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thesis entitled

WHO WAS BETTER OFF?: THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF AMERICAN SLAVES AND ENGLISH FARMWORKERS COMPARED, 1750–1875

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in HISTORY

Lyndon Stewart
Major professor

Date 6/25/97

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER IN HISTORY

Department of History

1997

ABSTRACT

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The material standard of living for American Slaves in the South before the Civil War is compared to English agricultural workers during the industrial revolution. The areas of diet, clothing, housing, medical care, and others are systematically examined for both groups. Regional and other variations within each group are noted, as well as the limitations of the sources. While attempts to portray the slaves as having a relatively high standard of living are debunked, it is found that the English farmworkers on average had generally an equal or lower standard of living than the slaves in the categories used for comparison. The reasons for this result are briefly considered, as well as the limitations of the standard of living relative to the overall quality of life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. WHY COMPARE ENGLISH LABORERS AND AMERICAN SLAVES TO BEGIN WITH?

The Standard Yet Problematic Comparison of Factory Workers with Slaves

Mississippi slaveowner and politician John A. Quitman "professed little respect for the northern free-labor system, where 'factory wretches' worked eleven-hour days in 'fetid' conditions while their intellects were destroyed 'watching the interminable whirling of the spinning-jenny.' . . . The Quitman plantations functioned satisfactorily, and his bondsmen were appreciative of their condition. He described his slaves as 'faithful, obedient, and affectionate.'" Here Quitman made a comparison still made today when debates break out over the standard of living over who was better off: slaves versus [Northern] factory workers, not farm servants. Similarly, historian Jurgen Kuczynski stated, while examining general European conditions for workers: "It is precisely these bad conditions which justify the arguments of the slaveowners of the South, that the slaves are materially better off than the workers in the north. This would in many cases have been true." Actually, this common comparison is problematic: It discounts the additional effects of urbanization, crowding, and doing industrial/shop work inside. Life in the countryside, with its low population density, and working in the fields outside makes for a

different way and quality of life for those involved. The conditions of urban factory life simply are not directly tied to the legal status of being free or slave. Despite being routinely made, this comparison actually contrasts two very different ways of life, urban versus rural, factory versus farm, to which very different value judgments can be attached. As E. P. Thompson observed: "In comparing a Suffolk [farm] labourer with his grand-daughter in a cotton-mill we are comparing--not two standards [of living]--but two ways of life."[1] By likening some other agricultural labor force with the slaves of the American South before the Civil War, many of the apples/oranges comparison problems are eliminated. Rather surprisingly, it has been found that the black slaves in the American South (c. 1750-1865) often had a material standard of living equal to or higher than the largely landless English agricultural workers during the general period of the industrial revolution (c. 1750-1875).

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[1]Robert E. May, "John A. Quitman and His Slaves: Reconciling Slave Resistance with the Proslavery Defense," Journal of Southern History 46 (Nov. 1980):552; Jurgen Kuczynski, The Rise of the Working Class (New York, 1967), p. 181, quoted in Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1976), p. 59; Edward P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1966), p. 231.

Why Do Such a Comparison?

Comparing American slaves and English farmworkers brings into focus features of both subjects under study that might otherwise go unnoticed. New insights may be gained, which might not occur when highly specialized historians devoted to a particular field analyzing historical phenomena stay strictly within their area of expertise. Suddenly, through historical comparison and contrast, the pedestrian can become exceptional, and what was thought to be unusual becomes part of a pattern. For example, both the agricultural workers and the slaves found ways to resist the powers that were in their respective societies, but this took different forms due to their differing legal statuses. Kolchin observed in the preface of his study of American slavery and Russian serfdom some of the advantages of doing such a comparison. It reduces parochialism in given fields, allows features to be seen as significant that otherwise might be overlooked, makes for the formulation and testing of hypotheses, and helps to distinguish which variables and causal factors had more weight.[2] A comparative topic is justified, even when it deals with phenomena long since analyzed by historians, if it wrings new insights out of the same old sources. It may expose assumptions about events or

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[2]Peter Kolchin, Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, 1987), p. ix.

processes experts take for granted in the fields being compared. Labor historians and African-American slavery specialists may be letting their respective historiographical work pass each other like ships in the night, not knowing the valuable insights one field may have for the other.[3]

Comparing and contrasting English agricultural workers during the industrial revolution and American slaves before and during the Civil War allows one to explore the (perhaps unexpected) similarities and differences in what they experienced during the same general time. Placing side by side for inspection two agricultural work forces which lived at the same basic time who spoke the same language seems "a natural," but this identification has been largely overlooked by specialists in both fields. The history of black slavery is "labor history" concerning how on a daily basis masters obtained people to labor for them, and tried to motivate them, by fear and the stick, or, less commonly but ideally, by love and the carrot. Exploring the similarities and differences between these two work forces is the burden of this work concerning their standard of living in such categories as diet, clothing, housing, and medical care.

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[3]Herbert Gutman is an exception, being a historian of American labor history and of African-American slavery.

What Exactly Is Compared Out of Each Diverse Group

This work compares those working in agriculture out of these two groups, meaning those who lived in rural areas and did farm work as their main or exclusive occupation. Urban slavery in the American South, as well as slavery in the North before its demise, are not analyzed here. However, some source documents used below involve slaves who either may have lived in a small town or in both city and country. Artisans who lived in rural areas, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, etc., who are slaves in the South, will receive some attention, but are mostly omitted when considering the English case. Included here are servants, whether American slave or English free, whether they are doing domestic chores, learning husbandry, or a combination of the two, with slave domestics receiving much more attention than English ones. Slaves who worked in industry or factories receive little attention here, as well as their English counterparts, since this work is about agricultural/rural workers. But cases in which substantial machinery and mills functioned on plantations, such as for rice and sugar refining, are covered since these operations occurred in a rural setting. It should be assumed, unless otherwise mentioned, that when "Southern slaves" are compared with English agricultural workers, that the slaves in question live in rural areas or small towns, and that they are either field hands or servants, not urban and/or industrial

workers. Since about ninety percent of the slaves did not live in cities, the vast bulk of them lived in rural areas.[4] Blacks without masters--"free Negroes"--are not covered here. The focus shall be on ENGLISH farmworkers, not Scottish, nor Welsh, i.e., not British broadly considered, nor the Irish. The exclusions and limits of what is compared here within these two large, diverse groups should be remembered, since more could always be added.

This comparison uses the general time period of 1750-1875. These dates allow two largely contemporary work forces to be compared, both living in industrializing nations and speaking the same language. The nineteenth century is emphasized, partly due to greater documentation, but also because the respective extreme developments of the factors creating these two work forces' conditions climaxed then. The proletarianization of the farmworkers reached a peak in the first half of the nineteenth century, before allotments became more common, and mechanization and out-migration had had serious effects on the English countryside. The Cotton Kingdom clearly reached an economic high point in 1860, having generally experiencing a boom in the preceding thirty years. Of course, processes and events beginning in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had set the stage for the early to mid-nineteenth-

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[4]Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 31.

century conditions portrayed below, such as the first arrival of slaves in the English colonies and the second general wave (i.e., post-Tudor) enclosure acts. Changes from earlier conditions (pre-1750) are treated largely in passing, which makes the conditions of the slaves look better, due to the improvement in their conditions and treatment from the early colonial period, while these make the agricultural workers worse off, because of the negative effects enclosure and the French Wars had on their standard of living compared to (say) 1725.

Both work forces lived in industrializing countries. The South's industrial sector before the Civil War that the slaves could work in was much smaller than for rural English workers. Nevertheless, they still resided in what was, by the eve of the Civil War, the world's second greatest industrial power. The North's industrial sector clearly affected them. Often the clothes and shoes they wore, and the tools and machines they worked with, were made in Northern factories. In the case of the agricultural workers, the enclosure acts' largely negative effects correspond with the period of England's industrialization, and were very important in taking away what independence and social mobility they had possessed. Industry provided them an outlet from bad rural conditions if they were willing to migrate, and some competition for their labor if they did not, at least in northern England. A major chronological difference between the two groups was that the slaves were

abruptly freed in 1865, while the improvements and changes in the farmworkers' conditions were gradual, without any radical discontinuity. Perhaps the gaining the vote in 1884 was the one event that changed their lives the most, for even though the Swing riots of 1830-31 shook the British establishment badly, these altered their lives relatively little compared to the effects of emancipation on American blacks.[5] The mechanization of English agriculture was a long, slow process, undoubtedly hindered early in the nineteenth century by the massive labor surplus that characterized much of the English countryside, and even by "Captain Swing" himself. Hence, some post-1875 sources are cited for the English case, since their conditions did not change so quickly, while the freedmen entered a brave new world from 1866 on, even as racial subordination continued by means other than bondage.

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[5]Joseph Arch, Joseph Arch: The Story of His Life, ed. Countess of Warwick (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1898), pp. 376-77, 389.

2. SLAVE DIET

Issues in Comparing Slaves and Laborers' Theoretical Standard of Living

Before turning to the specifics for the diet of the slaves and farmworkers, we have to consider first generally factors bearing on the standard of living debate. One of historiography's longest running disputes was whether during industrialization the masses' consumption and use of various material goods rose or fell, and the role of capitalism in this process. The Long Debate on Poverty[6] was an aptly chosen title! Unfortunately, for both Southern slaves and English farmworkers, no solid nationwide statistical economic data has appeared that could decisively settle the issue. The English (and Welsh) did not have a fully inclusive census until 1801, an occupational census until 1841, and official registration for deaths and births until 1839.[7] American census data begins with 1790, but the mere counting of people, crops grown in a given year, or even

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[6]R.M. Hartwell, et al, Eight Essays on Industrialisation and 'the Condition of England' (n.p.: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1972).

[7]Phyllis Deane, The First Industrial Revolution, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 2d ed., pp. 13, 22. Of course, E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield's The Population History of England 1541-1871 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981) has revolutionized the subject of the growth of the English population during the eighteenth century through its ingenious method of backwards projection starting from the 1871 census.

recording of their occupations, is not enough to calculate per capita income.[8] Furthermore, what the average American received was hardly what the average slave received! Knowing what the slaves alone received or obtained is necessary for number crunching. The historical evidence, such as it is, can give clues and indications of what was the actual standard of living, but nothing with full rational certainty capable of convincing all the disputants involved likely to be turned up at this late date. Anecdotal evidence is valuable, since it can descriptively expose the relationships within a society that an overemphasis on quantitative data can obscure. But it cannot totally settle the dispute in question, since conflicting stories appear on both sides of the question, such as how kindly or harshly the "typical" master treated his slaves. This point leads us to the next big problem in the standard of living controversy . . .

