



LOUIS HUGHES

THIRTY YEARS A SLAVE: FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM

The Institution of Slavery as Seen on the Plantation
and in the Home of the Planter

1897 ____ Excerpts ____

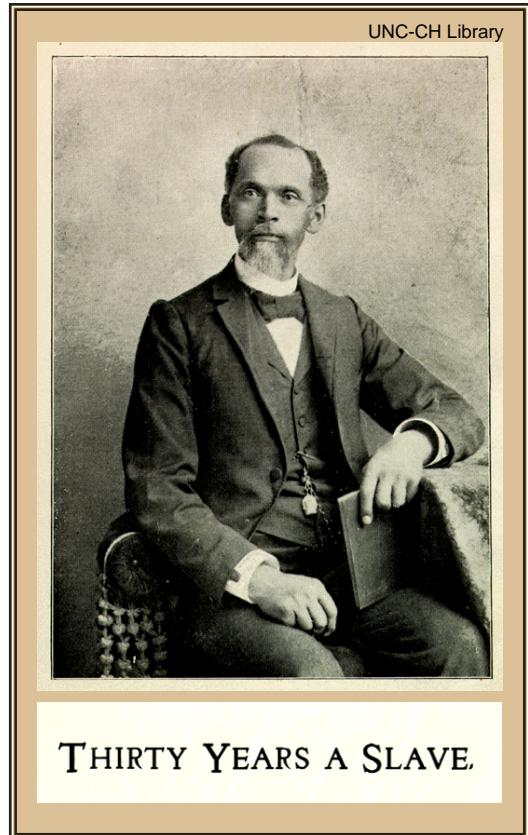
For about 15 years, Louis Hughes lived on a Mississippi cotton plantation owned by Edward McGee, "one of the wealthiest and most successful planters of his time." In his narrative, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom* (1897), Hughes describes the physical complexity of a large southern cotton plantation—the planter's house, overseer's residence, task-defined outbuildings, and minimal slave quarters. He details the regimented work routines of the enslaved blacks, noting the skilled craftsmen among them who fashioned most of the farming equipment. He lists the punishments meted out by the overseer that were "barbarous in the extreme" In 1865, as the Union army approached his plantation, Hughes was able to escape, soon retrieving his wife and children.

