to save their own property that they refused to fight the fire.³⁷ This fire destroyed several substantial buildings which might have been saved by proper civic spirit.

Many settlements in Louisiana had more than a proper share of stray dogs, and it was necessary that some of them carry on a more or less annual war to rid themselves of these nuisances. In 1853 the editor of an Alexandria newspaper found his town so dull that he was pleased that there was at least this activity in the town.³⁸ Different methods were used to destroy the dog population; most

³⁵Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, December 6, 1858.

³⁶Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 7, 1859.

³⁷Alexandria Red River Republican, June 10, 1850.

³⁸Ibid., August 13, 1853.

villages ordered the town marshalls to shoot them, but in one village the city council decided that it was too expensive to follow that procedure and decided to exterminate the surplus canine residents by feeding them poisoned sausages.³⁹ At times the prevalence of stray dogs was not only annoying but dangerous, and this caused a Baton Rougean to ask "Where is the dog killer? It is dangerous to walk the streets at night."⁴⁰ Later the same town decided to get rid of the stray dogs only to find that as fast as they were picked up and put into the pound, someone would let them out.⁴¹ It appears that the smaller villages did not have as much trouble with this problem as did the larger ones; however, the editor of the Bellevue Bossier Banner complained that yelping and shooting made him think that the dogs had taken over the village.⁴²

There were times when the villagers were greatly disturbed by pests other than dogs, although these pests never caused as many complaints. In 1852 Alexandria became the temporary haven for thousands of wild pigeons,⁴³ and Bellevue was always heavily populated by hogs and fleas as

³⁹Thibodaux Minerva, June 3, 1854.

⁴⁰Baton Rouge Gazette, February 28, 1852.

⁴¹Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 28, 1857.

⁴²Bellevue Bossier Banner, August 26, 1859.

⁴³Alexandria Red River Republican, January 17, 1852.

well as by dogs.⁴⁴ At times the rats were too plentiful and were then treated to feasts of poisoned food.

There was little that was planned about the villages of ante-bellum Louisiana; in fact it is probably true that they looked as if they had "been fired off at random and scattered" about.⁴⁵ The ones along the rivers and bayous were composed of a few buildings up and down the banks of the streams, while those located away from any stream were probably clustered around a cross roads or strung out along one long street.

The towns and villages were characterized by dirt roads that were all but impassable after the slightest rain, and after a hard rain sometimes the mud was not ankle deep, but knee deep. The roads always needed work, and no one ever thought that the village streets were in good condition--they were either miserable or worse.⁴⁶

Most of the difficulties in the incorporated towns were blamed on the town councils, who then as now rarely pleased the citizens. If they passed ordinances, they were berated for not enforcing them, and if they did not take action, they were criticized for lack of public spirit. The streets of Houma were so bad it seemed that no ordinances

⁴⁴New Orleans Grescent, July 30, 1860.

⁴⁵Ibid., May 7, 1860.

⁴⁶Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

existed for either "making, repairing, or keeping up" the roads,⁴⁷ and an Opelousas editor inquired, "Have we a Municipal Government?"⁴⁸ It was considered a great civic improvement when a resident of Ponchatoula paid to have the roots cut from under the road of the main street of the village.⁴⁹ Roots under the street would have been a minor difficulty in the villages of Gretna, Mechanics-ham, and McDonoghville, where it took an order of the Police Jury to get the property holders to take down fences that they had built across the streets of the villages.⁵⁰ The bridges were worse, if possible, than were the streets, and they were responsible for as many complaints, but as with the roads, if the citizens wanted them improved, they would receive quicker action by attending to the matter themselves.

There were no sidewalks in most of the villages, and Baton Rouge, the capitol city, still lacked satisfactory sidewalks at the opening of the 1850's.⁵¹ The residents of one small village managed to have walks built before the end of the 1850's, but remained greatly dissatisfied as the town council had ordered the sidewalks built of

⁴⁷Houma Ceres, December 20, 1855.

⁴⁸Opelousas Patriot, April 12, 1856.

⁴⁹E. G. Stewart to J. W. Gurley, February 27, 1860. Gurley Papers.

⁵⁰Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

⁵¹Baton Rouge Gazette, December 27, 1851.

shells. A running quarrel was carried on between the proponents and opponents of the shell walks for over two years.⁵² Before the shell controversy died, the residents began to complain about roots growing through the walks, and the editor pointed out that it was no use to build walks if the employees of the town were going to cut the weeds from the ditches and throw them on the path; he thought this both foolish and unhealthy.⁵³

Cows, hogs, and other animals usually had the run of the streets. In Baton Rouge, the largest center of population outside of New Orleans, the editor of one of the newspapers complained that the presence of a large number of cows made the sidewalks, "especially from Laurel to Church street . . . present more the appearance of a stable than a promenade."⁵⁴ Worse yet was that some residents of Opelousas used a vacant lot on a well-used route "just beyond the Catholic Church" as a place of deposit for all the cattle, horses, and dogs that died in the town.⁵⁵

There seems to have been a tendency for the majority of the settlements to attempt to improve their

⁵²Franklin Planters' Banner, December 20, 1849, June 19, 1852.

⁵³Ibid., May 22, 1852.

⁵⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, May 3, 1850.

⁵⁵Opelousas Patriot, March 24, 1855.

streets, ditches, and bridges during the 1850's. It is impossible to determine accurately just how successful they were, but in some villages improvements of sufficient importance were made to satisfy some people who had once been very bitter critics.⁵⁶ Except Baton Rouge and possibly Shreveport, it seems that none of the towns had street lights.⁵⁷ The promoters of town progress in most of the villages did not mention having or needing street lights, although it would appear that several of the more important villages should have been interested in the installation of lighting systems.

Since many of the people of ante-bellum Louisiana relied on rainfall as their major source of water, those who would not drink the water from the bayous and rivers of the state sometimes found themselves in dire need of rain. Although it was not a common occurrence, lack of rain did cause some editors to comment that cisterns were almost dry. The worst example of a water shortage during the decade was in Alexandria in 1855 where a dry season caused most of the cisterns in the town to go dry. By the end of May, the shortage was so acute that residents paid two dollars to water peddlers who brought in water from across the Red River;

⁵⁶Shreveport The Southwestern, et passim. Houma-Ceres, et passim. Thibodaux Minerva, et passim.

⁵⁷Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. See the Baton Rouge Gazette, December 27, 1851 and the New Orleans Crescent, July 21, 1860.

the owner of an ice house charged "two bits" a bucket for the drippings from his ice, and all strangers visiting the town had to pay ten cents for a glass of water.⁵⁸

Life in ante-bellum Louisiana towns and villages was regarded by the residents as either dull or peaceful and quiet. However, in many of the towns and villages there were enough shooting scrapes, fights, and brawls to make a twentieth century American consider life at least lively. Although there were a few ruffians walking the streets who took pleasure in beating up people, one town was once considered not too rough⁵⁹ and only two months later, was considered very peaceful and quiet.⁶⁰ A resident of a small village near Alexandria told her northern relatives that she was surprised to hear that her old hometown had gone through a crime wave (a series of robberies) but that nothing like that ever happened around her new home, although the people were "bad enough for anything." One probable reason for such peace and quiet was that "every one goes went armed and any attempt of that kind would be met with certain

⁵⁸Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, May 31, 1855. Morris and Sibley Papers. Shreveport suffered from a severe water shortage in September, 1858. Shreveport The Southwestern, September 29, 1858.

⁵⁹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 16, 1854.

⁶⁰Ibid., November 25, 1854.

death."⁶¹

Baton Rouge was considered a peaceful town, but residents had to beware of pickpockets for members of that "light fingered gentry" availed themselves of every possible opportunity "to gather in a plentiful harvest."⁶² At times citizens had to be on guard against stray bullets, for although there was a law against firing guns in town, one resident had his hat torn open and "his head grazed, the other day on Lafayette street" by a playful Baton Rougean.⁶³

Shreveport, a quiet town where "little happened" and where the city fathers prohibited the sale of liquor and closely supervised the activity of the less desirable citizens, fought off two series of petty robberies in a two year period.⁶⁴ More than one gun fight took place on the streets of the town, and in January, 1860, two gamblers fought it out, but fortunately neither was hurt seriously although one used a double-barreled shotgun.⁶⁵

Perhaps the roughest section of the state was the

⁶¹Augusta to Sarah W. Simpson, February 10, 1851. Anonymous letter. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁶²Baton Rouge Gazette, January 22, 1853.

⁶³Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 17, 1860.

⁶⁴Shreveport The Southwestern, January 3, 1855, February 13, 1856.

⁶⁵Bellevue Bossier Banner, January 6, 1860.

Opelousas region where the newspapers continuously carried articles concerning one fight or killing after another. In this region the residents sometimes fought with guns and bowie knives,⁶⁶ a practice that was not uncommon in other sections of the state.⁶⁷

Elections and sessions of court were periods of importance and activity in most settlements as well as in the parish seats. Residents from all parts of the parish usually visited the parish seat during these times, a fact which not only stimulated business, but also sometimes caused crowded housing conditions.⁶⁸ During these periods special political meetings, church services, holiday celebrations, interesting court battles, and many other events took place.

It was said that the villages were liberally supplied with "worn-out politicians" and lawyers during these periods, and truthfully the lawyers were not always welcomed even during court sessions.⁶⁹ One editor admitted that

⁶⁶Opelousas Courier, et passim. Opelousas Patriot, et passim.

⁶⁷Report of a fight in Bayou Sara printed in the Houma Ceres, June 19, 1856.

⁶⁸Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. See particularly the Thibodaux Minerva, January 13, 1855; the Franklin Planters' Banner, June 6, 1850; the Shreveport The Southwestern, May 9, 1855. F. D. Richardson to Moses Liddell, January 23, 1852. Liddell Collection.

⁶⁹Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 26, 1855.

courts, lawyers, and lawsuits were necessary, but that bleeding and blistering were also needed in certain cases and that all could become terrible burdens to those having to become intimate with them.⁷⁰ The main reason that people complained about lawyers was because it was thought that many of them delayed court proceedings so that they could charge higher fees. NOT TOO DIFF. FROM TODAY

Actually there appears to have been too many lawyers in some parts of the state. One lady wrote that she thought that young lawyers would "have to kill each other to get business" in Alexandria,⁷¹ and a lawyer from the Teche country once wrote to his congressman requesting aid in obtaining a political job because "there is scarcely any thing doing in the law line at present, & as I am totally dependant [sic] on what I can make at my profession, which at present barely yields me a support."⁷² When more than fifteen lawyers were located in a village of less than 1,000 people, it is obvious that some had to find other means of earning a living.⁷³ In another parish seat, there were sixteen lawyers by the end of the decade

⁷⁰Franklin Planters' Banner, June 6, 1850.

⁷¹Mary Sibley to Mrs. Thomas H. Morris, December 2, 1854. Morris and Sibley Collection.

⁷²Henry J. Heard to John Moore, April 11, 1852. Weeks Collection.

⁷³Franklin Planters' Banner, June 6, 1850.

although there were less than 1,500 people in the town and fewer than 4,000 free inhabitants in the whole parish.⁷⁴

The residents of many of the villages were able to secure medical treatment from trained physicians, but there is some evidence that a few of the supposedly skilled practitioners of the art of healing were nothing more than charlatans and swindlers.⁷⁵ Perhaps the outstanding example of quackery and dishonesty took place in Opelousas where a swindler "operating under the garb of masonry" succeeded in stealing much money from patients who had deposited their life savings with him, and if that were not enough, he was a "gay Lothario and Deep-Dyed Scoundrel" who though he remained in the village only two months stole the hearts of many women as well as the money of their fathers and husbands.⁷⁶

A young doctor who wanted to impress the residents of his village protested that he had too much business, but since in those days patients wrote their names on a slate on the doctor's door, it was found that he had no patients. His slate was always covered with names, a fact which caused suspicion, so he was watched and caught

⁷⁴Manuscript Census of 1860, Schedule I.

⁷⁵Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁷⁶Opelousas Courier, September 1, 1860.

"laboriously scrawling names on his slate trying desperately to make each one different."⁷⁷ There are instances when doctors advertised that they had been educated in France and, therefore, could give consultations in French and English, and one claimed that he could converse with his patients in French, German, Spanish, and English.⁷⁸

Although not as frequently mentioned in the newspapers, some of the villagers could obtain the services of highly skilled midwives some of whom claimed that they had been educated in Paris. Most of these women advertised in the Baton Rouge newspapers, although occasionally, an advertisement would be inserted in a newspaper printed in one of the smaller villages.⁷⁹

Residents of the outlying villages had to rely on itinerant dentists for most of their dental work, but some of the small towns did have permanently established dentists, although many of these went on tours of the countryside at various times of the year. One parish had the services of a New York dentist who left the North each winter to reside in a warmer climate for a few months.⁸⁰

In all probability, the dentists were forced to

⁷⁷Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 10, 1854.

⁷⁸Ibid., December 30, 1854.

⁷⁹Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁸⁰Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 8, 1854.

go on annual tours of the state in order to earn enough money to support their families. One dentist who resided in Madison Parish wrote that "I am geting almost out of hart about ever making any thing in this part of the country."⁸¹ Later he complained that it was easy to "pay out money but hard to collect."⁸² A study of dental bills in manuscript collections reveals that the large planters often went to New Orleans for their dental work; however, many were served by traveling dentists. Perhaps one reason why dentists did not collect some of their bills and serve more patients was because it was felt that dental care was too expensive. One Louisianian complained that she had twice visited her dentist who had filled "in all five teeth . . . and cleaned all of them, his charge was \$48.00 it was a most exorbitant charge I had but one bad tooth to fill, the others he had to make a hole through the enamel to fill them."⁸³ Relatively high dental bills were not uncommon during the period, although in many instances, much work had to be done.⁸⁴

⁸¹Chambers Diary, January 15, 1860.

⁸²Ibid., January 28, 1860.

⁸³McCollam Diary, April 2, 1851.

⁸⁴Based on a study of dental bills in the collections on file at the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

In many localities food and drink could be purchased every day of the week, but in some places there were strict rules governing the closing time of bars and coffee-houses and places of amusement. The residents of Baton Rouge could not purchase liquor after eleven o'clock P.M., nor could they enter establishments with billiard tables or ten pin alleys after that time. All places of amusement and all grog shops and coffee shops were to remain closed on Sunday.⁸⁵ In Jefferson Parish establishments that sold spirituous liquors had to close at eight o'clock during the fall and winter and at nine o'clock during the spring and summer.⁸⁶

The sale of alcoholic beverages was prohibited in some parts of the state. Usually the voters of the wards were given an opportunity to express their desires concerning this matter, and if the majority of the people in a ward voted to prohibit the sale of spirituous beverages, no liquor licenses were sold in that ward.⁸⁷

⁸⁵Baton Rouge Gazette, April 10, 1852.