Just what exactly IS the "average" slave or the "typical" agricultural worker? These abstractions represent

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[8]Planter Bennet Barrow noted the taking of the "Cencus" in his Diary on May 31, 1840: "Taking the Cencus of the United States--the products, cotten corn horses mules cattle Hogs sheep Potatoes Poultry, quantity cloth made, Fodder hay." Edwin Adams Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846 as Reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow, Columbia University Studies in the History of American Agriculture, no. 9 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 197. All sources quoted in this thesis have the literal language quoted, regardless of how misspelled or ungrammatical they may be, with their original emphasis retained, unless otherwise noted.

groups that experienced a great diversity of working conditions, climates, lifestyles, occupations, family statuses, masters supervising, etc. What is "average" for slaves when comparing the relatively mild bondage of the border states such as Virginia and Kentucky with the harshness of the frontier Deep South, such as Texas and Arkansas? What is "average" for agricultural workers between Northumberland, where wages and the standard of living were said by one observer to be better than America's for them, as opposed to the utter misery of notoriously low-waged Wiltshire in southern England?[9] Theoretically, after warming up computers armed with spread sheet programs, adding the two together and dividing, the issue would be settled, if accurate, broad-based, quantitative statistics did exist (which they do not). Number-crunching can obscure the essential reality of unequal or extreme situations within the working class or bondsmen as a whole. The economist who said to be wary of wading a river with an average depth of four feet drew attention to a serious theoretical problem that pervades quantitative analysis when applied to the standard of living debate. While the "average" bondsman or the "mean" farmworker are useful

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[9]For conditions in Northumberland, see Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1867-68, vol. xvii, Commission on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, first report, p. xiv. The British Parliamentary Sessional Papers are hereafter referred to as BPP, while this report may be called simply "Commission on Employment in Agriculture."

abstractions, they remain generalizations. They should not be allowed to obscure the underlying realities of (especially) regional diversity in the case of the farmworkers, or the widely varying treatments meted out by various masters and mistresses to their bondsmen.

Diet and the Standard of Living for Slaves

The core of the standard of living debate seems to come down to diet, and how far were the masses above bare subsistence.[10] Related issues include: How much and what kinds of "luxuries," such as sugar, coffee, and tea did the groups in question enjoy? How much and what kinds of meat did they have? Did they eat wheat, the most expensive grain, or barley, rye, oats, etc.? How coarse was the food they ate? For the American slaves, as for American Southerners generally, the main grain was corn (maize), and the main meat, pork.[11] The absolutely archetypal rations

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[10]This emphasis can be disputed, especially when adopting Snell's approach of examining what the poor themselves considered important. Simply put, while food is a major part of the material standard of living, it is not so important to the overall quality of life, excluding true famine conditions. The distinction between the quality of life and the standard of living is touched on at the end. See K.D.M. Snell, Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 9-14.

[11]Olmsted, during his travels in eastern Texas before the Civil War commented: "The meals are absolutely invariable . . . The bread is made of corn-meal, stirred with water and salt, and baked in a kettle covered with coals. The corn for breakfast is frequently unhusked at

slaves received concerned so many pecks of corn and pounds of pork or bacon per week. Anything adding to or replacing these items was at least mildly unusual. Escaped slave Christopher Nichols testified to Drew that: "My master used to allow us one piece of meat a day, and a peck and a half of corn meal a week." Eli Johnson stated, after being sold for $1,200 in Natchez, that he was "put on a cotton farm, and allowed a peck of corn a week and three pounds meat." Traveler Frederick Law Olmsted inquired of one white Southerner: "'What do they generally give the niggers on the plantations here?' 'A peck of meal and three pound of bacon is what they call 'lowance, in general, I believe. It takes a heap o' meat on a big plantation.'" Aged ex-slave Andy Anderson painfully recalled that the new overseer, Delbridge, cut rations as the Civil War began: "He weighs out the meat, three pound for the week, and he measure a peck of meal." The "meat" in question was normally from the flesh of hogs, although there were exceptions. Frederick Douglas, once a slave in eastern Maryland, mentioned how the standard monthly rations included fish sometimes: "The men and women slaves received, as their monthly allowance of

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sunrise. . . . Wheat bread, if I am not mistaken, we met with but twice, out of Austin, in our whole journey across the State." Frederick Law Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States, 2 vols. (New York: Mason Brothers, 1861), 1:368-69. While visiting Neu-Braunfels, Texas, he found no wheat in the market. Frederick Law Olmsted, The Slave States, ed. Harvey Wish (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 158.

food, eight pounds of pork, or its equivalent in fish, and one bushel of corn meal." Charles Ball described similarly Calvert county, Maryland, where

> the practice amongst slave-holders, was to allow each slave one peck of corn weekly, which was measured out every Monday morning; at the same time each one receiving seven salt herrings. This formed the week's provision, and the master who did not give it, was called a hard master, whilst those who allowed their people any thing more, were deemed kind and indulgent.[12]

Hence, the normal bondsman and woman expected a diet that included several pounds of pork or bacon and, even more certainly, corn.[13]

Were the standard rations enough? Sometimes they were not, at least for some adult men. As Blassingame notes:

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[12]Benjamin Drew, A North-side View of Slavery The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1856; reprint ed., New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968), pp. 71, 381. Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, 2:109. See also 1:102 and 2:172, 241. Testifying to the nearly universal racism of whites, North or South, racial slurs are quoted when found in the sources. B.A. Botkin, ed., Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), p. 172. Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave Written by Himself (1845; reprint ed., New York: New American Library/Penguin, 1968), p. 28. Charles Ball, Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837; reprint ed., New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), pp. 42-43.

[13]More evidence of the nearly universal prevalence of the "standard rations" is found in: Kenneth F. Kiple and Virginia H. Kiple, "Black Tongue and Black Men: Pellagra and Slavery in the Antebellum South," Journal of Southern History, 43 (Aug. 1977) 413, n. 7; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), 1:110; Richard Sutch in Paul A. David, et al., Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 235.

"Equally serious was his [the slave's] dependence on the 'average' amount of food and clothing his master decided was sufficient for all slaves." What was sufficient for one man or woman may be insufficient for others![14] Ex-slave Anderson added, after describing his plantation's new standard rations: "And 'twa'n't enough. He half-starve us niggers, and he want more work." Runaway slave Williamson Pease commented with irony about the draught animals' superior treatment to Drew: "Horses and mules have food by them all the time, but the slaves had four pounds of fat bacon a week, and a peck of corn meal,--not enough to last some men three days." Francis Henderson similarly stated: "Our allowance was given weekly--a peck of sifted corn meal, a dozen and a half herrings, two and a half pounds of pork. Some of the boys would eat this up in three days."[15] Underfeeding almost inevitably encouraged theft, as the latter two ex-slaves also observed. The miserly attitude with which the rations could be handed out was well put by Harriet Brent Jacobs, alias Linda Brent, whose mistress would

> spit in all the kettles and pans that had been used for cooking. She did this to prevent the cook and her children from eking out their meager fare with the remains of gravy and other scrapings. The slaves could get nothing to eat

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[14]John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 254.

[15]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 172; Drew, Refugee, pp. 131, 155.

> except what she chose to give them. Provisions were weighed out by the pound and ounce, three times a day. I can assure you she gave them no chance to eat wheat bread from her flour barrel. She knew how many biscuits a quart of flour would make, and exactly what size they ought to be.[16]

So if we accept the slaves' own testimony, the nearly universal "standard rations" were inadequate, at least by themselves without what they could raise, hunt, or steal for on their own, or what else more indulgent masters might issue, for a good number of them.[17]

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[16]Linda Brent, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861; reprint ed., San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1973), p. 11. While this narrative, because of its rather incredible events and novelistic "feel" has had its trustworthiness questioned in years past, excellent evidence for its authenticity more recently has come to light. See Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative," American Literature, 53 (Nov. 1981):479-86. Nevertheless, the feel of a morality tale does hang over it. Consider the story of one slaveholder who supposedly on his deathbed shrieked, "I am going to hell; bury my money with me"--and so had, when his eyes did not close after he died, silver dollars laid on them! This "incident," which she did not personally witness, sounds suspiciously like what this master's slaves wished and felt ought to have happened than what really did. Incidents, pp. 46-47.

[17]"Compensated undernutrition," the dietetic condition in which the human body operates at a lower metabolic rate due to months or years of low caloric intake, may factor also in how slaves got by on such rations without great physical damage. See David Eltis, "Nutritional Trends in Africa and the Americas: Heights of Africans, 1819-1839," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 12 (winter 1982):471. This condition still makes its sufferers less energetic, less mentally alert--and easier to control.

Fogel and Engerman's Rosy Reconstructions of the Slave Diet

Fogel and Engerman in Time on the Cross argue that slaves were well-fed concerning the quantity of the food they ate:

> The average daily diet of slaves was quite substantial. The energy value of their diet exceeding that of free men in 1879 by more than 10 percent. There was no deficiency in the amount of meat allotted to slaves. On average, they consumed six ounces of meat per day, just an ounce lower than the average quantity consumed by the free population.[18]

While such data as average heights and rapid population growth indicate American slaves were not seriously underfed, this fact is not entirely to the credit of the masters and mistresses themselves.[19] The slaves' own efforts to get food by hunting and trapping (both relatively productive in a sparsely populated/frontier region), gardening small patches of land, purchasing food using money they earned from extra work, not to mention stealing, must also be considered. The testimony cited above casts some doubt on whether the "standard rations" of pork and corn alone always

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[18]Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:113.

[19]Some gathered evidence indicates the average height of American-born slaves was greater than their African counterparts. See Eltis, "Nutritional Trends," 453-75. For the greater natural population growth of Southern slaves as contrasted with those elsewhere in the Americas, see Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:25-29. Frederick Douglass believed "in the part of Maryland from which I came, it is the general practice,--though there are many exceptions" that the slaves were fed enough. Narrative, p. 65.

were enough to satisfy at least adult male bondsmen.