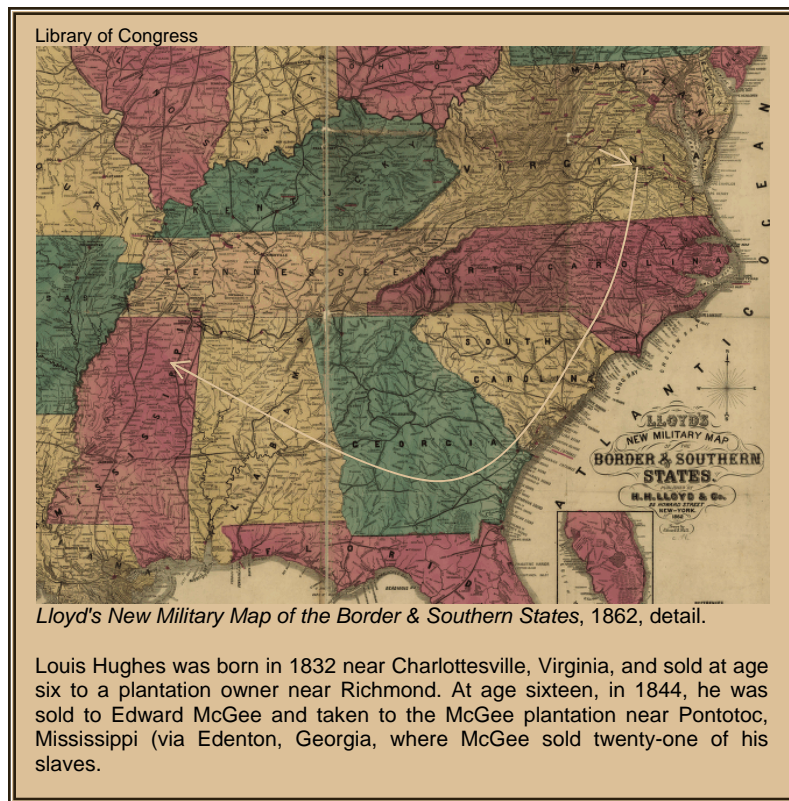
Ch. I. Life on a Cotton Plantation

Birth – Sold in a Richmond Slave Pen

I was born in Virginia, in 1832, near Charlottesville, in the beautiful valley of the Rivanna river. My father was a white man and my mother a negress, the slave of one John Martin. I was a mere child, probably not more than six years of age, as I remember, when my mother, two brothers and myself were sold to Dr. Louis, a practicing physician in the village of Scottsville. We remained with him about five years, when he died, and, in the settlement of his estate, I was sold to one Washington Fitzpatrick, a merchant of the village. He kept me a short time when he took me to Richmond, by way of canal-boat, expecting to sell me; but as the market was dull, he brought me back and kept me some three months longer, when he told me he had hired me out to work on a canal-boat running to Richmond, and to go to my mother and get my clothes ready to start on the trip. I went to her as directed, and, when she had made ready my bundle, she bade me good-by with tears in her eyes, saying: "My son, be a good boy; be polite to every one, and always behave yourself properly." It was sad to her to part with me, though she did not know that she was never to see me again, for my master had said nothing to her regarding his purpose and she only thought, as I did, that I was hired to work on the canal-boat, and that she should see me occasionally. But alas! We never met again. I can see her form still as when she bade me good-bye. That parting I can never forget. I ran off from her as quickly as I could after her parting words, for I did not want her to see me crying. I went to my master at the store, and he again told me that he had hired me to work on the canal-boat, and to go aboard immediately. Of the boat and the trip and the scenes along the route I remember little — I only thought of my mother and my leaving her. . . .

Hughes was sold to George Reid and worked on his farm outside Richmond for about six years, when Reid sold him at a slave auction for \$380 to a Mississippi plantation owner named Edward McGee. In late 1844, Hughes and thirty-nine other enslaved African Americans arrived at the McGee plantation.





My Mississippi Home

At length, after a long and wearisome journey, we reached Pontotoc, McGee's home, on Christmas eve. Boss took me into the house and into the sitting room, where all the family were assembled, and presented me as a Christmas gift to the madam, his wife.

My boss, as I remember him, was a tall, rawboned man, but rather distinguished in looks, with a fine carriage, brilliant in intellect, and considered one of the wealthiest and most successful planters of his time. Mrs. McGee was a handsome, stately lady, about thirty years of age, brunette in complexion, faultless in figure and imperious in manner. I think that they were of Scotch descent. There were four children, Emma, Willie, Johnnie and Jimmie. All looked at me, and

thought I was "a spry little fellow." I was very shy and did not say much, as everything was strange to me. I was put to sleep that night on a pallet on the floor in the dining room, using an old quilt as a covering. The next morning was Christmas, and it seemed to be a custom to have egg-nog before breakfast. The process of making this was new and interesting to me. I saw them whip the whites of eggs, on a platter, to a stiff froth; the yolks were thoroughly beaten in a large bowl, sugar and plenty of good brandy were added, and the whites of the eggs and cream were then stirred in, a little nutmeg grated on top of each glass when filled for serving. This was a delicious drink, and the best of all was, there was plenty of it. I served this to all the family, and, as there were also visiting relatives present, many glasses were required, and I found the tray so heavy I could hardly carry it. I helped myself, after the service was finished, and I was delighted, for I had never tasted anything so fine before.

My boss told me I was to wait on the madam, do any errand necessary, attend to the dining room — in fact I was installed as general utility boy. It was different from the quiet manner of life I had seen before coming here — it kept my spirits up for some time. I thought of my mother often, but I was gradually growing to the idea that it was useless to cry, and I tried hard to overcome my feelings.

Plantation Life

As already stated, it was Christmas morning, and, after breakfast, I saw the cook hurrying, and when I went out into the yard, everywhere I looked slaves met my view. I never saw so many slaves at one time before. In Virginia we did not have such large farms. There were no extensive cotton plantations, as in Mississippi. I shall never forget the dinner that day — it was a feast fit for a king, so varied and lavish was the bill of fare. The next attraction for me was the farm hands getting their Christmas rations. Each was given a pint of flour of which they made biscuit, which were called "Billy Seldom," because biscuit were very rare with them. Their daily food was corn bread, which they called "Johnny Constant," as they had it constantly. In addition to the flour each received a piece of bacon or fat meat, from which they got the shortening for their biscuit. The cracklings from the rendering of lard were also used by the slaves for shortening. The hands were allowed four days off at Christmas, and if they worked on these days, as some

of them did, they got fifty cents a day for chopping. It was not common to have chopping done during the holidays; some planters, however, found it convenient thus to get it out of the way for the work which came after Christmas.