⁸⁶Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

⁸⁷A good example of this process was the action taken in Lafayette Parish where in September, 1854, the Police Jury refused to sell licenses in certain wards because the majority of the people wanted to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages. Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 5 and September 4, 1854.

In many of the villages, though not all, there were social, fraternal, and military organizations that helped to lighten the life of the residents. Many of the newspapers carried notices of meetings of Temperance Unions, fire companies, Masons, military organizations, and other groups of all types.⁸⁸

Perhaps a good indication to the true rural character of the villages of the state was the complaint of the editor of a Baton Rouge newspaper; this citizen was indignant because men and boys bathed in the back-water within the corporation limits. He wrote in 1850 that this was a "shameful and disgusting" sight and that the women of the town should not be exposed to such indecency.⁸⁹ A year later, the Police Jury of Iberville Parish found it necessary to pass a law prohibiting bathing in the river or bayou in the daylight.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

⁸⁹Baton Rouge Gazette, June 1, 1850.

⁹⁰Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, April 14, 1851.

CHAPTER XV

The Constitution of 1845 which gave to the state white manhood suffrage also provided a public school system under the supervision of a state superintendent who was to be appointed by the governor. Recognizing public education as a corollary of manhood suffrage, it provided that education was to be free for all white children and that parish superintendents were to be elected by the voters of the several parishes.¹

The provisions made by the constitution were implemented by the public school law of 1847 which set the term of the state superintendent at two years, granted him an annual salary of \$3,000, and ordered him to visit each parish in the state annually as well as to give instructions regarding the course of studies and books to be used. The parish superintendents were to be paid \$300 a year. In order to support the schools a tax of one mill on all

¹Official Report of Debates in the Louisiana Convention, 1845 (New Orleans, 1845), 906. Hereafter cited as Constitutional Convention Debates, 1845. Constitution of 1845, Title VII, in Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention of the State of Louisiana. . . . 1845 (New Orleans, 1845). Hereafter cited as Constitution of 1845.

state assessments and a poll tax of one dollar on all white males over twenty-one years of age were levied. The Police Juries were ordered to divide the parishes into school districts and to assemble the citizens of each district to elect a district school board of three members.²

Under the administration of Alexander Dimitry the public school system of the state made rather rapid progress from 1847 to 1852, but in that year the office of parish superintendent was abolished and replaced by an unpaid board of district directors; the salary of the state superintendent was cut to \$1,500 a year, and he was no longer required to visit all of the parishes each year.³ Thus, much of the good that had been accomplished from 1847 to 1852 was dissipated. The effect was disastrous in the more isolated parishes but was bad everywhere for the abolition of the office of parish superintendent threw the whole school system into confusion.⁴ Most of the new district directors were not interested in public education and often appointed untrained and inefficient teachers, paid them small salaries, and failed to report the

²Based on Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1847, 178-187.

³Acts of the State of Louisiana, 1852, 211. J. R. Ficklen, "The Origin and Development of the Public School System in Louisiana," Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Education, 1894-1895, 1302.

⁴"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1852, 3.

conditions of the schools in their districts.⁵ In some instances where half the children of educable age had attended public school in the years before 1852, less than a third attended in 1858,⁶ and in one parish where there were thirteen public school houses in 1850, there were only three in 1860.⁷

Although strides were made before 1852, it should not be thought that the conditions were satisfactory. Although some of the parish superintendents were able and conscientious men some were not, and the latter was the case in Rapides Parish where the editor of one newspaper maintained a continuous war of words with the superintendent and the directors of the school districts. In early May, 1850, the editor complained that no one knew how much money was in the school fund of the parish because the parish superintendent would not disclose the information and that the district directors could not hire teachers because they had no way of knowing if they could pay them.⁸ At that time, the children of the Alexandria district had been without schools for six months because the superintendent claimed that funds were not available.⁹ Two weeks

⁵Ibid., 1857, 8-9, 1853, et passim.

⁶Opelousas Patriot, February 12, 1859.

⁷"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1852, 25-26; 1859, 34-35.

⁸Alexandria Red River Republican, May 11, 1850.

⁹Ibid.

later, the editor struck at the district directors for not keeping records and said that if they had they would not have been dependent on the superintendent for information.¹⁰ The schools in Alexandria remained closed until August (nearly a year) when the teachers thought that there was enough money in the fund to meet their salaries.¹¹

In Ascension Parish one teacher agreed to open a private school for the first six months of the year because there were no public funds available,¹² and in another alluvial parish the Police Jury was forced to combine two school districts because no teachers could be hired.¹³ There was difficulty in obtaining class rooms for the public school students of Baton Rouge, and it was not until 1851, that a building was built to serve as a school.¹⁴

There was nothing elaborate about the school houses of ante-bellum Louisiana; actually most of them were crude cabins. Within the first five years of the formation of the public education system over six hundred log cabins and frame houses were rented or built to house students,¹⁵

¹⁰Ibid., May 25, 1850.

¹¹Ibid., August 19, 1850.

¹²McCollam Diary, January 13, 1851.

¹³Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 21, 1851.

¹⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, January 18, 1851.

¹⁵Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 72.

and some of the school houses were used as churches as well as schools.¹⁶ School buildings were described by one school official who wrote that "The schools are generally taught in dingy, rickety, half roofless sheds or shanties, that a planter of ordinary capacity would not allow his negroes to inhabit. I myself have taught school for months in an apology for a school house, through the cracks and holes of which I could easily throw a good sized urchin of sixteen years, (there are honorable exceptions however)."¹⁷

It was the duty of the parishes to set the qualifications for the teachers, but some did not bother to do so, and there were many complaints that incompetents, "drunkards and unprincipled adventurers" were hired to instruct the children.¹⁸ Although some parishes set up regulations governing the selection of teachers, the difficulty of securing instructors made it impossible to enforce the laws.¹⁹ There were many reasons why teachers were difficult to obtain, but perhaps the most important one was the poor

¹⁶J. W. Nicholson, Stories of Dixie (New York, 1915), 30-32.

¹⁷"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1858, 55.

¹⁸J. R. Ficklen, "The Origin and Development of the Public School System in Louisiana," 1302.

¹⁹Based on a study of Louisiana Police Jury Minutes. See particularly Iberville Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 22, 1858.

pay that they received for their efforts;²⁰ one editor claimed that the pay offered, usually not more than four hundred dollars a year, was not enough to attract a good schoolmaster.²¹ Another reason so few able people entered the teaching profession was because teachers were "looked upon as an inferior sort and being of little sensibility and not justly entitled to the regards of society."²² The people of Lafourche Parish realized that the position of the teacher was difficult, and they called a meeting to consider "the best means of elevating the profession of Teaching, and promoting the interest of schools in this parish."²³

One former student remembered that his course of study consisted of "spelling, reading, writing, ciphering, and flogging." He studied Webster's blue-back speller and Smiley's arithmetic, and no less important he was fully acquainted with the hickory switch.²⁴ In some of the public schools of the state were taught French, English,

²⁰"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1857, 8-9. Houma Ceres, February 14, 1856.

²¹Franklin Planters' Banner, August 17, 1847.

²²"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1859, 55.

²³Thibodaux Minerva, November 24, 1855.

²⁴Nicholson, Stories of Dixie, 30-32.

Grammar, Latin, philosophy, and chemistry,²⁵ but most scholars had a much plainer educational fare. It was said that the schools of Terrebonne Parish taught spelling, but no pronunciation; writing, but no punctuation; and reading, but no grammar.²⁶

The reasons why the public school system of antebellum Louisiana was unsuccessful are not hard to determine. In the first place, the state itself did much to ruin a potentially good program when, on an economy spree, its legislators abolished the office of parish superintendent and decreased the pay of the state superintendent. It follows that with poorly paid and unpaid officials, the system would not attract able men to administer the program, and the low salaries paid teachers forced many prospective instructors into more lucrative fields. But as disadvantageous as the above factors were, the program would have had a chance to develop if the people of the state had been really desirous of having a public educational system.

Not only were the planters and wealthy merchants indifferent toward public education, but they opposed it. These were the people who had to bear the heaviest

²⁵"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1859, 34-35.

²⁶Houma Ceres, December 13, 1855.

financial burden in supporting an educational program, and they were little concerned for they could afford to send their children to private schools. This group felt that the cost of education for the masses was prohibitive, especially since it was they who had to foot the bill by tax assessments on their land and slaves. One river planter informed famed Louisiana historian Charles Gayarre that he looked "upon our School and Internal Improvement Systems as humbugs, and a useless drain upon an overtaxed people; and would gladly see them abolished."²⁷ In some places where the school lands were not in use they were not sold because influential planters were too busy cutting the timber from the land, and in one instance it was found that an artisan had set up a cooper shop on the school land and was busily engaged making profits from the sale of products made from public resources.²⁸

It was realized that where there were large land owners and where the support of public schools could be easily borne, few would appear for "where the private fence is far, the public school cannot be near,"²⁹ and it was well

²⁷E. G. W. Butler to Charles E. Gayarre, January 25, 1858. Gayarre (Charles E.) Collection. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

²⁸"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1857, 30.

²⁹Journal of the Louisiana House of Representatives, 1852, 12.

known that there was no profitable source of revenue where land was cheap and thinly settled; so, unless the alluvial and bluff planters were willing to finance public enlightenment, the chances for success were small.³⁰

The situation was particularly bad in Louisiana because a large segment of the population of southern Louisiana was French and Catholic, and this group was opposed to any institution that they thought might lessen the power of the church and the family. In their minds, the responsibility of education belonged to the church.³¹

Although there was much more interest among the less wealthy Louisianians, they were partly to blame for the failure of a system that was designed to benefit them, for the continual inability to get people to act as district directors indicates a lack of interest among that class of society. In reply to a complaint that there had been no election for school directors for the Baton Rouge schools, the editor admitted the fact but said that everything was in accordance with law for at the previous election, no one came in to vote.³² The editor complimented the board of directors and said that the evils of the

³⁰See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 69.

³¹Ficklen, "The Origins and Development of the Public School System in Louisiana," 1300.

³²Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, August 30, 1860.

school system were not inherent but lay with the people: they took absolutely no interest in the schools of the town and they kept over half of their children at home or allowed them to "lead a vagabondish life in the street."³³

Perhaps it was as the noted author T. B. Thorpe wrote the editor of one newspaper--that the people of Louisiana were more apt "to vote money away upon things bearing high sounding names and requiring no particular attention, than to provide for the humble wants of a small community, that demands the drudgery of going into details."³⁴

Taking up the slack caused by the unsatisfactory operation of the public school system were many privately owned or church-supported schools that were usually more favorably received by the people. Many of these schools included in their titles the word college or seminary, and many were called institutes, but most of them while offering a wider variety of subjects than did the public schools were seldom anything but primary or secondary schools. In fact in many parts of the state the only secondary education available was in these schools.³⁵

³³Ibid.

³⁴T. B. Thorpe to M. C. Bryan, in the Baton Rouge Gazette, December 11, 1852.

³⁵Guy C. Mitchell, "Growth of State Control of Public Education in Louisiana," an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1942, 69.

These educational institutions operated on a term-basis, but in some it was not impossible to enter at anytime of the year, although entrance in the middle of the term might cause difficulty in passing the examinations given at the end of the session.³⁶ Most of the schools accepted either males or females, but some were co-educational.³⁷ The subjects taught ranged from penmanship to intellectual philosophy with the majority of the schools offering courses in some foreign language, usually French, and many presenting courses in music for extra cost.³⁸ In girl's schools special courses could be had in French needlework and various kinds of embroidery as well as painting and other "ornamental" subjects.³⁹ As one young lady wrote: "According to your request, I have commenced taking painting lessons. We have now quite an interesting class, and Mrs. Ohivia has promised to entertain us whilst painting by reading Shakspear."⁴⁰

³⁶Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, April 28, 1855.

³⁷Alexandria Red River Republican, February 2, 1850. Franklin Planters' Banner, April 15, 1847.

³⁸Based on a study of advertisements inserted in the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

³⁹Ibid. See particularly Baton Rouge Gazette, February 7, 1852. Franklin Planters' Banner, January 14, 1847. See also Almina [Kilbourne?] to J. G. Kilbourne, April 22, 1851. Kilbourne Papers.

⁴⁰Almina [Kilbourne?] to J. G. Kilbourne, April 22, 1851. Kilbourne Papers.

Some of the boys attended these private schools to prepare themselves for entrance into colleges and universities, and many of the schools stressed the fact that they could do a good job along such lines. The editor of a Baton Rouge paper heartily congratulated two schoolmasters for doing a wonderful job in preparing students for entrance into colleges; they were in his good graces for some of their students were doing well at Harvard and West Point.⁴¹ In the schools specializing as college preparatory institutions, it was not unusual to find pupils studying English grammar, geography, ancient and/or modern history, philosophy, foreign languages, and some type of mathematics. Some schools also offered courses in chemistry, elocution, and mapmaking.⁴²

The cost of attending the private and parochial schools of the state varied greatly. One school charged sixty dollars for board and tuition for a six months' session but added one dollar a session for lights, five dollars for bed and bedding, and fifty cents a dozen for washing clothes. If the student desired to study French, he paid an extra ten dollars for the session, and music

⁴¹Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, January 7, 1857.

⁴²Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

lessons required another twenty dollars.⁴³ A schoolmaster in Catahoula Parish charged ten dollars a student for a five months' session, but obviously this fee did not include room and board.⁴⁴ To attend the Summit Female Institute in Ouachita Parish, it cost fifteen dollars per month for board, two to five dollars per month for instructions in English and ancient languages, six dollars per month for music lessons, and three dollars per month for French painting and drawing.⁴⁵ The principal of Opelousas Female College informed the residents of St. Landry Parish that the tuition in his school was \$100 for a forty week term for students in the "academic" department and fifty dollars in the preparatory department. Sixty dollars more was required for training in music if the school's instruments were used, and instruction in French was given at the additional cost of twenty-five dollars.⁴⁶ The Collegiate Institute in Shreveport charged the parents of the boys twenty dollars for a five month term in the "common branches," and twenty-five dollars per term in the higher branches. Extra charges were five dollars per month for

⁴³Alexandria Red River Republican, February 5, 1850.