More clearly, as shown by Richard Sutch's searching and intensive critique of their data, Fogel and Engerman make many dubious assumptions and casual mistakes in their reconstruction of the slave diet. They use a disappearance method based on only 44 generally backwoods counties out of a sample of 413 gathered by Parker and Gallman of their farms and plantations' food production. They assume the slaves must have eaten most of what food was produced on the plantations in their subsample because they were too far from significant urban markets. Discounting the possibility of local sales of produce by the big plantations to neighboring farms and small plantations in their subsample of this sample, they excluded farms and small plantations with fewer than fifty-one slaves. Indeed, this subsample came down to just seventy-seven plantations, which included less than 10 percent of the total population and 1.5 percent of the total productive landholdings in the Parker-Gallman sample. With such a narrow sample focused on the largest plantations, a bias similar to U.B. Phillips's <u>American Negro Slavery</u>, distortions are almost inevitable. Being commercial and non-subsistent in nature, large plantations sold produce for cash, and using a subsample of them in backwoods area more than fifty wagon miles from urban areas would not prevent local sales of produce, or the driving of animals on the hoof to market. The latter becomes a serious possibility when one discovers 15 percent of all the cattle

in Fogel and Engerman's subsample were on four Texas ranches in two counties, which are used as evidence for a fairly high beef consumption by slaves since they fell outside the fifty-mile radius. But since Texas was notorious for long distance cattle drives to market, thinking these ranches' slaves ate most of the steer raised on them is rather absurd! Fogel and Engerman also underestimate the resident white population's consumption in these areas, and use conversion ratios (such as dressed to live weight) which decrease how much pork the slaves ate and overestimate how much the whites in these subsampled areas ate. Between all the mistakes and questionable assumptions Sutch identifies, many of them omitted here, little reason remains to place much stock in Fogel and Engerman's arguments for a varied and nutritious slave diet.[20]

A major part of the debate on the slave diet between Fogel and Engerman and their critics like Sutch surrounds minerals and vitamins deficiencies. For example, was the phenomenon of dirt/clay eating, which still arises among Southern rural blacks in the United States today, due to malnutrition? A thiamine deficiency could easily explain some plantations' sudden outbreaks of dirt-eating

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[20]Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:109-115; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, Time on the Cross Evidence and Methods--A Supplement (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1974), 2:90-99; Richard Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 231-283.

frenzies.[21] More clearly, the classic slave diet, high in pork and maize, was tailor-made for producing pellagra, just as it would among poor whites. Due to its chemically bound form, corn lacks niacin that the human body can easily use, and its high content of the amino acid leucine partially interferes with the body's digestion of whatever niacin that is consumed. While the body can convert the amino acid tryptophan into niacin from crude protein, the low quality fat pork slaves normally received unfortunately was a poor source of it. Even nowadays, let alone in antebellum times, physicians had difficulty diagnosing pellagra because its symptoms seem to be like other afflictions; it also manifests itself in the early stages in disparate ways in different individuals. It normally lacks development along standard, classical lines. The disease was simply not known by nineteenth-century American doctors, and so they diagnosed the bondsmen under their care as having other diseases. Nevertheless, the description of the "negro disease" called black tongue by Southern physicians fits nearly perfectly pellagra in its earlier stages. Kiple and

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[21]William D. Piersen, "White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression, and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide among New Slaves," Journal of Negro History, 62 (Apr. 1977):153. He also notes that clay eating could be used to feign illness, which suddenly makes it a labor discipline issue. Fogel and Engerman cite Twyman in denial of this interpretation: Time on the Cross, 2:99. But Sutch strongly rebuts their claims that this practice does not occur due to vitamin deficiencies, noting their selective quotation of Twyman. See David, Reckoning with Slavery, pp. 277-79, n. 129.

Kiple, employing such arguments as above, suggest that pellagra's symptoms manifested themselves during hard times when planters cut back on their rations. In an early, endemic form that put in an appearance during winter and early spring many bondsmen suffered from it, only for it to disappear yet again due to seasonal fresh fruits or vegetables entering their diet. Sutch observes that the standard ration falls way short of supplying the necessary niacin as well as the extra protein with which the body could convert tryptophan into niacin. He also notes other vitamin and mineral deficiencies of the unsupplemented standard ration, such as thiamine, riboflavin, calcium, and even vitamin A, since the corn and sweet potatoes of the antebellum South were evidently normally white, not yellow, in color.[22] So the bondsmen likely suffered from dietary deficiencies, at least during winter and early spring when forced to survive on the easily stored items of the standard ration and/or under harsher masters and mistresses' more restrictive diets, which casts doubt upon Fogel and Engerman's rosy reconstruction.

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[22]Kiple and Kiple, "Black Tongue," 411-28; Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 270-81. However, in Fogel and Engerman's defense, it should be noted Eltis found a nutritional survey of Nigeria in the 1960s that indicated Africans had lower amounts of riboflavin and thiamine than Southern slaves had. They also had lower calorie and protein intakes. See "Nutritional Trends," 470.

The Slave Diet as Crude, Coarse, and Boring

Besides likely being vitamin deficient, the slave diet was certainly crude, coarse, and boring. As Frederick Douglass commented: "Not to give a slave enough to eat, is regarded as the most aggravated development of meanness even among slaveholders. The rule is, no matter how coarse the food, only let there be enough of it." Victoria McMullen remembered her slave grandmother described the average bondsmen's diet this way: "But the other slaves didn't git nothing but fat meat and corn bread and molasses. And they got tired of that same old thing. They wanted something else sometimes." Mary Reynolds recalled during slavery days what she was fed: "Mostly we ate pickled pork and corn bread and peas and beans and 'taters. They never was as much as we needed." While monotonous, this diet showed her master at least gave more than just the stereotypical "hog and hoecake" diet. As Olmsted observed: "The food is everywhere, however, coarse, crude, and wanting in variety; much more so than that of our [Northern] prison convicts." Monotony in the slave diet came from the restricted food types made available to them and the sharp time limits they had to cook and prepare food within after working a "sunup to sundown" day using crude cooking facilities. As actress turned reluctant mistress Fanny Kemble observed at her husband's rice plantation:

> They got to the fields at daybreak, carrying with

> them their allowance of food for the day, which toward noon, and not till then, they eat, cooking it over a fire, which they kindle as best they can, where they are working. Their second meal in the day is at night, after their labor is over, having worked, at the very least, six hours without intermission of rest or refreshment since their noonday meal.

With the adults of both sexes working long hours of hard labor in the fields, and cooking equipment largely limited to fireplaces or open fires, with relatively few or no metal pots, forks, knives, and spoons being available, crudely prepared meals were inevitable. Solomon Northrup, a free man sold into slavery, said slaves often lacked the motivation to hunt after work because "after a long and hard day's work, the weary slave feels little like going to the swamp for his supper, and half the time prefers throwing himself on the cabin floor without it." Little time remained for the slave woman, if the contemporary Victorian middle class's ideology of the separate spheres to this situation is unrealistically applied, to spend long periods of time bringing supper's food to some high level of gustatory delight. John Brown, once a young slave in southern Virginia, described how simply slaves often prepared their food: "We used to make our corn into hominy, hoe and Johnny-cake, and sometimes parch it, and eat it without any other preparation."[23] If issued unground, just

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[23]Douglass, Narrative, p. 65; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 26, 120; my emphasis, Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:241; Frances Ann Kemble, Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839 (New York: Harper & Bros., Publishers, 1863), p. 65; Solomon Northrup, Twelve Years a

grinding/pounding the corn into something cookable took enough effort and time itself. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem with the slave diet was the lack of variety in what the slaves had been issued by their owners to begin with, not the lack of time due to long work days in the fields by both sexes cutting down on the number of domestic chores, including cooking, that could be done.[24]

Setting up communal facilities army-style was one partial solution to slaves lacking time to cook. Kemble mentioned that one old woman in a shed boiled and distributed the daily allotment of rice and grits on her husband's Georgia rice-island plantation. Francis Henderson, who escaped from the Washington D.C. area, said slaves cooked food on their own, often lacking the time to do so: "In regard to cooking, sometimes many have to cook at one fire, and before all could get to the fire to bake hoe cakes, the overseer's horn would sound; then they must go at any rate." Frequently he had to eat on the run and could not sit down to eat due to time constraints. During harvest, one solution to this problem was to cook everything at the big house "as the hands are wanted more in the field. This was more like people, and we liked it, for we sat down

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Slave, eds. Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (1853; reprint ed., Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), p. 153; Brown is found in F.N. Boney, "The Blue Lizard: Another View of Nat Turner's Country on the Eve of Rebellion," Phylon, 31 (winter 1970):356.

[24]See also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 549; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 284-85.

then at meals."[25] This move removed this burden, but at the cost of still greater regimentation and making the slave family's role still weaker than it already was, by reducing their freedom as part of households to make decisions about consumption, i.e., how dinner was cooked.

Differing Diets for Slaves with Different Positions

Since masters and mistresses were "respecters of men," they treated different slaves--or groups of slaves--differently.[26] In particular, the household servants and drivers and their families were apt to receive better material conditions, in exchange for (inevitably) the tighter controls and supervision due to being in the white owner's presence more. (This is the classic trade-off of a sincerely practiced paternalism). The bleak picture of field hands subsisting on "hog and hominy" diets did not apply to all their neighbors in the quarters. Servants benefited from the leftovers of their master and mistress' table, and did not just have to subsist on the standard rations, as Kemble observed. Mary Boykin Chesnut got mobbed

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[25]Kemble, Journal, p. 18. Note the similarity of Henderson's experience to what household servants in Georgia Kemble saw who had "even less comfort [than field hands], in one respect, inasmuch as no time whatever is set apart for their meals, which they snatch at any hour and in any way that they can--generally, however, standing, or squatting on their hams round the kitchen fire." Journal, p. 66; Drew, Refugee, p. 156.