—The Great House—

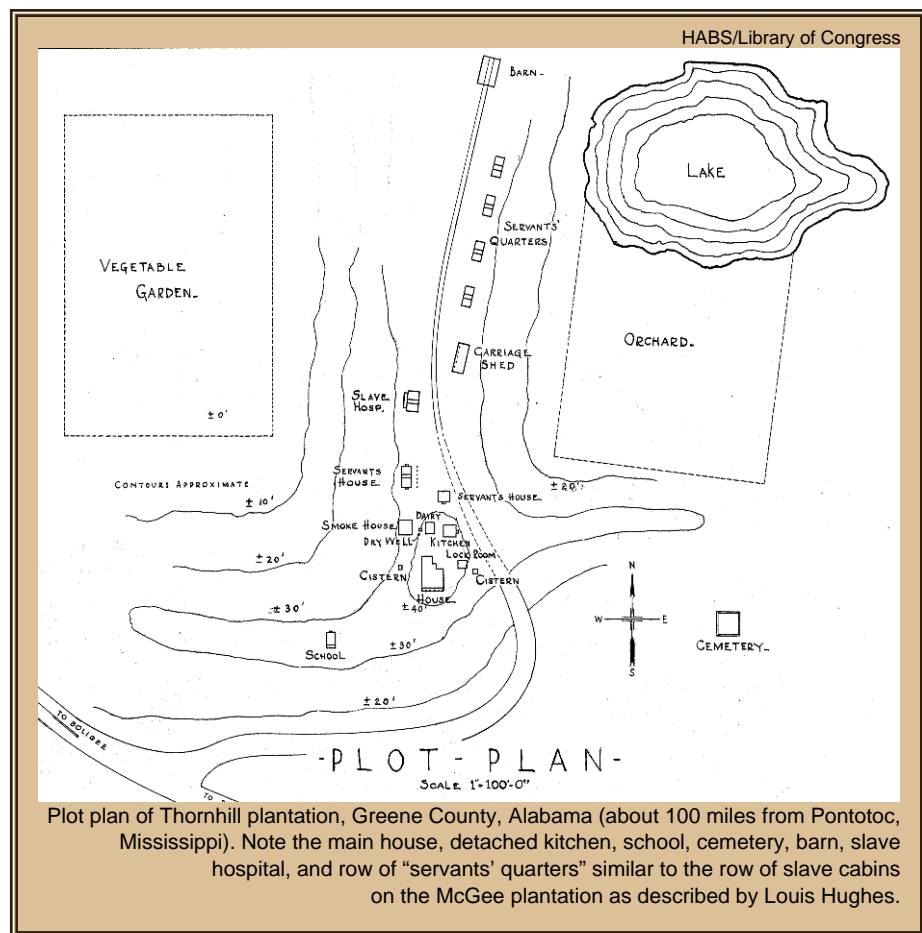
I soon became familiar with my work in the house and with the neighborhood, as I often had to carry notes for Boss to neighboring farmers, as well as to carry the mail to and from the post office. The “great house,” as the dwelling of the master was called, was two stories high, built of huge logs, chinked and daubed and whitewashed. It was divided, from front to rear, by a hall twenty-five feet long and twelve feet wide, and on each side of the hall, in each story, was one large room with a large fire-place. There were but four rooms in all, yet these were so large that they were equal to at least six of our modern rooms. The kitchen was not attached to the main building, but was about thirty feet to the rear. This was the common mode of building in the south in those days. The two bedrooms upstairs were very plain in furnishings, but neat and comfortable, judged by the standard of the times. A wing was added to the main building for dining room. In rear of the kitchen was the milk or dairy house, and beyond this the smoke house for curing the meat.

In line with these buildings, and still further to the rear, was the overseer’s house. Near the milk house was a large tree, and attached to the trunk was a lever; and here was where the churning was done, in

which I had always to assist. This establishment will serve as a sample of many of those on the large plantations in the south. The main road from Pontotoc to Holly Springs, one of the great thoroughfares of the state and a stage route, passed near the house, and through the center of the farm. On each side of this road was a fence, and in the corners of both fences, extending for a mile, were planted peach trees, which bore excellent fruit in great profusion.