⁴⁴Levi Morris to St. John R. Liddell, July 3, 1855. Liddell Papers.

⁴⁵Monroe The Register, December 1, 1859.

⁴⁶Opelousas Courier, November 24, 1860.

French lessons, fifty dollars per term for board, and ten dollars per term for fuel, lights, and janitor service.⁴⁷

It is difficult to evaluate the quality of instruction offered in the private schools of the state because there is no way to determine the qualifications of their faculties or their methods of instruction. However, if the newspapers are to be believed, all or nearly all of the schoolmasters were highly trained, very conscientious people whose only aim in life was to impart knowledge. J. W. Dorr, the traveling representative of the New Orleans Crescent, seemed impressed with the efforts of the private schools, particularly those run by the churches, but it is impossible to know whether or not he was telling what he himself had observed or what he had been told by a hometown editor.⁴⁸

Although wealthy Louisianians often sent their children to the North to complete their education, many permitted them to receive their primary and secondary training in Louisiana. Of course, many of the wealthier children who lived on plantations were educated by private tutors on their own or on a neighboring plantation, but some of them did go to the private schools in the towns and villages of the state. This in itself speaks well for some of the

⁴⁷Shreveport The Southwestern, March 18, 1857.

⁴⁸See New Orleans Crescent, April 30-September 10, 1860.

schools, and there are some direct references to particular schools among the letters of the ante-bellum planters. One Teche planter who sent his son to a Baton Rouge school wrote that "I find him improved in every respect and could not wish him to be at any better school. Magruder has two able Prof-with him and take it all in all, I think it is now the best institution we have in the state."⁴⁹ One incorporated female seminary, which was housed in a two-story brick building and which was staffed by five teachers,⁵⁰ was considered "very good" by a wealthy river planter and he considered its head mistress "a lady of fine attainments." He decided that it was not necessary to send his daughter to any other school with that one so near.⁵¹ A resident of Ascension Parish wrote regarding a private school in her parish: "Mr McCollam myself and the children went down to attend Andrew's examination, it was quite interesting to see 6 children reading and writing and speaking English that two or three years ago could no neither Mr Washburn is a good teacher."⁵²

⁴⁹F. D. Richardson to St. John R. Liddell, April 11, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁵⁰Record Book of the Iberville Female School Society, 1-3. Transcriptions at the Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁵¹John Hampden Randolph to St. John R. Liddell, November 1, 1850. Liddell Papers.

⁵²McCollam Diary, October 4, 1850.

There were, besides the regular schools offering a more or less general education, some schools that taught specialized subjects. These were not numerous. There is evidence that there were itinerant teachers who earned their livelihood by teaching a short course in one town and then moving on to another. An example of such a teacher was "Professor B. F. Rarey, the celebrated horse-tamer" who came to Opelousas to deliver a lecture upon the "government and education of the horse." A class was to be organized after the lecture, and the editor assured his readers that there was "no humbuggery in this matter."⁵³

Another teacher journeyed through Louisiana giving courses of lessons "in Fashionable Dancing and Graceful Gesture." The instructor guaranteed that "the most minute attention will be given to imparting an easy and elegant deportment to the pupils."⁵⁴

Some teachers realized that not only the children needed "schooling" and in some parts of the state tried to set up night classes for adults.⁵⁵ These schools offered courses in English, French, geography, and arithmetic.

⁵³Opelousas Patriot, February 19, 1859.

⁵⁴Opelousas Courier, January 7, 1860. Alexandria Red River Republican, June 1, 1850.

⁵⁵Baton Rouge Gazette, February 7, 1852. Thibodaux Minerva, November 10, 1855. Franklin Planters' Banner February 10, 1853.

Many planters hired tutors for their children. Some planters who hired these teachers opened schools on their plantations and invited other planters to send their children to receive their primary and sometimes secondary education. One planter paid a tutor \$1,500 a year, and then informed his neighbors that school would be held at his plantation from eight A.M. until two P.M. five days a week for approximately eleven months of the year. The tuition was one hundred dollars a year, and no student could be entered for less than one year.⁵⁶

All tutors were not fortunate enough to receive such large salaries. One received only five hundred dollars a year, although he did not like it, and he told his employer: "The profession of Pedagogue certainly deserves a consideration--monetary--since the receipts are but slight in other respects . . . I think we forgot the customary practice in a trade viz--To split the difference."⁵⁷ Another applicant for the same job wrote that he had some experience as a teacher, but that he was by profession a newspaper editor and printer. Ill health had forced him into the teaching profession, but he was a sober person and felt certain that he could teach reading as a science. He was so positive of his ability that he was willing to teach a

⁵⁶Minor Letter Books, October 4, 1856. Minor Papers.

⁵⁷H. Harris to St. John R. Liddell, January 23, 1856. Liddell Papers.

month or more on trial and to let his salary be determined by the progress of his pupils.⁵⁸

It was not always a simple matter to find a satisfactory tutor, and sometimes the planter had to write to Virginia or some other state in order to secure a teacher. One planter carried on a lengthy correspondence with the proprietor of a Virginia school who was supposed to hire a tutor for him. The schoolmaster told the Louisianian that all of the teachers who wanted to teach were teaching and that others who could teach were already in the University of Virginia and would not leave because their tuition would not be refunded. Furthermore, the Virginian explained that a school year in Virginia was ten months, and it would be necessary to give a Virginian his vacation all at one time for he would not want to stay in the portions of Louisiana that were thought to be unhealthy in late summer. The planter was informed that no Virginian would come to Louisiana for less than a thousand dollars for the school year.⁵⁹ Upon receipt of this information, the Louisianian decided that there was no need for him to try to get a tutor from Virginia, and he re-engaged his same instructor.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Nicholas Kelly to St. John R. Liddell, February 9, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁵⁹Franklin Minor to John Hampden Randolph, December 1, 1856. Liddell Papers.

⁶⁰John Hampden Randolph to St. John R. Liddell, January 1, 1857. Liddell Papers.

One Louisiana planter employed a New Englander as teacher for his children, and from the day the tutor arrived, he was unsatisfactory to the mistress of the plantation. This lady wrote: "Our teacher made his appearance yesterday in the person of a 'Green,' Mountain boy, a Vermont Yankee. I am not at all pleased with him. I find it very difficult to understand him; as also do the children--He has never taught before is rather illiterate; but with a great amount of supervision on my part we may get on well. he is very good natured & willing."⁶¹

The wealthy segment of Louisianians, like other affluent Southerners, were more interested in fostering higher education than in aiding the plain people to acquire mastery of the three "R's."⁶² This interest led to continual attempts to set up institutions of higher learning, and by the 1850's there were several schools in the state that were supposed to give instructions on a university or college level. Among the most important were the College of Jefferson in St. James Parish, Centenary College at Jackson, Mount Lebanon University in Bienville Parish, College of St. Charles at Grand Coteau, the University of Louisiana at New Orleans, and the Louisiana State Seminary

⁶¹Mary Liddell to Moses Liddell, November 19, 1851. Liddell Papers.

⁶²T. B. Thorpe to M. C. Bryan in the Baton Rouge Gazette, December 11, 1852. Constitutional Convention Debates, 1845, 909-911.

of Learning and Military Institute at Pineville.

Centenary College, a Methodist supported institution, enjoyed considerable prosperity during the 1850's. The faculty was said to be composed of carefully selected gentlemen who deserved their great popularity as teachers,⁶³ but some Baton Rougeans were doubtful whether Jackson was a suitable location for such a school. They thought that there were too many opportunities for recreation in the vicinity of that town.⁶⁴

The College of St. Charles, under the control of the Jesuits, was a small establishment that was really a secondary school in character throughout the ante-bellum period, although in 1859, it did grant four degrees to students who had completed their college requirements. At that time in the school, there were approximately 130 pupils of whom ninety-two were from the parishes in the vicinity of the college.⁶⁵

Mount Lebanon which was under the patronage of the Baptists opened its doors in 1852, but it was several years later before departments of higher instruction were added. In fact throughout the ante-bellum period, the institution was primarily a secondary school, and its chief

⁶³Baton Rouge Gazette, August 3, 1850.

⁶⁴Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 9, 1855.

⁶⁵Opelousas Courier, September 3, 1859.

purpose was to train recruits for the Baptist ministry.⁶⁶

The College of Jefferson, or Jefferson College as most Louisianians called it, was organized in the 1830's by a wealthy group of Coast planters and was prosperous during the first ten or so years of its existence. In 1845, however, the state withdrew financial support from the institution,⁶⁷ and shortly afterwards the college closed. The buildings and grounds were purchased after a time by another group of wealthy sugar planters, and it was reopened in 1859.⁶⁸ The buildings were roomy and substantial and in good condition, but there were only fifty students attending the college during the first term of 1860.⁶⁹

The University of Louisiana was provided for by the Constitution of 1845, but financial aid was not guaranteed by the state.⁷⁰ The University had developed from a private medical school that had been established in 1834, and by the end of the 1850's only the medical department and a law department were still in operation.⁷¹ Due to the

⁶⁶New Orleans Crescent, August 14, 1860. John T. Christian, A History of the Baptists of Louisiana (Shreveport, 1923), 143-144. Hereafter cited as Christian, History of the Baptists.

⁶⁷"Report of the Superintendent of Public Education," Legislative Documents, 1854, 47.

⁶⁸New Orleans Crescent, May 3, 1860.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Constitution of 1845, Articles 137-139.

⁷¹Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 73.

fact that the state did grant a little money to aid indigent students, some of the poorer citizens were able to take advantage of these departments.⁷²

Although the Louisiana State Seminary of Learning and Military Institute opened its doors in January, 1860, a member of its board of supervisors informed the governor in October, 1859, that he had "not met with a single one of our citizens this summer, who had the slightest knowledge of or about, 'The Seminary of Learning of The State of Louisiana.'--nor have I been able to see or hear of any (of the promised) newspaper notices of it, except those which I myself procured in the New Orleans papers."⁷³ The board member felt that it was an absolute necessity to inform Louisianians of the new institution as their "eyes appear to have so long [been] fixed on schools at a distance, that they cannot see or think about those nearer home."⁷⁴

The Seminary under the administration of William Tecumseh Sherman demanded strict obedience and discipline, although there is no evidence that its president was overly

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³G. M. Mason to Governor R. C. Wickliffe, October 22, 1859, Boyd (David F.) Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

⁷⁴Ibid.

hard on the students.⁷⁵ In his brief tenure as president of the institution, Sherman endeavored to instill in his charges a feeling of responsibility and propriety, a policy that did not always please the students. One group of students formed a society called the Midnight Marauders whose members evidently were not only mischievous but at times destructive. Attempts to clarify the situation caused an unpleasant disagreement between Sherman and the father of one of the Midnight Marauders. The parent, who was a prominent planter, came to the conclusion that the president was not consistent, dignified, or free from prejudice.⁷⁶ Sherman was vindicated in all of his actions in the matter by the board of supervisors, and G. M. Mason, an ex-board member, informed the planter that he was entirely mistaken in his attitude toward Sherman.⁷⁷

Before the institute had been opened six months, there was enough discontent among the members of the board of supervisors to cause the vice-president of the board to resign. Some of the board members wanted to do away with the military character of the institution and turn it into

⁷⁵Lloyd Lewis, Sherman Fighting Prophet, (New York, 1932), 121-122.

⁷⁶St. John R. Liddell to G. M. Mason, August 14, 1860. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁷G. M. Mason to St. John R. Liddell, August 20, 1860. Liddell Papers.

a 'Grand University' where "people may come & study all their lives."⁷⁸ Before any further trouble could be caused by the movement, however, the Civil War broke out, and the institution was forced to suspend operation.

There is abundant evidence to show that many of the sons of wealthy families did not study in the colleges and universities of Louisiana. Numerous planters sent their sons to out-of-state institutions for their secondary education.⁷⁹ Thus although there was much interest in higher education among the wealthy class of Louisianians, this class was not always willing to send its sons to local institutions.

There were several schools that were supposed to be institutions of higher learning for women. One was the Mansfield Female College where in 1860 there were from 130 to 150 students. This institution was under the patronage of the Methodist Church and during the 1850's taught mainly secondary subjects.⁸⁰ Another was the Silliman Female Collegiate Institute whose objective was "to impart to Young Ladies a thorough, liberal and practical education." It was open to all applicants with some preparatory literary

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Based on a study of the Minor, Randolph, Liddell, Butler, Bruele, and Batchelor papers.

⁸⁰New Orleans Crescent, July 18, 1860.

qualifications, and though it was under the patronage of the Presbyterian Church it was open to all people meeting the scholastic requirements.⁸¹ Two other female colleges of some importance were both under the patronage of the Baptists; they were the Mount Lebanon Female College which was established in 1856 and the Keachie Female College in DeSoto Parish which was founded in the same year.⁸²

Whereas it may be true that Louisianians were not overly concerned with the "judgments of Heaven" in the antebellum period⁸³ there is sufficient evidence to show that religion was making headway in the state in the decade before the Civil War. In 1850, there were only 306 churches in Louisiana, and of that total thirty were in the city of New Orleans, but by 1860 there were 572 churches and 511 of them were located in the rural parts of the state. The seating capacity of the churches was slightly over 200,000 (over 50,000 in New Orleans) in 1860, but it had been only slightly over 109,000 in 1850 with over 80,000 of the accommodations in the rural area. The value of church property increased from \$1,782,470 in 1850 to \$3,160,360 in 1860, but in this category it is seen that the great value of the church

⁸¹Charter of the Silliman Female Collegiate Institute, May 4, 1852. Marston Papers.

⁸²Christian, History of the Baptists, 156-157.

⁸³See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 62.

property was not located where most of the churches were. It was in New Orleans that nearly two million of the more than three million dollars of church property was located in 1860 and where \$1,200,000 of the slightly more than \$1,700,000 of religious property was located in 1850.⁸⁴

The value of church property in rural Louisiana was increasing throughout the decade, and it should be noted that while the average value of church property was only slightly more than \$1,800 in 1850, it was valued at above \$2,400 in 1860.⁸⁵ However, too much emphasis should not be placed on the increases in average value, for the decade of the 1850's was a period when some sects, particularly the Catholics and Episcopalians, built churches that were valued at more than twenty thousand dollars.⁸⁶

The Roman Catholic faith, which was strongest in South Louisiana, had in the rural areas of the state forty-two churches with seating accommodations for 25,080 people in 1850, but in 1860, there were eighty-one Catholic churches in the rural areas which could seat only slightly over six

⁸⁴Computed from Seventh Census, 491; Statistics of the U. S. in 1860, 403.