[26]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 370.

by her servants while visiting near her husband's father's plantation, wanting her to come home. Her cook said, when asked if she needed anything: "Lacking anything? I lack everything. What is cornmeal and bacon, milk and molasses? Would that be all you wanted? Ain't I bin living and eating exactly as you does all these years? When I cook fer you didn't I have some of all? Dere now!" Her complaint was, in part, "Please come home, so we could eat better again!" Freedman Edward Jenkins of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina told Armstrong how house servants gained from their master's meals: "What de white folk had ter eat, de servan's had also, when de white folks done eat dey fill." Although his parents were field hands, aged freedman Tony Washington remembered his mistress made him "the waiter-and-pantry" boy. This job allowed him to get extra food, including leftover alcohol, as he nostalgically remembered:

> Dey [the visiting white gentlemen] set down ergain, an' Massa say: 'Sonny, bring de glasses!' I'd bring de glasses, an' de brandy from de sidebo'ahd. Dey know how ter treat dey liquor in de old days an' nobody git drunk. Co'se, I got er little dizzy once when I drink all dat de gen'lemans lef' in dey glasses--heh heh!--but Missus say she gwine tell Massa ter whip me if'n I do dat ergain!

Sam Jackson also benefited from having relatives in the right places in "the big house." He enjoyed reminiscing about his boyhood job's perks:

> I was de waitin'-boy fo' de table. Don' you know, in dem conditions, I had a sof' bed ter lie in? Yaw . . . did I git plenty ter eat? Jus' guess I did. De waiter-boy allays got plenty, an' when his Maw was house-woman, an' his Auntie de cook,

guess he goin' go hungry? Ho![27]

By having family members close to the master or the mistress, these slave children avoided the customary lack of good treatment ("investment") most received from their owners since they could not work in the fields.

Further evidence of tiers within slave society in the quarters, as reflected by differences in diet, comes from archeological investigation. At Thomas Jefferson's Monticello estate archeologists found deposited bones from different animals, domesticated and wild, in different parts of his estate. While the differences in bones buried between "Building 'o'" and the storehouse, which were both areas mainly for slaves, could be explained by some other mechanism, it does appear higher quality cuts of meat were eaten at the former but not at the latter. As Crader noted: "Meaty elements such as lumbar vertebrae, the pelvis, and the front and hind limbs also are present, elements that virtually are absent from the Storehouse assemblage."[28] Differences between the secondary butchery marks, caused by removing the meat at the cooking stage existed between Building 'o' and those of the storehouse also arose. (Primary butchery involves taking the animal apart at the

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[27]Kemble, Journal, p. 314; Mary Boykin Chesnut, A Diary from Dixie, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949), p. 24; Orland Kay Armstrong, Old Massa's People: The Old Slaves Tell Their Story (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1931), pp. 31, 109, 110.

[28]Diana C. Crader, "Slave Diet at Monticello," American Antiquity, 55 (Oct. 1990):700.

joints after its slaughter). The bone marks found at Building 'o' are similar to those that would be produced by the way the whites at the mansion ate, but are completely absent from the Storehouse assemblage of bones. The master, as well as his evidently better-off slaves, ate their meat as roasts, while the worse-off slaves stewed their meat in pots, with the bones chopped up much more.[29] The evidence Crader literally unearthed may indicate that the big house's leftovers were consumed by Jefferson's domestic servants at their homes in the quarters, which gave them a somewhat better diet than the field hands.[30]

The Slaves' Role in Procuring Their Own Food

Slaves seeking additional food, if they were able and willing to put time into it after a long day working for their masters and mistresses, could do so by hunting, trapping, fishing, and tending their own plots of

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[29]Evidently, the habits of excessively chopping up the bones affected even the master's table sometimes. Kemble said her slave cook/butcher had such "barbarous ignorance" that she challenged "the most expert anatomist to pronounce on any piece (joints they can not be called) of mutton brought to our table to what part of the animal sheep it originally belonged." Her eventual solution was to teach him how to butcher it properly, demonstrating on the carcass of what her cook called "de beutifullest sheep de missis eber saw." See Kemble, Journal, pp. 196-98.

[30]Crader, "Slave Diet," 698-703, 708-10, 713-15. Jefferson had distributed the largest amounts of fish to various more favored slaves, including some domestic servants, and some very old field workers.

vegetables. Some masters banned these activities, but the slaves might still go secretly hunting (at least) anyway. Freedwoman Jenny Proctor of Alabama recollected that: "Our master, he wouldn't 'low us to go fishing--he say that too easy on a nigger and wouldn't 'low us to hunt none either--but sometime we slips off at night and catch possums." A strong majority still permitted these additional activities to gain food, in a spirit very different from the English rural elite's about almost anyone else hunting besides themselves. Northrup stated why: "No objections are made to hunting, inasmuch as it dispenses with drafts upon the smoke-house, and because every marauding coon that is killed is so much saved from the standing corn." Kemble once nearly tripped over a huge pile of oyster shells on her husband's cotton-island plantation, and later commented: "This is a horrid nuisance, which results from an indulgence which the people here have and value highly; the waters round the island are prolific in shell-fish, oysters, and the most magnificent prawns I ever saw. The former are a considerable article of the people's diet, and the shells are allowed to accumulate." She also remarked that the slaves set out somewhat ineffective traps for birds at the upstream rice-island estate. Douglass recounted how one old man of his master Lloyd's in Maryland was shot and killed while in the process of "fishing for oysters" by a neighboring master for the trivial offense of trespassing on his land. This way they "made up the

deficiency of their scanty allowance." Hunting could be very important to the bondsmen's diets. Archeological evidence from the Hampton St. Simons island plantation had 17.6 percent of the bones gathered from wild animals, while for one at Cannon's Point, an amazing 89.8 percent by number of bones (44.5 percent by estimated meat weight) were from them. These percentages sharply contrast with the 2 percent or less figures from such plantations as Monticello, the Hermitage, and at Kingsmill.[31] Hence, depending the environment and slaveowners' provisions (or presumed lack thereof), hunting, fishing, etc. could be just a minor way to supplement the slaves' diet, or a mainstay rather necessary for survival.

Many slaveowners allowed their bondsmen to cultivate small patches of land, similar to the allotments that English agricultural workers farmed. The slaves often benefited little from them, because this extra food was eventually obtainable only by working on their gardens after having put in a full day's work for someone else, thus increasing their real workweek. As aged ex-slave Mary Reynolds of Louisiana recalled:

> Sometimes Massa let niggers have a little patch. They'd raise 'taters or goobers. They liked to have them to help fill out on the victuals. . . . The niggers had to work the patches at night and dig the 'taters and goobers at night. Then if

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[31]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 90; see also p. 84; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 153; Kemble, Journal, p. 20, 216; Douglass, Narrative, p. 42; Crader, "Slave Diet," 698. See also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 487-88.

> they wanted to sell any in town, they'd have to git a pass to go.

Some masters did not allow their slaves to have gardens, as ex-slave Jenny Proctor remembered. Olmsted noted that while this practice was common, various planters prohibited it "because it tempts them to reserve for and to expend in the night-work the strength they want employed in their service during the day, and also because the produce thus obtained is made to cover much plundering of their master's crops, and of his live stock." Planter Bennet Barrow allowed his slaves to have gardens, but stopped them from <u>selling</u> anything they grew on their plots because it created a "spirit of trafficing" which required of them "means and time" they had no right to possess. Further, he added:

> A negro would not be content to sell only What he raises or makes or either corn (should he be permitted) or poultry, or the like, but he would sell a part of his allowance allso, and would be tempted to commit robberies to obtain things to sell. Besides, he would never go through his work carefully, particularly When other engagements more interesting and pleasing are constantly passing through his mind, but would be apt to slight his work.

Other slaveowners were more generous, and even allowed their bondsmen to raise animals such as pigs and chickens. Fanny Kemble noted that the blacks of her husband's rice plantation could raise as many domestic birds as they wished, but no longer had permission to raise their own pigs. Some slaves even were free to grow cash crops on their "allotments." Overseer John Mairs wrote to Mrs. Sarah Polk about how much cotton her hands had raised for

themselves, which was marketed with the rest of the plantation's output: "Youre servents crope of coten in 1849 was about 8400 lbs of sead coten."[32] Hence, the practice of giving plots of land to slaves to raise some of their own food or crops was common in the South, but slaveowners many times placed major restrictions on their use.

Variations in What Food Different Slaveowners Provided to Their Slaves

Although the "standard rations" should be seen as the norm, significant variations occurred in their size from master to master and plantation to plantation, and also even in the items routinely dispensed. On the one hand, disturbing cases of slaves who never got any meat, or got it rarely, show up enough to make one question the utter universality of the "standard rations." After all, would Louisiana have a law requiring slaves to be fed (Olmsted believed) four pounds of meat a week if some slaveowners were not doing it? He added also: "(This law is a dead letter, many planters in the State making no regular provision of meat for their force)." Frederick Douglass

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[32]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 90, 121; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:238-39; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409. See also pp. 51-52. Barrow's diary entry for March 19, 1842, p. 253 indicates he let them have their own pieces of land: "All hands repairing their Gardens;" Kemble, Journal, pp. 47-49; John Spencer Bassett, The Southern Plantation Overseer as Revealed in His Letters (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1925), p. 187. See also pp. 203 and 210 for discussions by this overseer about paying her slaves.

noted Master Thomas Auld in Maryland allowed him and three fellow slaves in his kitchen less than half a bushel of cornmeal a week, "and very little else, either in the shape of meat or vegetables. It was not enough for us to subsist upon." Thomas Hedgebeth, born free in North Carolina, worked on some farms there, and told Drew:

> I have known that the slaves had not a bite of meat given them. They had a pint of corn meal unsifted, for a meal,--three pints a day. . . This is no hearsay--I've seen it through the spring, and on until crop time: Three pints of meal a day and the bran and nothing else.

Fanny Kemble, beset by a minor mob of children begging her for meat, wrote later that at the rice plantation her husband owned: "Animal food is only allowed to certain of the harder working men, hedgers and ditchers, and to them only occasionally, and in very moderate rations." One neighboring plantation owner she encountered maintained somewhat offhandedly that a meatless diet was a good social control device: "He says that he considers the extremely low diet of the negroes one reason for the absence of crimes of a savage nature among them; most of them do not touch meat the year around." John Brown remembered as a slave child in Virginia that: "We never had meat of any kind, and our usual drink was water."[33] This evidence indicates that the "standard rations" which included pork were not quite as "standard" as some may think.