—House Servant and Errand Boy—

My first work in the morning was to dust the parlor and hall and arrange the dining room. It came awkward to me at first, but, after the madam told me how, I soon learned to do it satisfactorily. Then I had to wait on the table; sweep the large yard every morning with a brush broom and go for the mail once a week. I used to get very tired, for I was young and consequently not strong.



Aside from these things which came regularly, I had to help the madam in warping the cloth. I dreaded this work, for I always got my ears boxed if I did not or could not do the work to suit her. She always made the warp herself and put it in, and I had to hand her the thread as she put it through the harness. I would get very tired at this work and, like any child, wanted to be at play, but I could not remember that the madam ever gave me that privilege.

Saddling the horse at first was troublesome to me, but Boss was constant in his efforts to teach me, and, after many trials, I learned the task satisfactorily to the master and to bring the horse to the door when he wished to go out for business or pleasure. Riding horseback was common for both ladies and gentlemen, and sometimes I would have to saddle three or more horses when Boss, the madam, a friend or friends desired a ride. Bird hunting parties were common and were greatly enjoyed, by the young people especially. . . .

— The Overseer – Whippings and Other Cruelties —

The overseer was a man hired to look after the farm and whip the slaves. Very often they were not only cruel, but barbarous. Every farmer or planter considered an overseer a necessity. As a rule, there was also on each plantation, a foreman — one of the brighter slaves, who was held responsible for the slaves under him, and whipped if they did not come up to the required task. There was, too, a forewoman, who, in like manner, had charge of the female slaves, and also the boys and girls from twelve to sixteen years of age, and all the old people that were feeble.

This was called the trash gang. Ah! it would make one's heart ache to see those children and how they were worked. Cold, frosty mornings, the little ones would be crying from cold; but they had to keep on. Aunt Polly, our forewoman, was afraid to allow them to run to get warm, for fear the overseer would see them. Then she would be whipped, and he would make her whip all of the gang. At length, I became used to severe treatment of the slaves; but, every little while something would happen to make me wish I were dead. Everything was in a bustle — always there was slashing and whipping. I remember when Boss made a change in our overseer. It was the beginning of the year. Riley, one of the slaves, who was a principal plower, was not on hand for work one Monday morning, having been delayed in fixing the bridle of his mule, which the animal, for lack of something better, perhaps, had been vigorously chewing and rendered nearly useless. He was, therefore, considerably behind time, when he reached the field. Without waiting to learn what was the reason for the delay, the overseer sprang upon him with his bull whip, which was about seven feet long, lashing him with all his strength, every stroke leaving its mark upon the poor man's body, and finally the knot at the end of the whip buried itself in the fleshy part of the arm, and there came around it a festering sore. He suffered greatly with it, until one night his brother took out the knot, when the poor fellow was asleep, for he could not bear any one to touch it when he was awake. It was awful to hear the cracking of that whip as it was laid about Riley — one would have thought that an ox team had gotten into the mire, and was being whipped out, so loud and sharp was the noise!

I usually slept in the dining room on the floor. Early one morning an old slave, by name of "Uncle Jim," came and knocked at the window, and upon my jumping up and going to him, he told me to tell Boss that Uncle Jim was there. He had run away, some time before, and, for some reason, had returned. Boss, upon hearing the news, got up and sent me to tell the overseer to come at once. He came, and, taking the bull whip, a cowhide and a lot of peach-tree switches, he and Boss led Uncle Jim back into the cow lot, on the side of the hill, where they drove four stakes in the ground, and, laying him flat on his face, tied his hands and feet to these stakes. After whipping him, in this position, all they wanted to, a pail of strong salt and water was brought, and the poor fellow was "washed down." This washing was customary, after whippings, as the planters claimed it drew out all the soreness, and healed the lacerated flesh.

Upon one occasion, the family being away, I was left extra work to do, being set to help three fellow slaves lay off the rows for planting corn. We did not get them quite straight. The deviation we made from

the line was very little, and could scarcely be seen, even by an expert; but the least thing wrong about the work would cause any slave to be whipped, and so all four of us were flogged.