⁸⁵Computed from Ibid.

⁸⁶Based on Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana; a study of the ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers; Seventh Census; Statistics of the U. S. in 1860. Also it should be noted that the value of church property included the value of unused land and school facilities.

thousand more members than could the half as many churches in 1850. In 1850, there were twenty-one parishes without a Catholic Church, but in 1860, there were only thirteen and of this thirteen only one, St. Helena, was south of the traditional dividing line between North and South Louisiana.⁸⁷

From 1850 to 1860, the number of Episcopal churches increased from twelve to twenty-four in rural Louisiana, and the seating capacity increased from approximately 4,200 to nearly 7,700. The value of the property held by the Episcopal Church increased greatly during the decade; in 1850 it was valued at \$57,900 in the state and \$32,900 in the rural regions while ten years later the value was over \$330,000 for the state and nearly \$170,000 for the rural regions. In 1860, there were twenty-eight parishes with no Episcopal church. Although the number of churches increased from two to nine in New Orleans, the property valuation increase was less than threefold; on the other hand the number of churches in the rural area doubled, but the value of the church property increased over four times. Still the value of the nine churches in New Orleans was within five thousand dollars of being as valuable as the twenty-four rural churches.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Computed from Seventh Census, 490; Statistics of the U. S. in 1860, 403.

⁸⁸Computed from Ibid., 488; Ibid., 401.

In 1850, there were 125 Methodist churches in the state, but by 1860 there were 199. In rural Louisiana the number of Methodist churches increased from 120 in 1850 to 181 in 1860. In 1850, all but about five thousand of the 33,000 seating accommodations in Methodist churches were in rural Louisiana, and in 1860 when there was a total of fifty-eight thousand, there were still only about five thousand seats in the Methodist churches of New Orleans. It can be seen, therefore, that although this sect was building churches in New Orleans, most of the new members were gained in the rural areas. In 1860, there were only nine parishes without a Methodist church. Over \$211,000 of the \$336,000 worth of property belonging to the Methodist Church was held by rural churches.⁸⁹

In 1850, all of the seventy-seven Baptist churches that accommodated 16,660 people were located outside of New Orleans, and the church property was valued at \$30,470. There were 25 rural parishes with no Baptist church. By 1860, there were seven churches in New Orleans and 154 churches in the rural parishes. The church property was valued at \$231,945 most of which was in New Orleans, although only 5,500 of the 47,085 seating accommodations were in that city. By 1860, only nineteen parishes had no Baptist church, and obviously the Baptists were making rapid strides in both

⁸⁹Computed from Ibid., 489; Ibid., 402.

New Orleans and the rural parishes.⁹⁰

The Presbyterians also gained during the decade of the fifties. From eighteen churches, fourteen of which were in the rural parishes in 1850, to forty-two churches of which thirty-three were in rural Louisiana were the advances made by the Presbyterians in the ten year period. In 1850, the total seating capacity of all Presbyterian churches was 9,510, but by 1860 the rural churches alone could accommodate that number. Of the total of 9,510 seats in 1850, 5,110 were in the rural areas, but in 1860 of a total of 16,550, 9,550 were in the rural areas. The value of the church owned property was greater in New Orleans than it was in the rural areas although there were over four times as many rural Presbyterian churches as urban churches in 1850 and over three times as many in 1860. Of the total property valuation of \$149,000 in 1850, \$100,000 was held in New Orleans, and in 1860 of the total of over \$305,000 over \$200,000 was in New Orleans. In 1860 there were thirty-one parishes without Presbyterian churches.⁹¹

In 1860 there were no Jewish synagogues, Lutheran, or Unitarian churches outside of New Orleans.⁹² There were

⁹⁰Computed from Ibid., 488; Ibid., 401.

⁹¹Ibid., 490. Ibid., 402.

⁹²Statistics of the U. S. in 1860, 401-403.

twenty-two Union churches in the state in 1860 whose property was valued at \$22,750. All of these churches were located outside of New Orleans and could accommodate only 4,705 people.⁹³ In 1850, there were also two Christian churches⁹⁴ in rural Louisiana. These churches held property valued at only one thousand dollars, but the one Christian church in New Orleans controlled property worth \$60,000, and of a total seating capacity of 1,500, 1,200 accommodations were in the New Orleans church.⁹⁵ By 1860 there were three Christian churches, but the church owned no property in New Orleans, and the seating accommodations had declined to 950, and the property owned by the church was worth only \$13,550.⁹⁶

It is not difficult to determine that the great majority of the Catholics of Louisiana lived south of the Red River. In fact, the Catholics made very little progress in North Louisiana and actually no progress in the plantation areas of that region. Seven of the alluvial parishes of North Louisiana had no Catholic church before the Civil War. Although the Methodists and Baptists were gaining in numerical strength throughout the state, the areas of their largest

⁹³Computed from Ibid., 403. It is not known exactly what religion was followed in these churches.

⁹⁴Disciples of Christ or Campbellites.

⁹⁵Computed from Seventh Census, 488.

⁹⁶Computed from Statistics of the U. S. in 1860,

growth were north of the Red River, and it appears that their progress was not restricted to any one agricultural region, although their greatest strength was among the poorer people dwelling in the pine and oak regions. The Episcopal Church was centered in the plantation areas north and south of the Red River and made very little progress in the poorer regions of the state. Of the twenty-four Episcopal churches in 1860, eighteen were in the Alluvial and Bluff regions and five in the Oak Uplands. There were few Presbyterians in rural Louisiana, and they were centered in the plantation regions. Generally it can be said that the Catholic Church contained members from all social and economic classes, that the preponderance of its membership was in South Louisiana, and that the majority of its churches were in the Alluvial Region. The Episcopal and Presbyterian faiths were more appealing to the wealthier residents of the plantation areas, but their membership was less concentrated in any one plantation area.⁹⁷

Although Roman Catholicism had its beginnings in Louisiana nearly a century before the advent of Protestantism, by the end of the ante-bellum period the Protestants in rural Louisiana were more numerous though less wealthy than the Catholics. It appears that the most important sect numerically was the Methodist followed in order by the

⁹⁷Based on a study of religious statistics in Seventh Census, 488-490; Statistics of the U. S. in 1860, 401-403.

Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian. However the most valuable property was owned by the Catholic Church which was followed by the Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches respectively.⁹⁸

The statistics from the censuses are valuable, but they do not reveal the attitude of the people toward religion, for the number, size, and wealth of the churches do not necessarily give a true picture of the religious feeling of a people. It is true that the evangelical faiths suited the character and needs of many people of Louisiana and that these folk responded to the ministrations of the circuit riding Baptist and Methodist preachers. There can be no doubt that Protestant Louisianians enjoyed and attended the periodic revivals that were held, but there may be some truth in the statement that these revivals and camp meetings were as important if not more important as social events than as religious exercises.⁹⁹ One editor wrote that camp meetings "generally turn out to be mere farces in the test of religion,"¹⁰⁰ while another newspaper man left much unsaid when he wrote that the churches in some parts

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 65.

¹⁰⁰Bellevue Bossier Banner, September 2, 1859.

of North Louisiana "don't run regularly."¹⁰¹

"Of the rough piety of these rural Protestants, commonly Methodists or Baptist, more rarely Presbyterian or Episcopalian, there can be little doubt,"¹⁰² but it was admitted that piety did not reform the habits of many of the rural people. Dorr noted that the saloon owners would close their bars in time to follow their customers to church and that in some of the more pious North Louisiana communities there were a few more "whiskey restaurants" than were needed.¹⁰³ In one alluvial parish, it was remarked that the grog shops were more crowded on Sundays than were the churches and that while most of the ministers were starving, most of the bartenders were growing fat and wealthy.¹⁰⁴ In Baton Rouge, the Protestants had no cemetery of their own as late as 1852, and in Opelousas the Protestant cemetery was in terrible shape: "The gate was unhinged and leaning against the stile. . . . Cattle were browsing on the rank herbage of the once enclosure and hogs were rooting over the graves of the recently buried."¹⁰⁵

Religion seemed to be progressing in the Opelousas region, however, for five years before the editor of another

¹⁰¹New Orleans Crescent, July 30, 1860.

¹⁰²Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 66.

¹⁰³New Orleans Crescent, August 14, 20, 1860.

¹⁰⁴Franklin Planters' Banner, August 2, 1849.

¹⁰⁵Opelousas Courier, March 30, 1860.

Opelousas newspaper had boasted of the advances made by the Catholics and Episcopalians although he had admitted that the Methodists were not gaining because of their unsatisfactory minister.¹⁰⁶ Yet the ministers of the evangelical faiths were working diligently throughout the area and by 1857 were holding camp meetings that lasted for two or three days. At one of these meetings, the preaching was done by ministers from Alexandria, New Orleans, and places in Texas.¹⁰⁷

Where there were churches in continuous operation, there was not always good attendance. A Thibodaux editor wondered why, although the sermons were good and the members numerous, there was not a larger attendance at the Episcopal church in his village.¹⁰⁸ In Houma the Catholics paved a walk from the main street to the Catholic church in the hope that more residents would attend services; people of the village had obviously missed services too often, and the editor informed them that they no longer had any excuse for not attending church.¹⁰⁹

Even when the churches were attended there were examples of improper behavior. One editor denounced the

¹⁰⁶Opelousas Patriot, May 5, 1855.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., August 8, 1857. See the Monroe The Register, August 16, 1860 for the result of similar meetings.

¹⁰⁸Thibodaux Minerva, July 23, 1853.

¹⁰⁹Houma Ceres, September 13, 1853.

people of his community for their conduct; a number of members of the congregation entertained themselves at the religious meetings by kicking the seats, banging the pew doors open and shut, and when bored leaving church before the end of the service.¹¹⁰ Perhaps some of the reasons for the lack of attendance and improper behavior was attributable to the Negroes whose presence was becoming more and more annoying to white citizens.¹¹¹

The wealthy Catholic Church was not without its difficulties, for some of the church parishes had to struggle to build churches and had trouble trying to pay for them after they were built. For instance, one Catholic parish which was located in the heart of the Catholic belt of Louisiana was given land on which to build a church in 1840, but it was ten years before enough money could be raised to construct the edifice. In early 1858 the church burned and attempts to raise money to build another church failed. It was not until November, 1858, that work was started on a new church, but the work was done on credit. After the Civil War the church was seized by the contractors, and it had to be bought back by the Archbishop of New Orleans.¹¹² The Catholics of Baton Rouge were as unsuccessful

¹¹⁰Franklin Planters' Banner, August 2, 1849.

¹¹¹Taylor, "Negro Slavery in Louisiana," 187-189.

¹¹²Based on Baudier, The Catholic Church in Louisiana, 387-388.

in their attempts to rebuild their church in 1853. To start the program they heavily mortgaged their property, and by 1859, they could not raise enough money to meet their payments, and the building was finally sold at public auction.¹¹³

The churches of Louisiana served more than religious purposes, for some of the best schools in the state were established by religious bodies. Not only were the churches interested in higher education, but they also spent much money on primary and secondary education.¹¹⁴ Church activities also served as means of social relaxation for the people of the state, and many of the poor received much aid from the various churches. It is obvious that the Catholics, Methodists, and Episcopalians did the most, for they had the means with which to do the work; but all of the churches did all that they could for the needy and destitute.¹¹⁵

¹¹³Allen, "Baton Rouge," 38.

¹¹⁴See pages 416-418, 421-422.

¹¹⁵See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 55-58, 67.

CHAPTER XVI

It seems that there was no end to the ingenuity shown by the people of ante-bellum Louisiana in their quest for means of recreation. It is impossible to ascertain the favorite diversion of the people because it seems that they enjoyed most forms of entertainment.

One of the most popular was dancing; balls were given at every opportunity for every conceivable cause, and when no worthy cause was available they were given anyway. Not only were there private dances at residences and public balls in various fraternal lodge halls and public halls, but also in some localities there were private or public dances held in the saloons.¹ Dances were held on steamers, and on some occasions the people of Baton Rouge and the neighboring parishes were allowed to enjoy themselves in the rotunda of the state capitol.² While dancing was popular with most Louisianians it was particularly so with the residents of South Louisiana.

¹Opelousas Patriot, May 29, 1858. Baton Rouge Gazette, January 11, 1851. Franklin Planters' Banner, February 28, 1852. Thibodaux Minerva, January 28, 1854. Printed invitation. Bosley Papers. Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, May 29, 1858.

²W. M. Barrow to Anna Maria Johnson, February 25, 1860. Barrow (W. M.) Papers.

There were all types of balls--juvenile balls, masquerade balls, King's Balls, and dances for the benefit of some cause or activity; individuals rented halls so that they and their friends could enjoy the pleasures of music and feminine companionship. Some were free and some, usually those to aid a cause, required an admission fee of sometimes as much as two or three dollars.³ No matter the charge, the events were usually well attended.

Some dances were not planned, and a public speaking or perhaps a May Day celebration would turn into a frolic at the suggestion of an older person.⁴ The favorite dances of the decade included the Polka Quadrille, Military Quadrille, Polka Mazurka, Waltz, German Polka, Spanish Dance, and the Schottish Polka.⁵ Some people thought that dances imported from France and Italy should be prohibited,⁶ and some were opposed to the so-called public dances to which admission was charged for they felt that permitting all who could afford to enter to do so might embarrass the young ladies because it did not naturally follow that one who could pay the price of admission was necessarily a gentleman.⁷

³Shreveport The Southwestern, May 6, 1857. Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, December 22, 1860.

⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, May 3, 1850.

⁵Shreveport, The Southwestern, April 29, 1857. See also Allen, "Baton Rouge," 45.

⁶Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, March 22, 1859.

⁷Baton Rouge Daily Comet, January 18, 1854.

The newspapers of the period carried few elaborate descriptions of the public or the private balls, but printed enough to reveal that they were well attended and greatly enjoyed. Sometimes, without mentioning names, a brief description of the ladies' dresses was given but that was not a common practice. Perhaps the most common criticisms levied against the dances were those directed against the presence of Negroes. One editor was gravely dissatisfied with a well attended dance at which the music was excellent but at which "the refreshment room, and even the ball room, were woefully [woefully] infested by negroes, who were very annoying to the company, and that stole plentiful supplies of champagne."⁸ It was not only the Negroes who over-imbibed at dances, and this drew caustic comment from some editors, but in most cases editors said little about the behavior of white men.