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[33]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:241; Douglass, Narrative, p. 66; Drew, Refugee, p. 278; Kemble, Journal, pp. 134, 278; Boney, "The Blue Lizard," 356.

Other slaves enjoyed a more luxurious, or at least varied, diet. For example, Thomas Jefferson's slaves had at least a diversity of meats in their diet. They received .5 to 1.5 pounds of beef, 4 to 8 fish, and 4 to 4.5 pounds of pork per month per man or woman. Beef, judging from archeological remains at Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, Jefferson's Monticello, and the Hampton Plantation in Georgia, may have been more significant in the slave diet than commonly believed. Aged freedwoman Harriet McFarlin Payne recalled in the quarters: "Late of an evening as you'd go by the doors you could smell meat a-frying, coffee-making, and good things cooking. We were fed good." While admittedly this coffee may have been ersatz, McFarlin's account still shows these slaves did not subsist on the basically corn and water diet Brown recalled above. Although now seen as a proven public health menace, the giving of tobacco to slaves by planter Bennet Barrow demonstrates they were not confined to a limited barebones budget of strict necessities. In Louisiana Olmsted encountered a plantation that in a small way made up for the almost inhuman hours of grinding season by issuing extra rations of flour, and allowing the sugar refinery hands to drink as much coffee and eat as much molasses as they wished. Year around tobacco rations were regularly issued, as well as molasses during winter and early summer. Cato of Alabama remembered as a slave his mistress on Sunday gave out chickens and flour. He also had vegetables and dried

beef for eating later. Plowden C. J. Weston, a South Carolina rice planter with several plantations, prepared a standard contract for his overseers which included standard rations (some weekly, some monthly, some in only certain seasons or conditional upon good behavior) of rice, potatoes, grits, salt, flour, fish or molasses, peas, meat, and tobacco. Buttermilk was also (appropriately) issued to the often lactose-intolerant slaves by some masters. Many slaves got their hands on alcohol through their own earnings, or by the selling stolen property of their masters.[34] So while some evidence turns up for Fogel and Engerman's rosy perceptions of the slave diet, they are not sustained by the weight of the literary sources available, which points to flaws in their quantitative sampling methodology. The slaves' diets normally were rather constricted--though perhaps not much more than many free poor whites living near them--but a number had more than the standard rations, especially those under more progressive and/or indulgent masters and mistresses.

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[34]Crader, "Slave Diet," 704-5; for Payne and Cato's testimony and the evidence for buttermilk, see Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 84, 112, 127, 147; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:320. While in Mississippi, Olmsted spotted one slave woman smoking a pipe! Cotton Kingdom, 2:69; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, pp. 25-27; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 370-71.

3. FARMWORKER DIET

Regional Variations Considered

Turning to the English agricultural workers' diet, strong regional variations must be remembered. In the same way the slaves in the Border States enjoyed better conditions than those of the Deep South in part due to their ability to more easily escape to the North, the English farmworkers living in areas north of the Midlands enjoyed much better conditions than those in southern England, where the most desperate rural poverty prevailed. Additionally, the grain-growing arable districts in the southeast, due to greater seasonal variations of employment, normally had worse conditions for their generally more numerous inhabitants than the pastoral, shepherding, dairying districts in the southwest. Sir James Caird's dividing line drawn from the Wash (north of East Anglia) across England through the middle of Shropshire quite accurately divides the high-wage north from the low-wage south. The main reason for these wide wage variations was because in the north, farmers as employers faced the competition of mine operators and factory owners for labor, which placed a floor under which the price of labor dare not fall. Otherwise, farmworkers might opt to "vote with their feet" and migrate to nearby booming urban areas benefiting from the economic expansion produced by the industrial revolution. Even

Thompson says that the real wages of laborers in such areas probably "had been rising in the decades before 1790, especially in areas contiguous to manufacturing or mining districts. 'There wants a war to reduce wages,' was the cry of some northern gentry in the 1790s." By contrast, in the south, outside of London, a city of trades dominated by skilled artisans which also contained relatively little factory employment, few nearby urban areas possessed employers competing for unskilled labor. Due to the increasingly overpopulated southern English countryside during this period (c. 1750-1860), and the very understandable lack of willingness for rural laborers to move long distances, the rural gentry and farmers had successfully racheted down wages to levels often barely above subsistence, especially for married men with large families. According to Brinley, in 1850-51 the average weekly agricultural wages in the south of England were eight shillings, five pence, about 26 percent lower than northern England's. By James Caird's calculations, the average was 37 percent lower for southern counties than northern ones.[35]

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[35]For regional wage variations, see John L. Rule, The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850 (New York: Longman Group, 1986), p. 48, and the frontispiece of James Caird, English Agriculture in 1850-51, 2d ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1852); In southern Lancashire, Caird found that "native labour is so scarce that the farmers declare they could not get on at all without the aid of the Irish." English Agriculture, p. 284. See also pp. 511-13; Thompson, Making, p. 219; Brinley Thomas, "Escaping from Constraints: The Industrial Revolution in a Malthusian Context," Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 15 (Spring 1985):746; Caird,

Increasingly, under the old poor law (pre-1834), parish relief became a way of life for many of the rural poor, especially during winter months in arable counties due to their strongly seasonal swings in agricultural employment. The subsidizing of wages directly out of parish relief funds raised by local property taxes ("the poor rates") placed bandages on the deep wounds inflicted ultimately by the decline of service, the enclosure acts, and population growth. Unfortunately, such "solutions" as the Speenhamland system, which gave supplemental allowances to members of families in proportion to the rise and fall of the price of bread from parish relief funds, only served to depress wages further. The grim picture of southern farmworkers' families being dependent most of the year around on the father's wages of ten shillings a week or less and little else besides parish relief sharply contrasts with the northern agricultural workers' conditions, who benefited from much higher wages, the greater availability of work for wives and/or children, and the frequent survival of service (the hiring of (unmarried) farm servants for one year contracts).

The material standard of living for the agricultural workers south of Caird's wage line across England often was truly desperate, and placed probably a majority of them in conditions worse than the moderately better-off slaves. In particular, meat had largely fallen out of the diets of

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English Agriculture, p. 511. Brinley cites this source, but how he derives the 26 percent figure remains unclear.

southern English farmworkers. Agricultural Labourers' Union organizer and leader Joseph Arch remembered as a child (b. 1826) in Warwick how scarce meat was:

> Meat was rarely, if ever, to be seen on the labourer's table; the price was too high for his pocket,--a big pocket it was, but with very little in it . . . In many a household even a morsel of bacon was considered a luxury. Flour was so dear that the cottage loaf was mostly of barley.

He then discusses how potatoes were not very common in "country districts"--or at least in Warwickshire, as may be implied by evidence cited below (pp. 46-48)--in that period (1830s). During a period of distress, only one farmer, a hoarder in 1835, had grown them locally. Similarly, a "Rector and Conservative" described the status of "bacon, [which] when they can get it, is the staff of the laborers' dinner." When it put in an appearance, a careful rationing exercise was undertaken, befitting male privilege, or female self-sacrifice, depending on one's perspective: "The frugal housewife provides a large lot of potatoes, and while she indulges herself with her younger ones only with salt, cuts off the small rasher and toasts it over the plates of the father and elder sons, as being the breadwinners; and this is all they want."[36]

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[36]Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 12; The rector and Conservative was in the Times, quoted by Frederick Law Olmsted, The Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England (1859; reprint ed., Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 243.

The Southern English Agricultural Workers' Diet Was Poor, Often Meatless

William Cobbett, the great Tory-turned-radical journalist and gadfly, saw up close the poor, largely meatless diet of southern farm laborers. While travelling in Hampshire, he noted the "poor creatures" who "are doomed to lead a life of constant labour and of half-starvation." After noting the snack of a pound of bread and a quarter pound of cheese he and his young son ate came to five pence, or almost three shillings, if they had it daily, he wondered:

> How, then, Gracious God! is a labouring man, his wife, and, perhaps, four or five small children, to exist upon 8s. or 9s. a week! Aye, and to find house-rent, clothing, bedding and fuel out of it? Richard and I ate here, at this snap, more, and much more, than the average of labourers, their wives and children, have to eat in a whole day, and that the labourer has to work on too!

Laborers facing such tight budgets were unlikely to spend money on meat, but would concentrate on cereal foodstuffs or (perhaps) potatoes, which Cobbett particularly hated. Later in the same county, he indignantly observed:

> These poor creatures, that I behold, here pass their lives amidst flocks of sheep; but, never does a morsel of mutton enter their lips. A labouring man told me, at Binley, that he had not tasted meat since harvest; [this was written Nov. 7th] and his looks vouched for the statement.[37]

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[37]William Cobbett, Rural Rides in the Counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Somersetshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Hertfordshire, ed. E.W. Martin (1830; reprint ed., London: MacDonald & Co.,

Cobbett's polemics constitute only a small part of the evidence describing how poor the laborers' diet was in southern England. Caleb Bawcombe, a shepherd, recalled for Hudson how his father Isaac (c. 1820) was tempted into poaching while living in Wiltshire:

> For many many days he had eaten his barley bread, and on some days barley-flour dumplings, and had been content with this poor fare; but now the sight of these animals [deer] made him crave for meat with an intolerable craving, and he determined to do something to satisfy it.

Somerville encountered one man, who was better fed in prison (he had participated in the Swing Riots of 1830) than when freed to live in Hampshire. He ate four times a week 14 ounces of meat in prison. "No working man like me as can get it [good meat]. I wish I had as much meat now as I had in the hulk [prison ship]; and I wishes the same to every poor hard-working man in Hampshire." While visiting England, one farmer told Olmsted this pathetic vignette. The rarity of fresh meat in laborers' diets caused them to gorge themselves the few times they could afford it:

> They [the laborers] will hardly taste it [fresh meat] all their lives, except, it may be, once a year, at a fair, when they'll go to the cook-shops and stuff themselves with all they'll hold of it; and if you could see them, you'd say they did not know what it was or what was to be done with it--cutting it into great mouthfuls and gobbling it down without any chewing, like as a fowl does barleycorns, till it chokes him.

1958), pp. 110, 254-55, 276. Since Cobbett visited areas in the economically depressed south, what he witnessed cannot safely be extrapolated to the north of England.