The Slave Cabin

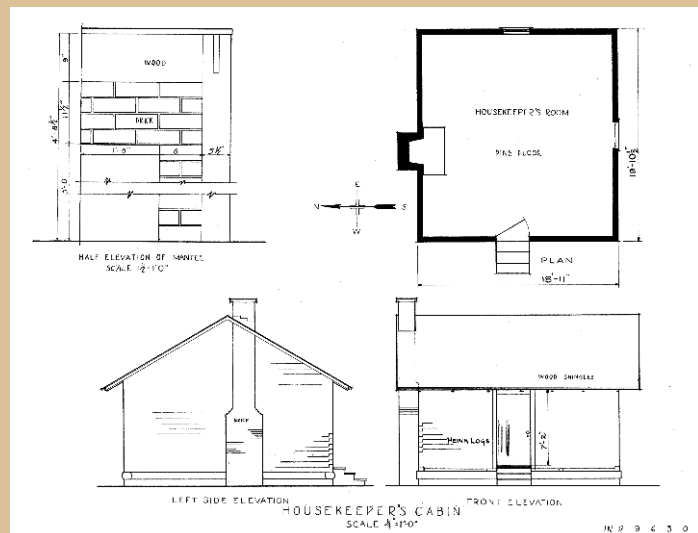
There was a section of the plantation known as “the quarters,” where were situated the cabins of the slaves. These cabins were built of rough logs, and daubed with the red clay or mud of the region. No attempt was made to give them a neat appearance — they were not even whitewashed. Each cabin was about fourteen feet square; containing but one room, and was covered with oak boards, three feet in length, split out of logs by hand. These boards were not nailed on, but held in their places by what were termed weight-poles laid across them at right angles.

There were in each room two windows, a door and a large, rude fireplace. The door and window frames, or facings, were held in their places by wooden pins, nails being used only in putting the doors together. The interior of the cabins had nothing more attractive than the outside — there was no plastering and only a dirt floor. The furniture consisted of one bed, a plain board table and some benches made by the slaves themselves. Sometimes a cabin was occupied by two or more families, in which case the number of beds was increased proportionately. For light a grease lamp was used, which was made of iron, bowl shaped, by a blacksmith. The bowl was filled with grease and a rag or wick placed in it, one end resting on the edge for lighting. These lamps gave a good light, and were in general use among the slaves. Tallow candles were a luxury, never seen in the “great houses” of the planters. The only light for outdoors used by the slaves was a torch made by binding together a bundle of small sticks or splinters.

HABS/Library of Congress



“Housekeeper’s cabin,” Thornhill plantation, Greene County, Alabama, similar to Hughes’s description of the slave cabins on the McGee plantation in Mississippi. Architectural plan and photographs of interior fireplace & cabin exterior (with the woman occupying the cabin), 1934.



Cotton Raising

After the selection of the soil most suitable for cotton, the preparation of it was of vital importance. The land was deeply plowed, long enough before the time for planting to allow the spring rains to settle it. Then it was thrown into beds or ridges by turning furrows both ways toward a given center. The seed was planted at the rate of one hundred pounds per acre. The plant made its appearance in about ten days after planting, if the weather was favorable. Early planting, however, followed by cold, stormy weather frequently caused the seed to rot. As soon as the third leaf appeared the process of scraping commenced, which consisted of cleaning the ridge with hoes of all superfluous plants and all weeds and grass. After this a narrow plow known as a “bull tongue,” was used to turn the loose earth around the plant and cover up any grass not totally destroyed by the hoes. If the surface was very rough the hoes followed, instead of preceding, the plow to unearth those plants that may have been partially covered. The slaves often acquired great skill in these operations, running plows within two inches of the stalks, and striking down weeds within half an inch with their hoes, rarely touching a leaf of the cotton. Subsequent plowing, alternating with hoeing, usually occurred once in twenty days. There was danger in deep plowing of injuring the roots, and this was avoided, except in the middle of rows in wet seasons when it was necessary to bury and more effectually kill the grass. The implements used in the culture of cotton were shovels, hoes, sweeps, cultivators, harrows and two kinds of plows.

It required four months, under the most favorable circumstances, for cotton to attain its full growth. It was usually planted about the 1st of April, or from March 20th to April 10th, bloomed about the 1st of June and the first balls opened about August 15th, when picking commenced. The blooms come out in the morning and are fully developed by noon, when they are a pure white. Soon after meridian they begin to exhibit reddish streaks, and next morning are a clear pink. They fall off by noon of the second day. . . .

The Cotton Harvest

The cotton harvest, or picking season, began about the latter part of August or first of September, and lasted till Christmas or after, but in the latter part of July picking commenced for “the first bale” to go into the market at Memphis. This picking was done by children from nine to twelve years of age and by women who were known as “sucklers,” that is, women with infants. The pickers would pass through the rows getting very little, as the cotton was not yet in full bloom.