All of the Louisiana editors and correspondents found the women very beautiful and graceful, and their comments cannot be regarded as anything other than flattering remarks by chivalrous or at least tactful Southerners. But Frederick Law Olmsted who had to maintain no such propriety could say what he pleased, and perhaps his description of a Creole ball in the small village of Washington might be more objective. He wrote: "The ladies were, on an average, more

⁸Franklin Planters' Banner, June 13, 1850.

beautiful, better formed, and more becomingly dressed, as well as much better dancers, than they would ever be found in a country ballroom at the North; but what was chiefly remarkable, was the exquisite skill and taste displayed in the dressing of their hair. The ball was conducted with the greatest propriety and broke up earlier than public balls usually do at the North."⁹

In one small village where dances were held only on special occasions, the editor complained that the people were too engaged in the cares of sober reality and thought that life should be carried on with a bit more gaiety and that the residents should follow the progress of the year the way they had started it, with dances. His motto was "if a little dancing is fun, much dancing is still greater fun."¹⁰

Since the people enjoyed dancing, it follows that they liked music, and Louisianians enjoyed all types of music and musical performances. In many of the parishes there were concerts for the benefit of churches, schools, and other worthy causes as well as performances by traveling professionals. Not all concerts were entirely instrumental, and sometimes listeners were entertained at "Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert[s/]." Although the people in many of

⁹Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 301.

¹⁰Houma Ceres, January 10, 1857.

the small villages were provincial due to their isolation, poor performers were not always allowed to leave the area without receiving blistering criticism. Because life in one town was so "monotonous," the concert of a "celebrated Miss Reynolds" was well attended, but it was remarked that if gallantry had not forbidden criticism of a lady, an endeavor would have been made "to show that the entire performance was a stupendous humbug, a catch affair. The farce was not exactly ridiculous, but only a little funny."¹¹

At the beginning of the decade the people of Franklin were well entertained by one series of concerts in which music comprised but a part of the entertainment; the residents were treated to a variety of songs and dances with the dancing of a Miss Duke producing a particularly favorable impression. Although some of them considered stage dancing "a piece of refined obscenity," this trouper's dancing was so modest that it won the admiration of all who saw it, and the audience expressed their feelings by cheering her act, although they showed their disfavor by hissing others.¹²

The pride and joy of any community were its musicians, and those not fortunate enough to have a band bragged about the quality of their fiddlers. One North Louisianian

¹¹Ibid., February 21, 1856.

¹²Franklin Planters' Banner, June 6, 1850.

offered to bet his clothes that his village had more fiddlers than any settlement of comparable size in the state, and he boasted that there was not an hour of the day when one could not hear the "dulcet strains" of music.¹³ Another parish considered its band as good as any in the state and regarded it as indispensable to the social life of the area.¹⁴ Two months later the people of this parish were gleefully informed that another fine band was being organized by an "excellent" professor of music.¹⁵

Most white Louisianians enjoyed traveling minstrel shows, and whenever one came to town its citizenry flocked to the performances. One of the favorite shows was the Christy Minstrels which visited many of the small towns of the state. Another popular minstrel man was Ned Davis who performed aboard the steamer Banjo and who was considered to be one of the "best imitator[s] of the negro character" ever to visit Louisiana.¹⁶ In communities rarely visited by the professional minstrel men, the people had their own minstrel shows produced, directed, and acted by local talent. One of the most famous of the local performers was

¹³Bellevue Bossier Banner, September 24, 1859.

¹⁴Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, September 29, 1860.

¹⁵Ibid., November 17, 1860.

¹⁶Shreveport The Southwestern, February 13, 1856.
Thibodaux Minerva, May 10, 17, 1856.

Simon Richard of the Opelousas region who entertained throughout the area with his famous juvenile minstrels.¹⁷

A great number of ante-bellum Louisianians were privileged to see the good and bad circuses, menageries, and hippodromes that circulated among the villages of the state. All sections were visited by the same minstrel shows, concerts, and circuses, which traveled an irregular circuit. Most of the newspapers carried the same lavish advertisements when the entertainers arrived in their town, a fact which brought added revenue to the rural publishers.¹⁸

Usually the circuses were staged in small, crowded, hot tents although some were given aboard steamboats. When a properly equipped circus visited a village it was remarked that the people were fortunate for too often much of the enjoyment that should be had at such affairs was ruined by poor facilities.¹⁹ One of the most advertised of all circuses was the Dan Rice Show, and once during a two-day stay in Baton Rouge over a thousand people gleefully witnessed the antics of Dan and his troupe.²⁰ Admission to this show was fifty cents for adults and twenty-five cents for

¹⁷Opelousas Patriot, March 6, 1858.

¹⁸Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

¹⁹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, December 10, 1853.

²⁰Baton Rouge Gazette, April 3, 1852.

children under ten.²¹ Another popular circus was Welch's Great Hippodrome, which had 163 male and female performers as well as 200 horses, monkeys, and other wild animals. Also well regarded was Van Amburgh's Menagerie, which was said to exhibit lions, monkeys, tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses, and leopards.²² To the collection was later added a giraffe "unfortunately dead, but fixed up as natural as life."²³

All of the circuses were not up to the expectations of the viewers, and in such cases the performers were sometimes criticized in no uncertain terms. The subscribers of one North Louisiana paper were told not to waste their time on the Rivers and Derious Circus because it was a complete "humbug" even though its manager was an honest man,²⁴ and the residents of Terrebonne Parish were informed that John Robinson's Circus and Menagerie contained nothing but the same old gags and tricks and that its immense menagerie was a fraud because it contained only four cages of animals.²⁵ In April, 1858, the editor of the Opelousas Patriot thought that Buckley's Circus was a rather "piebald" pageant,²⁶

²¹Ibid., March 27, 1852.

²²Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, December 3, 1853.

²³Ibid., January 20, 1855.

²⁴Bellevue Bossier Banner, October 21, 1856.

²⁵Houma Ceres, January 10, 1857.

²⁶Opelousas Patriot, April 17, 1858.

in May he wrote that although Reynold's Menagerie was not as large and complete as some that had visited the town, it was "sufficiently so to excite the admiration of the Zoologist."²⁷

Although not as numerous as the circuses and the minstrel shows, the magicians and their troupes seemed to have been favorites with rural Louisianians. Although some tricksters must have been less proficient than others, their performances occasioned no complaints, and in some of the small villages, these performers remained for as many as three days, to the immense satisfaction of the citizens.²⁸

Of course, the residents of the towns and villages had the opportunity to visit the numerous saloons and billiard parlors, and there can be little doubt that many idle hours were passed in these establishments. Usually the saloons, coffee houses, ten pin alleys, and billiard parlors served as gambling establishments, and as one Baton Rouge editor wrote: "Could the walls of certain back rooms in this city tell all they know of card playing and liquor drinking at midnight, how many are there of our citizens . . . who would be ashamed to hold up their heads and plead

²⁷Ibid., May 15, 1858.

²⁸See particularly the Thibodaux Minerva, April 12, 1856; Shreveport The Southwestern, March 18, 1857.

not guilty to the charge?"²⁹ But drinking and gambling were not confined to the back rooms of saloons; hotels, boarding houses, steamboats, and private residences were all used for these purposes.³⁰

Gambling was not limited to card playing, for many enjoyed the "Sport of Kings," horse racing. The great interest in horse racing was not confined to any section,³¹ and St. Francisville, Alexandria, and Baton Rouge had once been the rural centers of the sport. In 1851, the sportsmen of Alexandria sought to form a new jockey club and to get their race course in perfect order because "Races always draw strangers to a place and increase its business."³² This move was necessary for Rapides Parish wanted to regain its position.³³ Baton Rouge was also attempting to make a

²⁹Baton Rouge Daily Comet, August 9, 1855. For a similar opinion, see the Bellevue Bossier Banner, December 16, 1860.

³⁰Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, February 29, 1860 and Baton Rouge Daily Comet, March 1, 1853.

³¹Shreveport The Southwestern, November 1, 1854. During the 1830's William R. Barrow, Bennet H. Barrow, Daniel Turnbull, Alexander Barrow, and others had developed strong racing stables in the St. Francisville area and had made the track of the St. Francisville Jockey Club one of the best known in the lower Mississippi Valley. In 1838 its track had been considered one of the best in the United States and in "location, soil, or beauty," was unsurpassed. See Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, 58.

³²Alexandria Red River Republican, May 31, 1851.

³³Thomas Scarborough to William E. Scarborough, December 4, 1850. Bosley Papers. Ibid., May 3, 1850.

comeback as a racing center, and it was hoped that the planters who transported their racing stables to New Orleans would stop off at Baton Rouge on the way to and from that city.³⁴

The planters along Bayou Lafourche and those living in the Teche and Attakapas regions also were horse racing enthusiasts. During the racing season one Bayou Lafourche planter always journeyed to New Orleans where he met friends from all over the state, and in one year, 1854, he planned to attend the races at the National Course in New York.³⁵ Horses from St. Mary Parish were raced at various state tracks, and if the Franklin editor can be believed, they had exceptional success.³⁶ One of the outstanding stables of that area was that of Alexander Porter whose horses were justly famous in all Louisiana racing circles.³⁷ In lower Louisiana, the sport became so popular that the Police Jury of one delta parish had to deny its citizens the right "to run races on the public roads or streets" of the parish.³⁸

A description of "A Great Horse Race" gives some idea of horse racing in the smaller villages of the state.

³⁴Baton Rouge Gazette, December 6, 1851.

³⁵Wingfield, "The Minor Plantations," 23.

³⁶Franklin Planters' Banner, April 27, 1848.

³⁷Stephenson, Alexander Porter, 128-129.

³⁸Jefferson Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 28, 1858.

This race, held on September 2, 1854, was between Major a seventeen year old bay horse owned by a merchant and a much younger horse owned by a bayou planter. The principal bet was \$600, but there was a large number of side bets. The distance of the race was seven acres, and although there were many jokes about Major's age and the odds were two to one against him, he won the race by nine feet. Immediately the owner of the loser demanded a rematch, but apparently he never got one.³⁹ Sometimes the horse races were terminated by a mule race which once caused a planter to exclaim that a race course was desecrated by such an event and that if a "Club survives this mule race it is immortal."⁴⁰

People spent many of their evening hours listening to all types of debates, lectures, and readings on all subjects.⁴¹ In some of the villages, the men organized lyceums, and the young men of one town stated that the object of their organization was to promote the cause of literature among the citizens and to afford rational public entertainment to the men and women of the community.⁴² These

³⁹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 9, 1854.

⁴⁰Minor Plantation Diary, March 22, 1857. Minor Papers.

⁴¹The residents of Northwest Louisiana seemed to greatly enjoy speeches on any topic. Shreveport The South-western, 1854-1858.

⁴²Franklin Planters' Banner, October 16, 1852.

organizations did not flourish in all towns. The editor of the Baton Rouge Daily Comet wrote that "This interesting institution is not, and cannot be dead, as long as we have two or three public spirited gentlemen" with an interest in the welfare of the town.⁴³ The lecturers and debators covered all topics from political ones of solely local interest to the "Mussulmans of the East, their history, manners, customs, and social habits."⁴⁴ However, many of the lectures during the 1850's dealt with temperance, a subject around which many societies were organized during the period.

The temperance societies attempted to recruit members in many ways. One of the societies hired a "very beautiful" young lady to address the members of a Methodist Church on the evils of drink, and an editor who in no way sympathized with temperance beliefs found her address entertaining and enlightening.⁴⁵ In order to attract followers from among people who would not attend lectures, the organization gave public balls, and one editor sarcastically commented that any dance backed by the promoters of temperance was certain to be a fine spectacle for it was sponsored by men who did not drink, gamble, fight chickens, race horses,

⁴³Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 25, 1855.

⁴⁴Thibodaux Minerva, March 4, 1854.

⁴⁵Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, February 24, 1855.

"go on a spree," or court a girl without the intention to marry her.⁴⁶ The temperance movement had organizations in many towns, and contrary to what might be expected, they achieved some success in South Louisiana. The movement was fairly strong in the vicinity of Pattersonville in St. Mary Parish⁴⁷ and was able to get enough votes in two wards of Lafayette Parish to prevent the sale of liquor licenses in those localities.⁴⁸ In Thibodaux, in the heart of Creole Louisiana, the followers of the temperance banner fought a staunch battle to gain strength; in fact they went so far as to use the pulpit as "a political forum [Fulcrum] to *forum* espouse the Maine liquor law."⁴⁹ The Methodist minister was told by the local editor to mind his Christian virtues and not to use his position to attack the Episcopalians and the Catholics who were proponents of the status-quo concerning liquor laws.⁵⁰ Eight months later when the issue was put to vote, the friends of temperance came within twenty-three votes of preventing the sale of liquor licenses.⁵¹

⁴⁶Ibid., December 2, 1854.

⁴⁷Franklin Planters' Banner, March 7, 1850.

⁴⁸Lafayette Parish Police Jury Minutes, June 5 and September 4, 1854.

⁴⁹Thibodaux Minerva, March 25, 1854.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., November 11, 1854.

Temperance societies were only one of the many kinds of organizations that existed in Louisiana during the 1850's. These organizations ranged all the way from the Odd Fellows to the chess and checkers clubs, and although some did have purposes other than recreation, most of them were primarily pointed towards social relaxation.

Not uncommon were the military organizations that were numerous before 1855 and which were even more prevalent toward the end of the decade. No matter what the military organizations were called and what their main functions were, their secondary aim was to build good feelings and fellowship, and in many instances, this was their chief accomplishment before the Civil War. These organizations sponsored many balls, but it was not only from this type of entertainment that they provided recreation for the public as their parades on holidays and special occasions were viewed by many interested villagers.⁵² The fire companies also sponsored dances and social events to raise funds either for themselves or for some needy charity. Usually the price of admission to these affairs was high,

⁵²Based on a study of the Shreveport The Southwestern, Thibodaux Minerva, Baton Rouge Gazette, Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, Opelousas Patriot, Opelousas Courier, Bellevue Bossier Banner, Monroe The Register, Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, Franklin Planters' Banner, Houma Ceres.

sometimes as much as three dollars.⁵³

There was an undeniable connection between education and recreation, for the public recitations of students served more as public entertainment than as a guide to the progress of the pupils. At these oral recitations, practically every student in the school performed in the field in which he was most skilled, and if he were not skilled in any; he did what the teacher had most successfully coached him to do. Sometimes there was singing and instrumental music, and often essays were read. Of course, there were times when the parents sat through a speech or two by the faculty members, and one such program offered distribution of prizes, "interesting" acts, "sweet" songs, and beautiful music, but none of this took place until the president of the school had delivered a long speech first in English and then in French.⁵⁴

In some sections of Louisiana, picnics were becoming "quite fashionable,"⁵⁵ and in most of the southern parishes it was getting to be a custom for the young blades and their ladies to board a steamboat, well chaperoned of course, to

⁵³Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers. For excellent examples see Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, December 22, 1860 and Franklin Planters' Banner, September 28, 1848.