Edward Butt, a Sussex relieving officer and farmer, recalled for the Committee on the New Poor Law how when he was younger (before 1794) that laborers routinely had some meat with their bread every day they came to eat in his father's farmhouse. But by 1837, they mainly ate bread and vegetables, especially potatoes. They were not able to get milk in his area, and meat had become rather rare in their diet. Somerville found one Wiltshire laborer, saddened by the death of his young son, but not fully regretting his death: "We ben't sorry he be gone. I hopes he be happy in heaven. He ate a smart deal; and many a time, like all on us, went with a hungry belly." And when he served a sentence in Bermuda for poaching: "We had terrible good living . . . by as I ever had for working in England. Fresh beef three times a-week, pork and peas four times a-week." Wiltshire's dire conditions for the laborers' diet well can only be imagined, when the food in prison was better than what he had while free in England. Similarly, one laborer in Hampshire commented to Somerville: "They say meat be wonderful cheap in Reading, but what of it being cheap to we who can't buy it at no price?" Many agricultural workers in the south of England clearly were beaten down to the edge of subsistence, with meat being scarce, in part due to an

increase in grain growing acreage occurring "at the expense of the nation's meat supply" during the French Wars, as Deane and Cole noted.[38]

Grains, especially Wheat, Dominate the Farmworkers' Diet

Perhaps best illustrating the importance of grain in Hodge's diet, consider one Hampshire laborer and his family. They normally only ate bread, with some vegetables. Somerville learned the father had for breakfast just dry bread, if anything at all, before midday. Especially in hard times, the budgets of laborers might be 80 percent or more committed to buying bread and/or flour. In the diet of southern English agricultural workers, the dominant grain was wheat, at least in good times. Barley, rye, or oats also put their appearances, with the lattermost being the dominant grain in the north. These grains had the advantage

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[38]W.H. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life: Impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs, new Am. ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1921), p. 81; Alexander Somerville, The Whistler at the Plough, ed. K.D.M. Snell (Manchester, England: J. Ainsworth, 1852; reprint ed., London, Merlin Press, 1989; Fairfield, NJ: Augustus Kelley, 1989), pp. 38, 75, 119, 264; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, pp. 243-44; Great Britain, Parliament, BPP, 1837, vol. xvii, Reports from the Select Committee to Inquire into the Administration of the Relief of the Poor under the Provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, part 1, second report, pp. 3, 7-8, 14-15. This report may be referred to simply as "Committee on the New Poor Law" below; Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, British Economic Growth 1688-1959 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 75, quoted in Brinley Thomas, "Feeding England During the Industrial Revolution: A View from the Celtic Fringe," Agricultural History 56 (Jan. 1982):338.

of avoiding some of the nutritional pitfalls of corn (maize). For all his travails, Hodge in southern England did not suffer from pellagra, as many black slaves in the American South probably did at least some part of the year. But since reliance on grains other than wheat in southern England was considered a sign of poverty, laborers often resented eating bread made out of anything else but wheat. That barley did not always make for palatable fare, and pointed to exceptional poverty for the southern English, is shown by this story about conditions in Wiltshire (c. 1830) for those paid by the parish to work in the winter months. Hudson learned from some of his most elderly informants of a game that the laborers played in the field with their food:

> The men would take their dinners with them, consisting of a few barley balls or cakes, in their coat pockets, and at noon they would gather at one spot to enjoy their meal, and seat themselves on the ground in a very wide circle, the men about ten yards apart, then each one would produce his bannocks, and start throwing, aiming at some other man's face; there were hits and misses and great excitement and hilarity for twenty or thirty minutes, after which the earth and gravel adhering to the balls would be wiped off, and they would set themselves to the hard task of masticating and swallowing the heavy stuff.

This food fight scene with barley balls still must be seen as exceptional. For the southern English, wheat was their mainstay, with 94 percent of the population in southern and eastern England subsisting on wheat in 1801. In contrast, the northern English, despite higher incomes, had less of a taste for wheat--just some 25 percent of the population

lived upon it--while 50 percent consumed oats, 18 percent barley, and 6 percent rye, according to Thomas. During the 1760s, Charles Smith judged assuming a population of around six million in England and Wales, that 3,750,000 ate wheat, 888,000 rye, 623,000 oats, and 739,000 barley. Evidently, wheat bread continued to gain in market share until the 1790s, and over two-thirds of the population relied upon wheat. Thomas sees the southern English desire to cling to the wheaten loaf and not shift to potatoes or other grains with their low wages and the effects of enclosure as combining to possibly cause them to eat less wheat than formerly, and perhaps less food overall. The northern English preference for oats (similar to the Scots') was made largely possible by the availability of inexpensive milk to the poor, something which had declined for laborers in the south due to enclosures taking away most of their cows, as the Hammonds saw.[39] By resisting making coarser grains the mainstay of their diet, the southern English may well kept

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[39]Somerville, Whistler, pp. 119-20; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 220-21; Thomas, "Feeding England," p. 331. See also Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 51-53; E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteen Century," Past and Present, no. 50 (Feb. 1971), p. 80 (Charles Smith); Thomas, "Escaping from Constraints," p. 747; J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer (1911; reprint ed., London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1966), p. 123. However, Caird found in Lancashire by 1850, compared to 1770, that "oat-bread" had become "much superseded, even in the country districts, by wheaten bread" which now sold at a slightly lower price. English Agriculture, pp. 283-84.

the finer "luxury grain" (wheat) in their diet only by eating less of it.

The Role of Potatoes in the Laborers' Diet, Despite Opposition

Potatoes were another important part of the laborers' diet, especially as the nineteenth century drew on, and desperation broke down resistance against substituting them for grain. Cobbett's polemics exemplify this contempt for potatoes. He implicitly saw them as a sign of the English sliding down to the Irish level:

> I see [in Sussex] very few of "Ireland's lazy root:" and never, in this country, will the people be base enough to lie down and expire from starvation under the operation of the extreme unction! Nothing but a potatoe-eater will ever do that.

Further, rather than see the English working people reduced into living on potatoes,

> he would see them all hanged, and be hanged with them, and would be satisfied to have written upon his grave, 'Here lie the remains of William Cobbett, who was hanged because he would not hold his tongue without complaining while his labouring countrymen were reduced to live upon potatoes.'[40]

Despite Cobbett's opposition, full of the prejudices of the southern farmworker which he in spirit remained, potatoes

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[40]Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 110; Cobbett as cited by Somerville, Whistler p. 296. Once when Somerville and passengers on a stagecoach discussed the relative merits of the crop in Suffolk and Buckingham, and what types they liked to eat, he asked the Stagecoach's guard what type of potatoes he liked. He replied: "Give me . . . good old English fare, and good old English times, and dang your potatoes and railroads both!" Whistler, p. 50.

became important in Hodge's diet. Sure evidence for the decay of farm laborers' anti-potato sentiments was how one landowner in Dorset operated successfully: He got laborers to reclaim wasteland for him in return for planting potatoes--knowing next year the process would be repeated with another piece of land. In Somerset, in 1845, one of the years of the Irish potato famine, the potatoes were all wiped out. This was disastrous because the laborers were extremely dependent on them. Earning wages of a mere seven shillings and six pence a week on average during the year, they needed to buy the most with the least: "For years past their daily diet is potatoes for breakfast, dinner, and supper, and potatoes only. This year they are not living on potatoes, because they have none." In Sussex, Somerville found a laborer's wife who complained about "how it hurts the constitution of a man to work hard on potatoes, and nothing else but a bit of dry bread." This family ate four days a week normally only potatoes and dry bread. Somerville saw potatoes as so important to the diet of English laborers that, when commenting on how the potato blight had wiped out the crop in the south and west of England, said this event had gotten far less attention than the disaster in Ireland: "Surely the English potatoes are not to be overlooked, nor the English labourers, whose chief article of diet potatoes are. . . . How much greater must be the suffering be when to dearness of bread there is the companionship of scarcity of potatoes!" Somerville

exaggerates here, for even though potatoes were increasingly important to the diet of the laborers, and 1845-46 was a bad year for England, not just Ireland, grains still remained the staff of life for English laborers generally, unlike for Ireland. Still, Cobbett's campaign against potatoes must be ranked a failure, for near the town of Farnham where he was born and buried, Somerville found "the finest specimens of this year's crop which I have seen in any part of England," having seen some excellent patches of potatoes between that place and the location of Cobbett's farm at Normandy.[41]

Did Farmworkers Prefer Coarse Food or Fine?

Against the view that the farmworkers (or slaves, by implication) prefer finer and less coarse foods are Jeffries' comments on Hodge's desires and the problems in changing what Mrs. Hodge ends up cooking for him:

> The difficulty arises from the rough, coarse tastes of the labourer, and the fact, which it is useless to ignore, that he must have something solid, and indeed, bulky. . . . Give him the finest soup; give him pates, or even more meaty entrees, and his remark will be that it is very nice, but he wants 'summat to eat'. His teeth are large, his jaws strong, his digestive powers such as would astonish a city man; he likes solid food, bacon, butcher's meat, cheese, or something that gives him a sense of fullness, like a mass of vegetables. This is the natural result of his training the work in the fields. . . . Let anyone go and labour daily in the field, and they will come quickly to the same opinion.

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[41]Somerville, Whistler, pp. 62, 249, 303, 405, 414.

Jeffries' somewhat condescending views were on target concerning food preparation, but this would not touch the laborers' (or the slaves') desires for a less coarse grain when it may make up 80 percent or more of their diet. Letting some class bias color his views about how coarse the laborers really wanted their food, Jeffries overlooks how bread remained the staff of life for the laborers, and made up most of their daily calories. Switching from wheat to barley, or to oatmeal without milk, would be rather taxing on anyone's digestive system used to the former grain when it is most of what someone eats, rather than just an incidental, as (wheat) bread is to many contemporary Americans' diets. Anyway, Jeffries was not addressing the issue of grain substitution at all. Unlike most aristocrats, laborers engaged in heavy physical work needed serious bulk in their diet in order to have sufficient calories to sustain their efforts, but their food need not be unusually hard to digest or unpalatably coarse after being prepared to fulfill their needs. Indeed, food that was too bulky might slow down the laborers in question, as Young noted. Correspondingly, E.P. Thompson noted that: "There is a suggestion that labourers accustomed to wheaten bread actually could not work--suffered from weakness, indigestion, or nausea--if forced to change to rougher mixtures."[42] While such complaints were likely partially

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[42]Richard Jefferies, Hodge and His Masters, 2 vols. (1880; reprint ed., London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), 2:71;

psychosomatic, that does not change the fact that the laborers preferred less coarse grain in their diet when this item dominated it.