HABS/Library of Congress



Gin house, originally on Goode plantation, Monroe County, Alabama, built approximately 1830, photographs ca. 1930s



Shaft (on ground) and pinion wheel (in two sections); old gin in background

From the lower part of the stalk where it opened first is where they got the first pickings. The season of first picking was always a great time, for the planter who brought the first bale of cotton into market at Memphis was presented with a basket of champagne by the commission merchants. This was a custom established throughout Mississippi. After the first pickings were secured the cotton developed very fast, continuing to bud and bloom all over the stalk until the frost falls.

The season of picking was exciting to all planters, every one was zealous in pushing his slaves in order that he might reap the greatest possible harvest. The planters talked about their prospects, discussed the cotton markets, just as the farmers of the north discuss the markets for their products. I often saw Boss so excited and nervous during the season he scarcely ate. The daily task of each able-bodied slave during the cotton picking season was 250 pounds or more, and all those who did not come up to the required amount would get a whipping. When the planter wanted more cotton picked than usual, the overseer would arrange a race. The slaves would be divided into two parties, with a leader for each party. The first leader would choose a slave for his side, then the second leader one for his, and so on alternately until all were chosen. Each leader tried to get the best on his side. They would all work like good fellows for the prize, which was a tin cup of sugar for each slave on the winning side. The contest was kept up for three days whenever the planter desired an extra amount picked. The slaves were just as interested in the races as if they were going to get a five dollar bill.

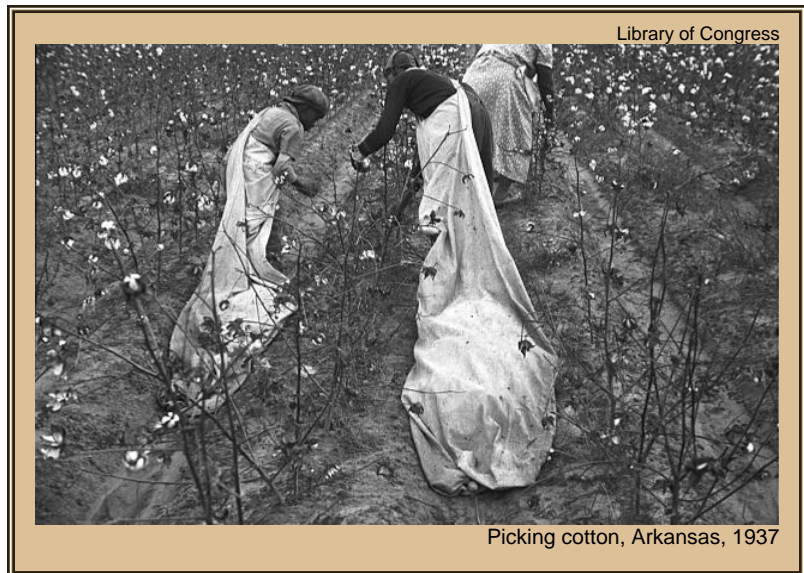
Preparing Cotton for Market

The gin-house was situated about four hundred yards from “the great house” on the main road. It was a large shed built upon square timbers, and was similar to a barn, only it stood some six feet from the ground, and underneath was located the machinery for running the gin. The cotton was put into the loft after it was dried, ready for ginning. In this process the cotton was dropped from the loft to the man who fed the machine. As it was ginned the lint would go into the lint room, and the seed would drop at the feeder’s feet. The baskets used for holding lint were twice as large as those used in the picking process, and they were never taken from the gin house. These lint baskets were used in removing the lint from the lint room to the place where the cotton was baled. A bale contained 250 pounds, and the man who did the treading of the cotton into the bales would not vary ten pounds in the bale, so accustomed was he to the packing. Generally from fourteen to fifteen bales of cotton were in the lint room at a time. . . .

Farm Implements

Almost all the implements used on the plantation were made by the slaves. Very few things were bought. Boss had a skilled blacksmith, uncle Ben, for whom he paid \$1,800, and there were slaves who were carpenters and workers in wood who could turn their hands to almost anything. Wagons, plows, harrows, grubbing hoes, hames, collars, baskets, bridle bits and hoe handles were all made on the farm and from the material which it produced, except the iron. The timber used in these implements was generally white or red oak, and was cut and thoroughly seasoned long before it was needed.