⁵⁴Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, August 18, 1860.

⁵⁵Thibodaux Minerva, April 19, 1856.

travel to a neighboring parish to enjoy the hospitality of their friends. When the residents of Baton Rouge heard that an excursion from Donaldsonville was on its way to their town, they hurriedly requested that the residents of Ascension Parish postpone their visit a few days so that they could enjoy the planned festivities in the rotunda of the capitol. When they learned that the trip could not be delayed, a ball was held in a public ball room for the visitors.⁵⁶

There were several theatrical troupes that made annual tours through the hinterland. The company of J. S. Charles of New Orleans apparently was the most popular of these entertainers. This troupe, well received in all of the villages, was especially awaited in the little hamlet of Houma where the group often stopped on its way to engagements in the Attakapas Region.⁵⁷ It was reported that Charles and his actors once remained in Opelousas for a month and put on many successful performances⁵⁸ and that they drew a very large crowd in Shreveport.⁵⁹ In Clinton there was a well patronized "Thespian corps" which possessed considerable merit and which performed many "heavy peices

⁵⁶Baton Rouge Gazette, October 19, 1850.

⁵⁷Houma Ceres, September 6, 1856.

⁵⁸Ibid., January 24, 1856.

⁵⁹Shreveport The Southwestern, March 25, 1857.

[sic] of standard and legitimate drama."⁶⁰ However, "heavy" drama was probably not nearly so popular as some of the Richard Puppet Shows which were "the most life-like and altogether the best" ever seen in the Opelousas region.⁶¹ Certainly the puppet shows were better attended than the critically successful but financially unsuccessful Shakespearean readings presented to the people of Baton Rouge.⁶²

Independence Day was one of celebration in all sections of the state, but it was far more important in some localities than in others. In Bossier Parish, July Fourth was the signal for a free fish fry to celebrate the "gl-lious fourth,"⁶³ and after immense preparations there was a large celebration at Trinity in Catahoula Parish.⁶⁴ There was no public celebration in the parish seat of Iberville, although there was an annual celebration at the little settlement of Grosse Tete where in 1858, bear meat, venison, and panther steaks were served.⁶⁵ Although the residents of Plaquemine held no civic celebration on Independence Day, they once entertained at a public ball Baton Rougeans who

⁶⁰Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 23, 1855.

⁶¹Opelousas Patriot, March 1, 1856.

⁶²Baton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 22, 1857.

⁶³Bellevue Bossier Banner, July 1, 1859.

⁶⁴Concordia Intelligencer, July 4, 1850.

⁶⁵Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, June 28, 1858.

visited the village.⁶⁶

Elections were times of merry making and celebration, and it did not have to be a large or an important election to provoke festivities. To celebrate the election of a sheriff, there was once a large fire-works display followed by a barbecue,⁶⁷ and at a meeting where the political topics of the day were to be discussed, it was said that barbecue would be served and "champaigne [champagne] . . . [would] flow like an ocean."⁶⁸ Usually presidential elections caused excitement, but none were in a class with the election of 1860, for in that year all over the state there were barbecues in honor of either the Southern Democrats or the Constitutional Unionists which provided the people with ample entertainment and refreshment.

Life in the country was not as lively as it was in the towns and villages because the people living on the farms and plantations were able only infrequently to see the circuses or any of the other traveling performers that visited the small towns. Often they were separated from their neighbors not so much by distance as by bad roads and although the men and boys could get about easily, it was more difficult for the women and girls. Life on the plantations

⁶⁶Baton Rouge Gazette, July 6, 1850.

⁶⁷Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, November 12, 1853.

⁶⁸Concordia Intelligencer, May 24, 1851.

was a lonely one, and yearning for company was evident in many of the letters written by the planters and their wives. Wives asked relatives to come and bring all their families including the teachers,⁶⁹ and husbands requested that friends come so that they could enjoy hunting and fishing.⁷⁰ When it was impossible to get visitors and when the plantation routine allowed it, the planter and his family left the plantation for one of the many watering places in Louisiana, Mississippi, or other states.

The most popular watering place in Louisiana was Last Island where many of the planters spent as much of the summer as they could, even though at times the mosquitoes were so bad that the vacations were ruined.⁷¹ This resort became more and more popular, and by 1852, special summer celebrations were held there as well as a summer racing season.⁷² As early as 1851, it was thought that accommodations on Last Island were good enough for anyone,⁷³ and until it was desolated by a storm in 1856, it held first

⁶⁹Jane Liddell Randolph to St. John R. Liddell, December 13, 1852. Liddell Papers.

⁷⁰John Hampden Randolph to St. John R. Liddell, March 27, 1852. Liddell Papers.

⁷¹John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, August 11, 1851. Liddell Papers.

⁷²Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 13, 1853. Franklin Planters' Banner, June 28, 1852.

⁷³Concordia Intelligencer, July 19, 1851.

place among the Louisiana summer resorts.⁷⁴

But Last Island was by no means the only resort popular among Louisianians. For the residents of the Baton Rouge area, there was Greenwell Springs, and by the middle of the 1850's it was a favorite summer gathering place. To maintain daily connections with Baton Rouge, hacks were run to the town on a definite schedule, and the summer traffic between the capitol city and the resort was so brisk that it was said that sometimes travelers could not see where they were going for the dust.⁷⁵ The residents of the Attakapas area and people living in the Red River region could journey to Belle Cheney Springs to escape heat, mosquitoes, and disease.⁷⁶ There were two other small resorts in the area, Point Aux Springs in the Bayou Cane region⁷⁷ and Beaver Creek Springs located thirty-five miles north of Opelousas in the pine woods.⁷⁸ It does not appear that these resorts prospered although there were many attempts made to entice.

⁷⁴Walter Prichard, ed., "The Last Island Disaster of August 10, 1856: Personal Narrative of His Experience By One of the Survivors," Louisiana Historical Quarterly, XX (1937), 690.

⁷⁵West Baton Rouge Capitolian Vis-A-Vis, May 3, 1854.

⁷⁶Alexandria Red River Republican, July 10, 1852. Opelousas Patriot, August 4, 1860. Belle Cheney Springs was located thirty-six miles northwest of Opelousas.

⁷⁷Opelousas Patriot, July 14, 1858.

⁷⁸Opelousas Courier, May 12, 1860.

customers. In 1858 the proprietor of Belle Cheney Springs announced that he had hired musicians for the entire summer and that he had dogs for those who wanted to hunt and boats for those who cared to fish.⁷⁹ Unfortunately the hiring of musicians and entertainers and the provisions for hunting and fishing did not make the resort profitable, and it was put up for sale at least twice during the decade.⁸⁰ Although North Louisiana had fewer such vacation spots, Castor Springs in Catahoula Parish⁸¹ and a large rest home far removed from the dust and heat of Shreveport served as vacation spots for weary planters and merchants.⁸²

All planters and merchants who went to summer resorts did not go to the Louisiana watering places; some wealthier Louisianians spent their summer vacations at restful places in other southern states.⁸³ One of the more popular out-of-state resorts was Mississippi City, a small town that fronted on the Gulf of Mexico. Louisiana and Mississippi planters had built a row of summer residences extending for two or three miles along the seashore, and it was thought that the

⁷⁹Opelousas Patriot, June 26, 1858.

⁸⁰Opelousas Courier, December 25, 1852 and August 4, 1860.

⁸¹Monroe The Register, January 19, 1860.

⁸²Shreveport The Southwestern, July 16, 1856.

⁸³Sitterson, Sugar Country, 81.

locality was one of the best in the South for fishing.⁸⁴ One planter who planned to spend his vacation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast decided to stay at Mississippi City because he felt that his usual stopping place, the Bay of St. Louis, was not as healthy as were those facing the open Gulf.⁸⁵ Other Louisianians took their leisure at Virginia Springs or Hot Springs, but from all indications most of them spent their little leisure time at one of the Louisiana retreats.⁸⁶ It should be noted that almost every advertisement of a summer resort informed the public of some healthful feature; none tried to interest the people as solely recreational centers.

There can be little doubt that the most popular sports in ante-bellum Louisiana were hunting and fishing. Every section of the state bragged of its great quantity of wild life, and every newspaper at one time or another told of the great hunting feats of some of its citizens. These sports were not restricted to the inhabitants of farms and plantations, for all that villagers had to do was to walk a block or so to arrive at ideal hunting and fishing places.

⁸⁴Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, June 12, 1858.

⁸⁵John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, July 7, 1853. Liddell Papers.

⁸⁶Concordia Intelligencer, July 19, 1851. Thibodaux Minerva, June 3, 1854. Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, September 15, 1860.

One of the best fishing spots in one sugar parish was only a "stone's throw" from the parish court house, and an equally good spot was within a block of the same building in another direction.⁸⁷ In fact, the resident of one small North Louisiana village added to his larder by walking out into the street and shooting robins.⁸⁸ People of the Lafourche region bragged about the excellent fishing along the banks of the bayou;⁸⁹ the residents of Concordia Parish thought that Lake Concordia was the best fishing place in the state;⁹⁰ and the Caddo Gazette reported that there was no place equal to Caddo Parish in regard to numbers of geese and ducks.⁹¹ Other areas were proud of their deer and bears, and it was stated that one hunter had killed over 125 bears in the Maringouin-Grosse Tete area in less than a month's time.⁹²

Although the life of planters and farmers was lonelier than that of the villagers, there were times when the

⁸⁷Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, December 23, 1854 and March 24, 1855.

⁸⁸Chambers Diary, January 6, 1860.

⁸⁹Thibodaux Minerva, April 29, 1854.

⁹⁰Concordia Intelligencer, May 17, 1851.

⁹¹Caddo Gazette reprinted in the Concordia Intelligencer, January 3, 1851. Five years later the Shreveport The Southwestern made the same report. Shreveport The Southwestern, November 5, 1856.

⁹²Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, December 23, 1854.

countryside became very gay. Nothing could liven up the farm and plantation area like a wedding. In 1853, a planter wrote to his father-in-law complaining that an approaching wedding had caused a "party every night somewhere in the neighborhood which has had pretty well used up the good people," and the next year he told his brother-in-law that another marriage had enlivened the countryside because of a number of parties, some of which he had missed because of bad weather and poor roads.⁹³ Usually newspapers did not carry information describing weddings, but one editor who attended a rather large one wrote that the house of the bride's family was very crowded by visitors from all over the section and that most remained at the reception until a late hour.⁹⁴

Holidays, particularly Christmas and New Year's, were also times of gala affairs on some plantations, and guests from distant parishes were urged to visit their friends on these occasions.⁹⁵ Christening also occasioned celebrations. One young Louisianian who visited a plantation

⁹³John Hampden Randolph to Moses Liddell, May 15, 1853 and John Hampden Randolph to St. John R. Liddell, May 11, 1854. Liddell Papers.

⁹⁴Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, July 21, 1855.

⁹⁵Willie Barrow to Mac, August 4, 1858 and M. Barrow to Anna Maria Johnson, November 11, 1850. Barrow (W. M.) Papers. George to Hubbard S. Bosley, March 5, 1853. Bosley Papers.

during the holiday season was to have "stood proxy" at a christening, but was delayed by poor roads and missed the occasion; however, he was treated to a very kind reception, and "There were many gathered around the social board."⁹⁶

It is difficult to determine how much of the leisure time of the ante-bellum Louisianian was spent reading, but it is known that several of the small villages maintained reading rooms, and most affluent planters purchased some type of reading material. One of the better reading rooms in the state was in Franklin, St. Mary Parish. It was said that this room was well patronized by the residents of the village and that it was one of the favorite gathering places in the community. Persons were charged five dollars a year for the use of the room, but visitors to the town could use it for a week before they had to pay the weekly stipend, seventy-five cents. In this room were the bound volumes of the Franklin Planters' Banner dating back to 1836 as well as novels by the popular writers of the day and popular periodicals; there were over 300 volumes in the library.⁹⁷

All of the small towns were not so fortunate. The editor of the Thibodaux Minerva rejoiced at the opening of Thibodaux reading room, but the establishment closed less

⁹⁶Frances Y. Pierce to William J. Minor, January 4, 1856. Minor Papers.

⁹⁷Based on deGrummond, "St. Mary Parish," 72-73.

a year after its opening. This room, located on the second floor of the post office building, contained all of the "principle papers and magazines of the chief cities of the Union" and levied an annual assessment of ten dollars on all patrons.⁹⁸ In some villages where the inhabitants had no reading room, the office of the editor of the town paper served the purpose. In one village, the editor who was the agent for the sale of subscriptions to many of the northern magazines allowed his readers to come to his office to view the issues,⁹⁹ and since some of the drug stores also sold the same periodicals, they offered the same accommodations.

If one may believe the advertisements, the most popular periodicals were Harper's Magazine, Godey's Lady Book, Edinburgh Review, Barnum's Illustrated News, The People's Journal, Arthur's Home Gazette, Graham's American Monthly Magazine, Gleason's Pictorial, and perhaps DeBow's Review. Of course, advertisement does not mean that the magazines were being read, but due to the amount spent proclaiming the virtues of these publications, it seems that some returns must have been going to the publishers.¹⁰⁰

Although it has been proved that many of the rich

⁹⁸Thibodaux Minerva, August 6, 1853 and June 21, 1854.

⁹⁹Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, et passim.

¹⁰⁰Based on a study of ante-bellum Louisiana newspapers.

southern planters had some type of library, it is hard to determine whether or not Louisiana planters read what they owned. A careful reading of extant letters written by the planters forces one to the conclusion that probably very few of them read anything other than the local and New Orleans newspapers, although it is likely that some did browse through periodicals imported from the North. As far as the classics are concerned, their correspondence reveals little acquaintance with them.¹⁰¹

The library of William J. Minor contained no history "worthy of mentioning," but it did have some works of the best poets, some geography, biography, and travel, and it was thought that the library could be strengthened by purchasing works that were "embellished with plates."¹⁰² One Louisiana sugar planter was greatly interested in history because he wanted to learn as much as he could about his ancestors who were related to George Washington by marriage. He maintained a correspondence with Louisiana historian Charles Gayarre concerning the matter, and in return for some manuscripts, Gayarre sent to the planter several books, one being his work on the history of Louisiana. The planter informed Gayarre that he regretted "that an imperfect knowledge of the French Language disqualifies me for a proper

¹⁰¹Based on a study of the Liddell, Randolph, Weeks, Batchelor, Minor, Landry, Butler, Brusle, Marston, Bosley, and Gurley Collections.