Admittedly, the southern farmworkers' partiality for the white wheaten loaf was rather unwise from a modern dietician's viewpoint. As Olmsted observed: "No doubt a coarser bread would be more wholesome, but it is one of the strongest prejudices of the English peasant, that brown bread is not fit for human beings." But, one needs to consider the laborers' view of what were good conditions as well before judging their situation by purely modern criteria, a point Snell develops at length. If they placed a strong priority on eating fine white wheat bread, outsiders are rather presumptuous to rearrange their lives for them, and say they should like what has been judged to be "good for them," even when objective reasons exist for doing so, i.e., the health advantages of increasing the amount of bran in the daily diet. The threat to the status of English laborers posed by coarser or non-wheaten bread in times of dearth was somewhat irrational, but still was probably more sensible than a contemporary preference for designer brand jeans over store brands of similar quality among the young. Attempts to force laborers to consume bread made of wholemeal flour even during the terrible 1800-

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See Arthur Young's comment in Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 122; Thompson, "Moral Economy," 81; see also 82, footnote 19.

1801 agricultural year by the "Brown Bread Act" provoked riots. In Surrey and Sussex in southern England the resistance to this law was especially strong. Unsurprisingly, this law lasted less than two months.[43]

The Monotony of the Farmworkers' Diet in the South of England

The southern English agricultural workers' diet was monotonous, like the slaves'. Caird in 1850 in the Salisbury area found it largely amounted to water, bread, some potatoes, flour with a little butter, and possibly a little bacon. "The supper very commonly consists of bread and water." In Wiltshire in the 1840s, Somerville found two laborers who could not afford bacon and vegetables with every dinner on eight shillings a week, and with a recent reduction to seven shillings, "they did not know how they would with seven." In Wooburn parish, Somerville found even in an apple orchard area most laborers did not earn enough to make apple pies! Years later (c. 1875), in this same general area of England, Jefferies still commented while noting improvement: "A basketful of apples even from the farmer's orchard [as a gift] is a treat to the children, for, though better fed than formerly, their diet is necessarily monotonous, and such fruit as may be grown in the cottage garden is, of course, sold." Near Monmouth,

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[43]Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 243; Snell, Annals, pp. 4-14; Thompson, "Moral Economy," 82.

Olmsted ran into a laborer who, although he also had a pig and a small potato patch, "oft-times . . . could get nothing more than dry bread for his family to eat."[44] Thomas Smart, a Bedfordshire laborer, and his family subsisted upon potatoes from a garden, bread, and cheese, with a little bacon occasionally, and tea and a little sugar. He said he would go without meat for a month at times. Milk was difficult to buy from the local farmers.[45] Jeffries described the hot dinner laborers had around noon on Sunday as their "the great event" for the day. Of course, beer made a major appearance in Hodge's diet around harvest time, and often at other times as well. This aspect of laborers' diets was a source of nearly endless moralizing by the rural middle and upper classes, at least concerning its abuses that caused a lack of labor discipline and the father's wages to be wasted in beerhouses. This diet, especially with the near absence of meat, could have well been less

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[44]Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 84-85; Somerville, Whistler, p. 18, 32; Jefferies, Hodge, 1:78; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 237.

[45]Great Britain, Parliament, BPP, 1824, vol. VI, Select Committee on Labourers' Wages, as found in Nigel E. Agar, The Bedfordshire Farm Worker in the Nineteenth Century (n.p.: Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society) 60 (1981):66. Indicating that conditions for unskilled laborers had not changed much by the First World War, the sample menus for a lower middle class household were far superior to a laborer's in Peel's Eat-Less-Meat-Book of 1917. Some agricultural laborers still ate up to fourteen pounds of bread a week during the First World War. Arthur Marwick, The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1965; reprint ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970), pp. 193, 196-97.

satisfying than what the slaves had, except that the bread often was purchased baker's bread. Such bread, or even what was made at home by the laborer's wife, was a much more carefully prepared and refined product than the cornmeal pounded into a crude hoecake or johnnycake (cornbread) by the slaves themselves normally. Olmsted (c. 1851) observed this while in southern England:

> The main stay of the laborer's stomach is fine, white wheaten bread, of the best possible quality, such as it would be a luxury to get any where else in the world, and such as many a New England farmer never tasted, and, even if his wife were able to make it, would think an extravagance to be ordinarily upon his table.[46]

White wheat bread likely was the only luxury Hodge and his family in the south of England enjoyed. Despite this particular boon, still a lack of meat characterized the southern English agricultural laborer's diet, although not the northerner's. All in all, the slaves' "standard rations" arguably, minus the problems of eating crude corn bread and the risk of pellagra without supplements, likely was better than what the majority of the free agricultural laborers of England subsisted off because meat (and milk) was largely missing from their diet as enclosure made it difficult or impossible for them to keep their own cows or pigs (see pp. 59-61 below).

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[46]Jeffries, Hodge, 1:72; an example of such moralizing is in 2:80-91; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 243.

The Superior Conditions of the Northern English Farmworkers

The northern English agricultural laborer clearly enjoyed superior conditions to his southern brother (or sister) during the general period of industrialization. Joseph Arch recalled why the union failed in organizing the workers in this area:

> We could not do much in the north; about Newcastle and those northern districts the men were much better paid, and they said, 'The Union is a good thing, but we are well off and can get along without it.' The Union was strongest, and kept so, in the Midland, Eastern, and Western counties.

In Northumberland and Durham, counties in northern England near Scotland, the 1867-68 Commissioners found the wages were high and the labor market favored the laborers. The institution of service was still persisted in northern Northumberland in the mid-1860s. They were often paid in kind and received fifteen to eighteen shillings a week. Day laborers--those not under a contract for their service--received two and a half to three shillings a day. The laborers' cottages were dispersed, allowing them to avoid the gang system's evils since they did not have to walk far to work but lived on or near their employer's premises. Wages were high enough so that their children rarely went to work before fourteen except during summers, where eleven-twelve year olds were employed during the seasonal peak of agricultural labor requirements. In southern Northumberland, none under ten worked. Higher wages allowed

northern laborers' children to get more education than those in the south received, where the margin above subsistence was much smaller, and the need for them to earn their keep immediately was correspondingly greater. Another sign of the tight labor market was how routinely single women living at home with their parents were often in farm service--"bound" in "bondage"--and did all types of heavy farm work.[47] This area's agricultural workers were about as well-off as non-skilled manual laborers then could expect, except perhaps for housing (see pp. 119,133).

Away from these areas near Scotland, wages gradually decline until reaching the Lincoln\Leicester area, where a rather abrupt transition to southern English conditions transpires. Lincoln and Nottingham had wages of fifteen to seventeen shillings a week, while Leicester just eleven. These wage differences turned up in their diets, where in Lincoln laborers' families would have meat two or three times a day, while in the latter only the father had it, and then just once a day. Similarly, for Oxfordshire and nearby, Somerville described many laborers as "always under-fed, even if always employed." By contrast, Yorkshire's higher wages of fourteen shillings per week encouraged parents to keep their children in school longer. There farm service still remained, with foremen receiving thirty pounds a year and board, a wagoner, sixteen to twenty pounds, and

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[47]Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 221-22; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. vii, xii-xiii.

plowboys, ten to fourteen. In Stafford, where during his life he moved from the southern part to the northern part (Caird's wage line falls at this county's southern border), Tom Mullins remembered at age seventeen (c. 1880) he earned sixteen pounds per year and his keep. Oatmeal, frequently turned into thin sour cakes shaped like disks, with dairy products, formed the mainstay of the diet before c. 1890. "Though wages were low people managed on them and also saved a bit. Ten shillings went a lot further then than now. Bread was 3d. the quartern loaf, milk 3d. a quart, tobacco 3d. an ounce . . . beer was 2d., the best was 3d." Service persisted in his area, and an annual hiring fair took place about October tenth each year. "But I never need to hire myself out, as I always had more jobs offered than I could undertake. Pity I couldn't have spread myself a bit!"[48] As these descriptions illustrate, the diet of the farm laborers north of Caird's line was quite good, and rendered them unquestionably better off on average than most slaves in the American South even before any of the quality of life factors are considered.[49]

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[48]Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xvii, xx; Somerville, Whistler, p. 128; John Burnett, ed., Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1920s (1974; reprint ed., London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 51-52.

[49]To compare slaves given rations largely regardless of work done and laborers earning wages presents some theoretical problems. Normally, slaves earned no wages, except for extra work outside normal hours, and were given a ration of food each week or month regardless of the amount of work done. But the agricultural laborers, if they had no

Butcher's Meat Was a Luxury for Farmworkers

Unlike most slaves, the meat English farm laborers ate was often tied to what animals they personally owned and slaughtered themselves, assuming they did not have to sell them to meet rent, clothing, or other expenses. In Wiltshire, near Cranbourne, Somerville found "all of them [the laborers] kept a pig or two; but they had to sell them to pay their rents." A Sussex farmer/relieving officer told Parliamentary Commissioners that "every labourer at that time [pre-1794] had a pig," and that farmworkers got their own pork from feeding an animal, not directly from the farmer he worked for. Somerville in Dorset encountered conditions that show a serious decline had set in by the 1840s, where often laborers were not allowed to keep a pig. "The dictum of the father of Sir John Tyrrell, in Essex, is understood and acted on in Dorset--'No labourer can be honest and feed a pig!'" Betraying a rather materialistic bent, Cobbett summarized well the importance of owning pigs was to laborers: "The working people [near Worcester] all seem to have good large gardens, and pigs in their styes; and this last, say the feelosofers what they will about her 'antallectal enjoyments,' is the only security for happiness

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access to a commons, an allotment, or were not under a yearly contract as a farm servant, had their standard of living virtually defined by their wages. So when examining their diets, wages stand as a partial proxy for comparison purposes when specific information on pounds of food eaten per person per week are not available for the laborers.

in a labourer's family." Of course, as part of their duties for their masters, slaves raised pigs and other animals for slaughter. But they did not own them personally, except those cases where their master allowed them to keep their own animals, such as in the low country areas of Georgia and South Carolina where the task system predominated. In England, buying butcher's meat, in which someone else had cut up the animal's carcass for you, was largely seen as a luxury, and was normally consumed by classes above the laborers.'[50] Jefferies heaps scorn on maidservants, born of fathers still at the plow, after having worked for wealthy tenant farmers, who when at "home ha[d] been glad of bread and bacon, and now cannot possibly survive without hot butcher's meat every day, and game and fish in their seasons."[51] The meat laborers consumed was often what they had raised themselves, whether it be on the commons before enclosure or (perhaps) on allotments or in gardens they had

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[50]Somerville, Whistler, pp. 32, 335-36; See also p. 120; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 8; Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 400; Phillip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century Low Country," Journal of Southern History, 49 (Aug. 1983):399-420; For butcher's meat being a luxury, see Caird, English Agriculture, p. 29 and Somerville, Whistler, p. 228.