The articles thus manufactured were not fine in form or finish, but they were durable, and answered



the purposes of a rude method of agriculture. Horse collars were made from corn husks and from poplar bark which was stripped from the tree, in the spring, when the sap was up and it was soft and pliable, and separated into narrow strips which were plaited together. These collars were easy for the horse, and served the purpose of the more costly leather collar. Every season at least 200 cotton baskets were made. One man usually worked at this all the year round, but in the spring he had three assistants. The baskets were made from oak timber grown in the home forests and prepared by the slaves. It was no small part of the work of the blacksmith and his assistant to keep the farm implements in good repair, and much of this work was done at night. All the plank used was sawed by hand from timber grown on the master's land, as there were no saw mills in that region. Almost the only things not made on the farm which were in general use there were axes, trace chains and the hoes used in cultivating the cotton.

___The Clearing of New Land___

When additional land was required for cultivation the first step was to go into the forest in summer and "deaden" or girdle the trees on a given tract. This was cutting through the bark all around the trunk about thirty inches from the ground. The trees so treated soon died and in a year or two were in condition to be removed. The season selected for clearing the land was winter, beginning with January. The trees, except the larger ones, were cut down, cut into lengths convenient for handling and piled into great heaps, called "log heaps," and burned. The undergrowth was grubbed out and also piled and burned. The burning was done at night and the sight was often weird and grand. The chopping was done by the men slaves and the grubbing by women. All the trees that blew down during the summer were left as they fell till winter when they were removed. This went on, year after year, until all the trees were cleared out. The first year after the new land was cleared corn was put in, the next season cotton. As a rule corn and cotton were planted alternately, especially if the land was poor, if not, cotton would be continued year after year on the same land. Old corn stalks were always plowed under for the next year's crop and they served as an excellent fertilizer. Cotton was seldom planted on newly cleared land, as the roots and stumps rendered it difficult to cultivate the land without injury to the growing plant.

I never saw women put to the hard work of grubbing until I went to McGee's and I greatly wondered at it. Such work was not done by women slaves in Virginia. Children were required to do some work, it mattered not how many grown people were working. There were always tasks set for the boys and girls ranging in age from nine to thirteen years, beyond these ages they worked with the older slaves. After I had been in Pontotoc two years I had to help plant and hoe, and work in the cotton during the seasons, and soon learned to do everything pertaining to the farm.

___Cooking for the Slaves___

In summer time the cooking for the slaves was done out of doors. A large fire was built under a tree, two wooden forks were driven into the ground on opposite sides of the fire, a pole laid on the forks and on this kettles were hung over the fire for the preparation of the food. Cabbage and meat, boiled, alternated with meat and peas, were the staple for summer. Bread was furnished with the meals and corn meal dumplings, that is, little balls made of meal and grease from the boiled bacon and dropped into boiling water, were also provided and considered quite palatable, especially if cooked in the water in which the bacon was boiled. In winter the cooking was done in a cabin, and sweet potatoes, dried peas and meat were the principal diet. This bill of fare was for dinner or the mid-day meal. For supper each slave received two pieces of meat and two slices of bread, but these slices were very large, as the loaves were about six inches thick and baked in an old fashioned oven. This bread was made from corn meal for, as I have said, only on holidays and special occasions did the slaves have white bread of any kind. Part of the meat and bread received at supper time was saved for the "morning bite." The slaves never had any breakfast, but went to the field at daylight and after working till the sun was well up, all would stop for their morning bite. Very often some young fellow ate his morning bite the evening before at supper and would have nothing for the morning, going without eating until noon. The stop for morning bite was very short; then all would plunge into work until mid-day, when all hands were summoned to their principal meal.



Carding and Spinning

Through the winter and on rainy days in summer, the women of the field had to card the wool and spin it into yarn. They generally worked in pairs, a spinning wheel and cards being assigned to each pair, and while one carded the wool into rolls, the other spun it into yarn suitable for weaving into cloth, or a coarse, heavy thread used in making bridles and lines for the mules that were used in the fields. This work was done in the cabins, and the women working together alternated in the carding and spinning. Four cuts were considered a task or day's work, and if any one failed to complete her task she received a whipping from the madam.

At night when the spinners brought their work to the big house I would have it to reel. The reel was a contrivance consisting of a sort of wheel, turned on an axis, used to transfer the yarn from the spools or spindles of the spinning wheels into cuts or hunks. It was turned by hand and when enough yarn had been reeled to make a cut the reel signaled it with a snap. This process was continued until four cuts were reeled which made a hunk, and this [was] taken off and was ready for use. So the

work went on until all was reeled. I often got very weary of this work and would almost fall asleep at it, as it was generally done at night after I had had a long day's toil at something else.