¹⁰²Wingfield, "The Minor Plantations," 18.

appreciation of your valuable History of Louisiana, but Mrs. Butler is delighted with the romantic adventures."¹⁰³ Bishop Polk owned a rather extensive library, but one visitor was impressed only by his "Books of Prints collected in Italy."¹⁰⁴ It seems that some planters owned works on English history, but to what extent it cannot be determined; however, one planter evidently considered these works important, for he requested that his father send him several volumes on English history so that his daughter could read them and be informed on topics that would better her.¹⁰⁵

One scholar has written that the libraries of sugar planters contained a wide range of titles and that the most popular were works of the nineteenth century romantic writers,¹⁰⁶ but it is probable that the observations of Olmsted were more accurate concerning the majority of Louisiana planters. He said that one could visit many planters and travel for days without finding more than a newspaper, perhaps a few books (usually school or religious), and several government publications.¹⁰⁷ It seems likely that if

¹⁰³E. G. W. Butler to Charles E. Gyarre, January 30, 1849; June 5, 1853; and March 20, 1853. Gyarre (Charles E.) Collection. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

¹⁰⁴Hilliard Diary, February 8, 1850.

¹⁰⁵St. John R. Liddell to Moses Liddell, November 7, 1852. Liddell Papers.

¹⁰⁶Sitterson, Sugar Country, 83.

¹⁰⁷Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 652.

and when the planters read, they read newspapers and magazines, but particularly the former.

There were more than enough newspapers in ante-bellum Louisiana; in reality, there were so many that some editors could not earn a living from the profession. Most were not newspapers in the true sense of the word, for much of their space was taken up by advertisement, literature, and opinion. Many papers carried little local news, but went to great trouble to quote material from other rural or the New Orleans papers. Many were strictly political organs that prospered as long as their party was in control in their vicinity, and some of the most bitter newspaper quarrels evolved around control of parish printing. Nearly all of the rural newspapers were weeklies, and outside of Baton Rouge, few villages made any attempt to publish dailies. However, one newspaper was called a daily because it contained a column for each day of the week although the paper appeared only once a week.¹⁰⁸

The newspapers changed hands frequently, and at times rival editors joined to finance one local paper. Failure to secure political support was a frequent cause for the failure of rural newspapers; other major reasons were that advertisers failed to pay for their space, and subscribers refused to pay their subscription fees. Many subscribers

¹⁰⁸Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, August 26, 1854.

refused to pay in advance because they felt that the paper would not last through the year. One editor who found that he could get subscribers discovered that none would pay him in advance, but he was so certain that his newspaper would be satisfactory that he decided to let the patrons have it for a short time on credit.¹⁰⁹ Less than two months later he sent bills and informed his subscribers that they had to pay because he needed the money; there were no exceptions--even "intimate friends" had to settle their accounts.¹¹⁰ An editor able to collect all the money due on subscriptions did not exist in ante-bellum Louisiana, and none hesitated to let the public know that he was dissatisfied with its paying habits. One, after giving vent to his anger, threatened to turn over the accounts to a lawyer if the subscribers continued to withhold payments.¹¹¹

Editors were a quarrelsome lot; they argued with everyone about everything, but above all they took special delight in catching other editors in mistakes or skulduggery. In 1855, one editor ran a story on the inundation of Caillou Island¹¹² which aroused the ire of a neighboring colleague. The story was entirely false, and when the

¹⁰⁹Houma Ceres, September 27, 1855.

¹¹⁰Ibid., November 9, 1855.

¹¹¹Monroe, The Register, January 5, 1860.

¹¹²Caillou Island was one of the Louisiana watering places.

publisher of the account was challenged by the editor of the Thibodaux Minerva, he replied that he had been misinformed and that he lived in "a kind of out-of-the-way place, and it is [was] a hard matter to obtain news, and you should act generous towards us . . . if we do manufacture an interesting item of current news occasionally."¹¹³

Other editors continually railed at their town councils but seldom at their Police Juries mainly because such action would cause them to lose the parish printing. Editors got angry with state legislators, and one said that if a better "set of men" were not elected to the legislature for the next session he was in favor "of converting that old Gothic building . . . into an asylum for decrepid, weak kneed-- and superannuated politicians; and that an act be passed to allow them a pension from the swamp land funds."¹¹⁴

Editors liked to publish information that would stir up action in a community, but they had to be certain that their sources were good; therefore, most of this kind of news found its way into print through letters to the editors. However, if the subject were dangerous enough the letter was not printed until the author was identified. One "Tax Payer" was told that he had to give the editor his name because

¹¹³Houma Ceres, September 13, 1855.

¹¹⁴Baton Rouge Daily Comet, May 5, 1855.

his "communication would bring two or three gentlemen up to our front office to demand the author, and we have no disposition . . . to stand in the shoes and take up the quarrel of any one. We believe what he says is true, yet the truth is not always palatable to the few, and the many do not always appreciate it."¹¹⁵

Editors particularly liked to boast about their circulation in neighboring parishes, and above all they cherished a complimentary remark from another editor, but as much as they regarded the compliments of fellow editors, they hated to have their paper condemned by a subscriber. One patron informed the editor of a Bossier Parish newspaper that he did not like the way the paper was printed and said that if an improvement were not made he would not pay for his subscription. The enraged editor informed the subscriber, one William Sapp, who was addressed as Mr. Sapphead that he could keep the money and sarcastically commented that he, the editor, would be willing to let him use an elementary speller at any time free of charge.¹¹⁶

The difficulties confronting a newspaper editor during the 1850's amounted to more than getting public printing, securing advertisement, and collecting from debtors.

¹¹⁵Eaton Rouge Daily Gazette and Comet, July 22, 1857.

¹¹⁶Bellevue Bossier Banner, December 23, 1853.

The editor was faced with many other problems; for instance, publication was at times suspended when the steamboats could not bring in paper, and sometimes when the boats were delayed, the editor had to print a half-sheet to conserve his paper so that he could bring out an issue the next week.¹¹⁷ At other times, the arrival of yellow fever or cholera or the breakdown of the press caused the editor to suspend publication.¹¹⁸ Delays in the mail also caused delays in delivery of the paper and complaints from subscribers.

Although the newspapers were not excellent, they were generally satisfactory sheets, and they provided most of the reading material for the majority of the Louisianians. They contained little that would today be considered news, but they contained enough of interest to justify their existence.

¹¹⁷Alexandria Red River Republican, August 13, 1853.
Bellevue Bossier Banner, August 12, 1859.

¹¹⁸Houma Ceres, December 6, 1855. Thibodaux Minerva, September 3, 1853.

CHAPTER XVII

Too little attention has been paid to class relations in ante-bellum Louisiana while race relations have been considerably over-emphasized.* Some writers have explained that the wealth, slaves, and political power of the great planters and merchants excited little envy among the plain people of Louisiana and that the combination of slavery and the plantation system prevented overt hostility among the classes. The lack or alleged lack of class enmity is considered a result of the presence of race prejudice which served as a substitute for ill-will among the classes. It is maintained that the contempt that the "struggling majority" of Louisiana might have directed against the upper classes was successfully expended on the Negroes and that any movement toward class hostility was quickly halted by the reminder that all Louisianians were superior to the slaves and free Negroes. It is thought that ante-bellum newspaper editors served as the agency for preventing class

*Some of the viewpoints expressed in this chapter were first brought to the writer's attention while he was a student in Sociology 194 (Race and Race Relations), Professor V. L. Parenton, Sociology Department, Louisiana State University.

conflict by preaching racial superiority.¹

A study of contemporary newspapers, travel books, and personal correspondence reveals that the actions of newspaper editors have been magnified and the race prejudice and contentment of the people exaggerated. Contrary to popular belief, many of the common people were not hostile toward the Negroes, and there is no evidence that they were complacent in their inferior social, economic, and political positions.

The residents of the Teche-Attakapas Region certainly had cause to complain of the actions of the upper class. In 1859, the region was infested with organized bands of "horsethieves and cut-throats" whose depredations caused the citizens continual losses. Since there was no "thorough organized government, or police system, . . . large numbers of prominent and intelligent citizens" formed an organization to put a stop to the outrages; and their organization grew to the point where it became "terrible in power, and bloody in its judgments." Through terrorism, this group ended the depredations, and people voiced the hope that no attempts would be made to prolong the power of the organization.²

30. ¹See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana,

²Opelousas Courier, August 27, 1859.

At first a majority of the people supported the organization, but by the middle of September, 1859, there was no such feeling, and many alleged undesirables who were expelled were returning to their homes.³ By this time, some questioned the motives of the vigilantes and concluded that a movement which had developed from necessity had degenerated into an instrument of aggrandizement for the upper classes. The editor of the Franklin Planters' Banner wondered who would want to live in a place where one group of men would steal your property and another would throw you down "and paddle you like a nigger if you dare express an honest opinion that does not suit their fancy. . . . One set of citizens steal your property and another will not allow you to open your mouth or use your tongue!"⁴

Residents of St. Mary Parish were told that the vigilantes "poured their wrath on none but poor men." It was thought that some of the outlaws were men of means but that the vigilantes passed over them to attack the poor who had no friends to aid them. The opinion was that "cunning avarice" was at work and that men of property were using the movement to acquire small homesteads and creole horses and cows at half price and that the whole movement was

³Ibid., September 17, 1859.

⁴Franklin Planters' Banner quoted in the New Orleans Crescent, September 20, 1859.

"assuming a darker appearance every day."⁵

Members of the vigilantes wrote that their motives were good and that the movement would not turn to speculation--none would take advantage of their activities to enlarge their holdings. A spokesman for the vigilantes explained that several men of means had been driven from the country and that the punishments exacted by the committee had been greatly exaggerated. He guaranteed that any property bought by the members of the Vigilance Committee would be paid for at full price and that aid would be extended to the widowed and the orphaned.⁶

This situation was far removed from that of the middle years of the 1850's when efforts were made to induce hardworking North Louisiana farmers to move into the region by tales of cheap land, fertile soil, and bountiful hospitality,⁷ but even then the trend was for poor men to leave the area because they felt that the rich "were taking up public land so fast" that people were wondering what was "going to become of poor folks."⁸ In 1855, the press of Opelousas condemned "Secret Foreign and Anti-American Associations" that advocated "freedom of religious liberty, the freedom

⁵Ibid.

⁶Opelousas Courier, October 1, 1859.

⁷Opelousas Patriot, August 11, 1855.

⁸Olmsted, A Journey Through Texas, 404.

of the press, and the equality of all men" and which pledged never to acknowledge any distinction of rank except that based on talent or merit.⁹ Conditions such as these in the Attakapas Region do not lend themselves to an interpretation that states that the poor were content with their position and that there was no open enmity among the classes.

A Bossier Parish editor claimed in 1859 that the rich oppressed and maltreated the poor not because the law was weak, but because it was not enforced against the rich. On the other hand only rarely was any leniency shown to "the poorer class of man-but with an unerring aim and stern decree, it [the law] strikes the fatal blow upon the defenceless wretch never wav[er]ing."¹⁰ These sentiments expressed by this small village editor are a long way removed from acceptance of the position of the upper class, and while the evils were not corrected by editorials, it is obvious that the spokesman for this parish was not going to turn his contempt from the planter-merchant class to the slaves and free colored, although he was against slave religion,¹¹ and what he called the shiftless and lazy whites.¹² The editor

⁹Opelousas Patriot, May 10, 1855.

¹⁰Bellevue Bossier Banner, October 28, 1859.

¹¹Ibid., August 19, 1859.

¹²Ibid., December 16, 1860.

of the New Orleans Crescent thought the productive laboring classes of society the "dragon of Democracy,"¹³ and another newspaper informed the citizens that no other people had ever been so enslaved by stupid laws and so degraded by class legislation which was designed to promote the welfare of a small, ignorant, selfish, domineering class.¹⁴ The editor of a Catahoula Parish paper stated that the slaves were better represented in the legislature than the poor whites for although the poor whites voted, they did not elect anybody while the master of slaves voted and elected members of the legislature for the slaves.¹⁵

The clash of interests between the Mississippi River planters and the planters along the Bayou Plaquemine-Attakapas network has been discussed, and this quarrel reveals that the smaller planters along the interior streams were not complacently allowing the wealthier river interests to have their way.¹⁶ Furthermore, the editor of one Plaquemine newspaper told his subscribers that the town would never really grow or attract industrious mechanics until some of the social evils were eradicated. He felt that there was

¹³New Orleans Crescent, October 27, 1859.

¹⁴New Orleans The Daily True Delta, August 3, 1852.

¹⁵Harrisonburg Advocate quoted in the New Orleans Daily True Delta, September 10, 1852.

¹⁶See pages 140-145.

too much prejudice, bitter feeling, and enmity and that ill-will was too strong "for a proper combination of will and energy to carry out important local enterprises as they should be."¹⁷

The prosperous planters and the less fortunate non-slaveholders and small planters often held different opinions of the railroads. The wealthy planters realized that railroads would probably increase their prosperity by opening new lands and markets. However, the small planters sometimes opposed the extra taxation that railroad building required, and the small farmers, many of whom were squatters, opposed the construction of railroads because railroad expansion caused them to fear eviction from their small homesteads.¹⁸

The methods used by planters in Rapides Parish inspired great dislike in the heart of one artisan who wrote that "The planters here generly speaking hold a good deal of property and would own ten times as much, if they could buy on a Credit, with the intent never to pay. it may surprise you when I tell you that in the distance of 30 miles on this bayou there are only seven Men who claims to own one Dollars worth of property, what they have is claimed by their Wives & Children and those that have none, manage to

¹⁷Plaquemine Southern Sentinel, September 9, 1854.

¹⁸New Orleans Crescent, February 23, 1857.

have Fixed as they term it so as those they owe cannot by Law recover any thing."¹⁹ It was only natural that a small planter, farmer, or laborer would think that he saw contempt in the deportment of such a neighbor toward him.²⁰

The sugar planters of the interior not only complained about the action of the river planters and their cohorts, the great merchants, in regards to the closing of the outlets of the Mississippi River, but they were also gravely dissatisfied with the way they were treated by the New Orleans merchants and the Mississippi River planters concerning the handling of their sugar in New Orleans. This dissatisfaction grew to such an extent that the Attakapas planters decided that they would prefer to move the sugar warehouses to Algiers, but in this they were balked by the actions of the river planters who favored New Orleans.²¹ It was hoped that someone could "pour oil upon the troubled waters, and settle all the jealousies that may have heretofore have existed between the planters of the Attakapas and those of the Mississippi river."²²

The attitude of the planter toward his hired labor

¹⁹Richard Seagars to St. John R. Liddell, May 13, 1850. Liddell Papers.