Slave Mothers — Care of the Children

The women who had young babies were assigned to what was considered "light work," such as hoeing potatoes, cutting weeds from the fence corners, and any other work of like character. About nine o'clock in the forenoon, at noon, and three o'clock in the afternoon, these women, known on the farms as "the sucklers," could be seen going from work to nurse their babies. Many were the heart-sighs of these sorrowing mothers as they went to minister to their infants. Sometimes the little things would seem starved, for the mothers could only stop their toil three times a day to care for them. When old enough to receive it, the babies had milk, the liquor from boiled cabbage, and bread and milk together. A woman who was too old to do much of anything was assigned to the charge of these babies in the absence of their mothers. It was rare that she had any on to help her. The cries of these little ones, who were cut off almost entirely from motherly care and protection, were heart-rending.

The cabin used for the infants during the day was a double one, that is, double the usual size, and was located near the great house. The cradles used were made of boards, and were not more than two by three feet in size. The women carried their babies in the cradles to the baby cabin in the morning, taking them to their own cabins at night. The children ranging in age from one to seven years were numerous, and the old woman had them to look after as well as the babies. This was indeed a task, and might well have taxed the strength of a younger woman. They were always from eight to a dozen infants in the cabin. . . .

Methods of Punishment

The methods of punishment were barbarous in the extreme, and so numerous that I will not attempt to describe them all. One method was to tie the slave to a tree, strip off his clothes, and then whip him with a rawhide, or long, limber switches, or the terrible bull whip. Another was to put the slave in stocks, or to buck him, that is, fasten his feet together, draw up his knees to his chin, tie his hands together, draw them down over the knees, and put a stick under the latter and over the arms. In either of these ways the slave was entirely at the mercy of his tormentors, and the whipping could proceed at their pleasure. After these

whippings the slave was often left helpless and bleeding upon the ground, until the master, or overseer, saw fit to let him up.

The most common method of punishment was to have the servants form a ring, called the “bull ring,” into which the one to be punished was led naked. The slaves were then each given a switch, rawhide, strap or whip, and each one was compelled to cut at the poor victim as he ran around the ring. The ring was composed of men, women and children; and, as they numbered from forty to fifty, each circuit of the ring would result in that number of lashes, and by the time the victim had made two or three rounds his condition can be readily imagined. The overseer was always one of the ring, vigorously using the whip, and seeing that all the slaves did the same. Some of the victims fainted before they had passed once around the ring. Women slaves were punished in the same manner as the men. The salt water bath was given after each punishment. Runaway slaves were usually caught by means of hounds, trained for the purpose by men who made it a business and a source of revenue, notwithstanding its brutal features and degrading influence. . . .

Longing for Freedom

Sometimes when the farm hands were at work, peddlers would come along; and, as they were treated badly by the rich planters, they hated them, and talked to the slaves in a way to excite them and set them thinking of freedom. They would say encouragingly to them: “Ah! You will be free some day.” But the down-trodden slaves, some of whom were bowed with age, with frosted hair and furrowed cheek, would answer, looking up from their work: “We don’t believe dat; my grandfather said we was to be free, but we aint free yet.”

It had been talked of (this freedom) from generation to generation. Perhaps they would not have thought of freedom, if their owners had not been so cruel. Had my mistress been more kind to me, I should have thought less of liberty. I know the cruel treatment which I received was the main thing that made me wish to be free. Besides this, it was inhuman to separate families as they did. Think of a mother being sold from all her children — separated for life! This separation was common, and many died heart-broken, by reason of it. Ah! I cannot forget the cruel separation from my mother. I know not what became of her, but I have always believed her dead many years ago. Hundreds were separated, as my mother and I were, and never met again. Though freedom was yearned for by some because the treatment was so bad, others, who were bright and had looked into the matter, knew it was a curse to be held a slave — they longed to stand out in true manhood — allowed to express their opinions as were white men. Others still desired freedom, thinking they could then reclaim a wife, or husband, or children. The mother would again see her child. All these promptings of the heart made them yearn for freedom. New Year’s was always a heart-rending time, for it was then the slaves were bought and sold; and they stood in constant fear of losing some one dear to them — a child, a husband, or wife.