²⁰Flint, Geography and History, 514.

²¹Opelousas Patriot, February 2, 1856.

²²Ibid.

has already been discussed, but it might be well to recall that one sugar planter considered all men of the artisan class foolish and conceited²³ and that other planters regarded hired laborers as bumbling incompetents.²⁴

The activity of the deck hands on river steamers reveals dislike for their position. It was said that this group of horribly exploited workmen were treated worse than the lowest slaves on the plantations of the most brutal masters, and to better their condition they resorted to frequent strikes, and after a while strike leaders were arrested for "tampering" with the crew just as if they were slaves.²⁵

The artisans of Baton Rouge were gravely dissatisfied with conditions in their town, and they vainly protested the leasing of the industrial facilities of the state penitentiary to private manufacturers. They went so far as to threaten to leave the town if they were forced to face the impossible task of attempting to meet the competition of convict labor.²⁶ Although the artisans could not prevent the legislators from leasing the facilities, it was thought

²³C. C. Weeks to John Moore, October 31, 1860. Weeks Collection.

²⁴See pages 73-79.

²⁵Baton Rouge Weekly Gazette and Comet, July 25, 1858. See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 116.

²⁶Baton Rouge Gazette, March 6, 13, 1852. New Orleans Crescent, March 30, July 27, 1857.

that they were able to stir up enough opposition to make the operation of the private manufacturers unprofitable.²⁷

Turning to the relations between the poorer whites and the slaves, it is found that the planters did not fear that the lower classes would harm their human property by violence growing out of dislike, but by associations which might cause the slaves to lose respect for white men. In some sections of North Louisiana planters purchased land at very high prices to get rid of the poor who were accused of being too friendly with the slaves and of encouraging them to steal from their masters.²⁸ A Pointe Coupee Parish newspaper carried the complaint that there was a certain class of white men who were allowed to remain in the parish too long and that their contacts with the slaves were entirely too intimate. It was thought that as long as such relations were allowed to exist, it would be impossible to maintain proper discipline among the slaves.²⁹ The New Orleans Crescent carried the warning that the state needed new white laws as well as new Negro laws.³⁰

One South Louisiana planter told a northern traveler

²⁷Allen, "Baton Rouge," 16.

²⁸Olmsted, A Journey in the Back Country, 449-450. Seaboard Slave States, 674-675.

²⁹Pointe Coupee Echo, December 13, 1856 quoted in the New Orleans Crescent, December 19, 1856.

³⁰New Orleans Crescent, December 19, 1856.

that he would gladly pay three times the worth of land to get the Acadians to move from it, although he admitted that the people were hard workers and had been of some help to him on his plantation. This planter disliked these small farmers because he thought that they demoralized the slaves by making the Negroes think that they could live in apparent comfort without doing much and because they would get the slaves to do little favors for them and would pay them with luxuries which the planter felt that they should not have. The planter concluded by saying that "It was better that negroes never saw anybody off their plantation; that they should not see white men who did not command their respect, and whom they did not always feel to be superior to themselves and able to command them."³¹ The same traveler was told by a slave that the Acadians were "very good people" who were orderly and industrious and who lived comfortably although they had to work hard.³²

There could not have been too much ill-will between the slaves and the non-slaveholders along Bayou Lafourche, for the small farmers were well regarded by the large planters; and if the non-slaveholding class had been overly antagonistic toward the slaves, the planting aristocracy would certainly not have been well disposed toward them.

³¹Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 332-333.

³²Ibid., 342.

One large planter held the following opinion of the small Creole farmers along the banks of Bayou Lafourche: "the creoles constituted a happy community; their wants were few . . . There was but a small number of slaves . . . There were no aristocrats of either sex . . . The balls were well conducted, and the contrast in manner and deference toward the fair sex was marked when compared with similar assemblages among Americans of the same class . . . They were noted for their politeness, or disposition to oblige and were the best of neighbors."³³

The activities of the slaves were circumscribed by numerous laws, none of which were emphasized much more than the ones concerning visiting to the quarters. It does not seem possible that these laws were designed solely to prevent the spread of abolitionist propaganda or to diminish the possibility that the poor non-slaveholders would do bodily harm to the slaves. In all probability, one of the main objectives of these enactments was to prevent social relations between the races that might cause the bondsmen to lose respect for white men. While not abundant, there is evidence that planters did feel that much of the trouble they had with their slaves was caused by over familiarity between whites and Negroes. One mistress, after complaining

³³W. W. Pugh, "Bayou Lafourche from 1820 to 1825-- Its inhabitants, Customs and Pursuits," The Louisiana Planter and Sugar Manufacturer (New Orleans, 1888), 143.

that she always had trouble with her overseers because they became too familiar with their female charges, informed her sister-in-law that she felt that close contact with non-slaveholders, more than any other factor, was a major cause of slave punishment.³⁴ One of her greatest complaints was that the overseers caused jealousy and thereby lessened the efficiency of the working force by becoming intimate with slave women.³⁵ Another planter was forced to tell the son of one of his friends that he was aware of the fact that the young man had been visiting one of his slave women because he had found some of his clothes in the girl's cabin, and he warned the youth that if the visits did not stop, he would be forced to injure his reputation by taking action to prevent further occurrences of the unlawful activity.³⁶

The inability of the industrious non-slaveholder to acquire slaves was viewed as dangerous by the editor of the Sparta Jeffersonian (Bienville Parish) who felt that the South would lose staunch friends if these small agriculturists were not permitted to purchase slaves. He wrote the following reply to the editor of the Minden Monitor who

³⁴Rachael O'Connor to Mary C. Weeks, July 6, 1834. Weeks Collection.

³⁵Rachael O'Connor to David Weeks, January 19, 1833 and October 23, 1833. Weeks Collection.

³⁶Minor Letter Books, February 14, 1856. Minor Papers. For another account of intimacy between the races see Russell, My Diary North and South, 97-108.

opposed reopening of the slave trade:

. . . We can tell the Monitor that the slave trade will have to be opened in time, to prevent the slaves from getting into the hands of a few, thereby forming a monopoly. That minute you put it out of the power of common farmers to purchase a negro man or woman to help him in his farm, or his wife in the house, you make him an abolitionist at once. So long as slaves are attainable by all industrious men, the South has no firmer friend than the non-slaveholders living in the South; but put it out of their power to own them by high prices, and, as we have said you make them enemies to slavery-and from present indications, that period is not far distant.

. . . The number of slaveholders is constantly decreasing while the price of negroes has risen to such a figure as to substantially put it out of the power of the masses to become pecuniarily interested in the institution profitably. This isolation, which is growing greater every year is, we fear, fraught with anything but promises of prosperous character.³⁷

Thus it can be seen that all of the poor classes of the state did not hate the Negro and that all of the people were far from satisfied with their lot under the slavery regime. Enough evidence is available to at least cast shadows on the old beliefs that there was little class enmity in ante-bellum Louisiana and that overt class conflict was prevented by race prejudice which was substituted for class dissatisfaction.

To be sure there were bitter feelings toward some Negroes, but it was the free Negro, not the slave who bore

³⁷Sparta Jeffersonian quoted in the New Orleans Crescent, September 17, 1859.

the brunt of the abuse of most editors. The free Negro was generally considered the "pest of every community," and it was thought that he was dangerous to both the slaves and the whites.³⁸ Free men of color were named as a corrupt and pernicious influence, and some hoped that they could be induced to move voluntarily from the state. The editor of the Opelousas Patriot wrote:

You can not live in the United States with the white man in peace, you can never hope to approach any thing like an equality with him, this idea on your part would be repugnant to the laws of natural reason, nature and nature's God. While residing with the white man you will always be looked upon as a contemptible and inferior order of creation, you will be borne down and oppressed by laws, the force of which you can not avoid, and in the formation of which you have no voice, you are taxed by the white man for the support of government, yet you can claim very little protection from the laws of the country. You will at once then see the propriety of seceding from the society of the white man. . . . We would advise you to flee the society of the white man voluntarily, before you are compelled to do so by his irrevocable decrees.

Take a fair price for your lands, and we will insure you speedy purchasers. We speak advisedly and know that your places in this parish can and will be quickly filled by good moral and respectable white families from a neighboring State. This is the element we desire, this is the kind of population we want--all white citizens and their slaves--no free colored citizens in our midst.³⁹

It was thought that the existence of free Negroes was incompatible with slavery and that their presence would cause the

³⁸Baton Rouge Gazette, February 7, 1852.

³⁹Opelousas Patriot, July 23, 1859.

slaves to become idle and vicious.⁴⁰ Sometimes this attitude was masked behind a show of kindness, and complainants were quick to say that all they were trying to do was to make it easier for the poor, unfortunate free colored.⁴¹

A Ouachita editor complained: "We have a pack of impudent free negroes about Monroe, which ought to be taken down about forty degrees below zero. It is high time that our citizens should attend to this nuisance, by teaching said population a lesson or two in the book of common propriety."⁴²

Actually the enmity toward the free Negro while present in most sections of the state was stronger in some than in others. A survey of the Manuscript Censuses of 1850 and 1860 reveals that free Negroes were engaged in most of the occupations in which the whites worked and in some instances were able to acquire very large plantations.⁴³ Actually it was thought that the free colored persons were in better situation in Louisiana than in some of the northern

⁴⁰Bellevue Bossier Banner, September 2, 1859.

⁴¹Opelousas Patriot, August 6, 1859.

⁴²Monroe The Register, April 5, 1860.

⁴³Based on a study of the Manuscript Censuses of 1850 and 1860, Schedules I, II, and IV. Free persons of color prospered particularly in Natchitoches, Iberville, Avoyelles, but all of the alluvial parishes had wealthy free colored residents.

states because they were able to live in closer proximity to the whites and were not insulted as much on account of their color.⁴⁴

Although many of this group were despised, some did gain the affection and respect of the whites, and when one free woman of color's daughter died, the whites as well as the colored of Baton Rouge assembled at her home to extend their condolences.⁴⁵ When one free person of color acquired a plantation worth over two hundred thousand dollars the editor of an Iberville Parish journal wrote: "Yes, a sure enough free man of color, purchased the plantation over the bids and heads of the rich and aristocratic white folks of Iberville. This purchase makes him, the f.m.c., owner of two plantations in this parish, over 200 negroes and some 4500 acres of land. So much for the Southern peculiar institution. Verily, we have been accustomed to look upon F.F.V.'s as some but now we throw up our hats to the f.m.c.'s of Louisiana."⁴⁶

Of course there was race prejudice in ante-bellum Louisiana, and no attempt has been made here to disprove its existence, but what has been attempted is to show that it was

⁴⁴Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, 289-290.

⁴⁵Baton Rouge Gazette, September 18, 1859.

⁴⁶Plaquemine Gazette and Sentinel, June 12, 1858.

not strong enough to prevent overt class struggle. No one denies that there was only little action taken against the misuse of power, wealth, and land by the large planters and merchants, but it is time for a reappraisal of the reasons why there was so little.

The reasons for the failure of the underprivileged Louisianians to throw off the burden of aristocratic rule are to be found in three fields; namely, education, transportation, and government. In the first place, the great mass of the people of Louisiana were inarticulate, and under the educational system that existed in the ante-bellum period there was no way for them to gain the education necessary to overcome this deficiency.⁴⁷ It is a known fact that illiteracy makes the rule of the able simpler and easier to maintain.

As for transportation, it should be remembered that many of the less fortunate Louisianians were isolated from the outside world for long periods of every year. They had no chance to make known their discontent since they were not able to mingle with people of other backward areas of the state, and they had no way to spread their beliefs or their dislikes because the instruments of enlightenment and propaganda were in other hands. Lack of education and isolation

⁴⁷See pages 398-407.

were potent factors in the failure of the artisans and farmers of Louisiana to overthrow "Government by Gentlemen."⁴⁸

Although faulty education and transportation systems played a vital part in the failure of the common people of Louisiana to organize a potent resistance to the power of the Black Belt planters and the New Orleans merchants, the vital factor was that they did not have enough political power to enact legislation that could aid them. The Constitution of 1845 granted white manhood suffrage, but at the same time it lengthened the residence requirement for voting from one to two years, and it allowed the Black Belt and the city of New Orleans to maintain its hold on the state government by apportioning the seats in the House of Representatives according to the qualified electorate, a fact which gave to New Orleans the balance of power there; in the Senate the seats were apportioned according to the total population which gave the Black Belt a majority in that body. Even if the merchants of New Orleans could not control the action in the House of Representatives, the planters could veto all legislation in the Senate.⁴⁹ Thus, the conservative Black Belt was over-represented in the state government, and since

⁴⁸Shugg entitled the rule of the large planters and the New Orleans merchants the "Government by Gentlemen."

⁴⁹Based on the Constitution of 1845, Articles 8, 15, 16. See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 121-156.

many of the rural non-slaveholding residents could not or would not vote,⁵⁰ the state government remained right where it had been before 1845, although changes in the number of elective offices did tend to make local government more democratic.⁵¹ The situation of the common people was worsened in 1852 when a Whig controlled constitutional convention based legislative apportionment for both houses of the legislature on total population instead of in only the Senate as it had been in 1845. The planters and merchants were more firmly entrenched in their power than before and thus were able to govern Louisiana up to the outbreak of the Civil War.

The reasons for the lack of overt class conflict in Louisiana should not be blamed solely on race hatred, prejudice, or jealousy, nor should it be said that it was absent because of lack of enmity among the classes. The basic reasons were illiteracy or lack of education, isolation, and lack of political power. Again it should be noted that submission does not mean content, and perhaps no clearer proof of this was the fact that the ruling class saw the need of rigging the government to prevent the majority of the

⁵⁰It was thought that the lengthening of the resident requirement made it impossible for many of the hired laborers to qualify as voters and that the difficulties of travel prevented many who could qualify from voting. See Shugg, Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana, 130-131.

⁵¹Ibid., 130.

people from controlling it. If the plain folk of Louisiana had been content with their lot, there would have been no need for the apportionment schemes that were resorted to by Black Belt and New Orleans politicians.

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