[51]Jefferies, Hodge, 1:97. Jefferies portrays one old farmer who rose by the utmost parsimony, but then started ordering butcher's meat when he got older and his teeth weaker. His equally stingy wife furiously opposed this luxury, which normally was one leg of mutton each week. His teeth could no longer take "the coarse, fat, yellowy bacon that [had] formed the staple" of his diet, "often . . . with the bristles thick upon it." Hodge, 1:55.

themselves. Dependence on the commercial market for meat was not a virtue when seeking to economize or simply to struggle on by. Allotments, which were scarce until after c. 1830, had the advantage of allowing laborers to raise their own pigs (when given permission to do so). Indeed, in some areas with allotments many or most did keep pigs, in part because they produced some of the needed manure to keep their (say) fourth or half acre fertile.[52] But as the enclosure movement gained strength after 1760, stripping farmworkers of grazing land, they largely lost their ability to raise their own animals until allotments in a very piecemeal fashion after c. 1830 began gradually to restore this.

The Effects of Enclosure and Allotments on Farmworker Diet

Allotments and especially enclosure had a major impact on the farmworkers' diets. Enclosure affected cottagers and others who had mixed wage earning with subsistence agriculture using the commons by cutting out the latter, throwing them fully upon what their wages could purchase. As E.P. Thompson observed: "In village after village, enclosure destroyed the scratch-as-scratch-can subsistence economy of the poor--the cow or geese--fuel from the common,

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[52]Great Britain, Parliament, BPP, 1843, vol. VII, Report from Select Committee on Labouring Poor (Allotments of Land), pp. 3, 12, 14, 20, 113. This report may be referred to simply as Committee on Allotments below.

gleanings, and all the rest." Ironically, as the Parliamentary Commissioners observed in 1867-68, allotments undid this consequence of enclosure, through they came later and affected significantly fewer laborers, especially before the late nineteenth century. They allowed the laborers to grow vegetables, especially potatoes, on a quarter or half acre of land specially rented out to them. Although a notoriously strong pro-enclosure advocate, agricultural improvement writer Arthur Young learned that enclosure normally harshly affected the poor:

> In twenty-nine cases out of thirty-one noted [by ministers making additional comments on a survey checking the effects of enclosure on grain production], the poor, in the opinion of the ministers, were sufferers by losing their cows, and other stock. . . . [In some cases] allotments were assigned them; but as they were unable to be at the expense of the enclosure, it forced them not only to sell their cows, but their houses also. This is a very hard case, though a legal one; and as instances are not wanting of a much more humane conduct, it is to be lamented that the same motives did not operate in all.

Many of the comments by these Anglican clerics (a group often not friendly to the laborers' interests, as Cobbett and Arch make clear) indicate directly the serious misery inflicted on the poor's diet by enclosure in various areas due to the loss of cows and other animals. One for the parish of Souldrop, Bedford stated: "The condition of the labouring poor [is] much worse now than before the enclosure, owing to the impossibility of procuring any milk for their young families." Another added, for Tingewick, Buckingham: "Milk [was] to be had at 1d. per quarter

before; not to be had now at any rate." Repeatedly they saw many had to sell off or otherwise lose their cows (sixteen of the thirty-one mentioned this specifically). For Passenham, Northampton, one commented: "[The poor were] deprived of their cows, and great suffer[ing?]s by loss of their hogs." A man of the cloth for Cranage, Chester remarked: "Poor men's cows and sheep have no place, or any being." These deprivations helped to breed the resentment one laborer expressed against almost anyone richer than himself, farmers, lords, and parsons all included, additionally bringing Somerville into his line of fire: "I see you ha' got a good coat on your back, and a face that don't look like an empty belly; there be no hunger looking out atween your ribs I'll swear."[53] Clearly, enclosure robbed meat and milk from the mouths of many farm laborers and their families, and was a major cause for eliminating these foods from their diets as the enclosure movement gained steam after 1760 in areas with a labor surplus, such as southern rural England.

Allotments returned some of what enclosure had taken. These small pieces of land gave underemployed and unemployed farmworkers something to fall back upon. Due to the Swing riots of 1830-31 and the increasing burden of poor rates

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[53]Thompson, Making, p. 217; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. il; Arthur Young, General Report on Enclosures: Drawn up by Order of the Board of Agriculture (London: B. Mcmillan, 1808; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelly, Publishers, 1971), pp. 14, 150-52; Somerville, Whistler, p. 42.

caused by the laborers applying for relief when their wages were insufficient to support them, the movement to rent out fourth- or half-acre pieces of land picked up speed as the nineteenth century progressed. Intensively cultivated, small amounts of land could produce impressive amounts of food, as the 1843 Committee reported. One rood of land--usually one fourth of an acre--could grow six months' worth of vegetables! Perhaps one-half would be planted in potatoes, with the rest being beans, peas, etc. One-eighth of an acre could grow five pounds' worth of crops--the equivalent of ten weeks or more of wages for many laborers in southern England. Such a tiny parcel had yielded eighty bushels of carrots, fourteen-fifteen bushels of other vegetables in at least one case, which was two or three times what the typical farmer would have raised on the same land. A rood's worth of land could also yield a hundred bushels of potatoes. Young even published calculations suggesting that if 682,394 laborer's families each grew a half acre's worth of potatoes, then no grain imports to England in the very bad 1800-1801 year would have been necessary. Due to the laborers' enormous desires for parcels to grow potatoes on--Cobbett's hated root--some landlords unscrupulously charged rents up to eight pounds per acre per year, which was far above what a tenant farmer would be charged. Allotments could allow the farmworkers to keep animals such as pigs, as noted above (pp. 58-59), potentially enabling them to eat meat more regularly. One

M.P. for Lincoln helped tenants by renting small allotments to keep animals on. The 1867-68 Commission reported that in Yorkshire some laborers benefited from having "cow gates" to pasture cows in lanes nearby.[54] Allotments often made a major difference in the diets of English agricultural laborers fortunate enough to have them, and were unquestionably more important in their lives than the patches of land many American slaves were allowed to cultivate. Unlike the farmworkers, most of the slaves' food was automatically given to them in the standard rations by their masters, excepting some in task system areas, something which did not occur in England unless the worker was a live-in farm servant.

Comparing Food Received by Paupers, Slaves, and Their Country's Army

One indication that the diet of many southern English agricultural workers was arguably worse than that of many slaves was that the former's food per family on parish relief was lower than what one soldier in the Royal Army received, when a similar ratio of the rations of at least some slaves compared favorably to that of the American army. As Cobbett vehemently observed:

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[54]For the influence of the Swing Riots on allotments, see Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, p. 157; Committee on Allotments, BPP, 1843, pp. ii-iv; Young, General Report, pp. 47, 107, 166, 348-50; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xxv.

> The base wretches know well, that the common foot-soldier now receives more pay per week (7s. 7d.) exclusive of clothing, firing, candle, and lodging; . . . [and] more to go down his own single throat, than the overseers and magistrates allow [in parish relief] to a working man, his wife and three children.[55]

Due to high unemployment caused by a growing population, and the increasing elimination of the subsistence economy because of enclosure, many laborers, probably a solid majority in the south, were on parish relief for extended periods during their lives, such as in winter.[56] Since arable agriculture was a highly seasonal business, many more laborers were out of work in winter than summer, causing many to depend on parish relief or at various parish make-work jobs such as stonebreaking on the highways or gathering flints in the fields. The disproportion between at least some slaves and the U.S. Army's rations for privates appears smaller than the gap between farm laborers on parish relief and average English soldiers. Olmsted cited an advertisement in the Richmond Enquirer which had one and a quarter pounds of beef and one and three-sixteenths pounds of bread--presumably hardtack--as the daily ration, with

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[55]Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 308; see also p. 336.

[56]Thomas Smart, father of thirteen children with seven still living when he was forty-six years old, was asked by the Select Committee on Labourers' Wages: "Do you know any labourers with so large family as you have, who have brought them up without assistance from the parish?" He replied: "Never one but me." (He mentioned having taken burial expenses from the parish, but nothing else earlier). BPP, 1824, vol. VI, pp. 53-56, as in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 64-65, 67.

eight quarts of beans, two quarts of salt, four pounds of coffee, and eight pounds of sugar distributed out over each hundred days. In contrast, the Daily Georgian listed as rations for slaves being hired for a year to work on a canal as receiving each "three and a half pounds of pork or bacon, and ten quarts of gourd seed corn per week." At least some masters would beat this ration of pork: Planter Barrow Bennet gave "weakly" "4 pound & 5 pound of meat to evry thing that goes in the field--2 pound over 4 years 1 1/2 between 15 months and 4 years old--Clear good meat."[57] Evidently, the disproportion was greater between what the British government gave its privates and its laborers in parish relief (admittedly, those not working) and what the American government gave its soldiers and a number of slaveowners gave their slaves.

Better Bread Versus More Meat?: The Farmworker Versus Slave Diet

A number of bondsmen in America had arguably better diets than many farmworkers in England, at least those south of Caird's wage line. Three pounds of pork or bacon were standard in the diets of the slaves, while many southern English agricultural workers, once both population growth and enclosures took off, had meat largely fall out of their

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[57]Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, 2:240; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409.

diets during the period c. 1780-1840. On the other hand, the grain the slaves ate often was coarser, and (perhaps) more nutritionally suspect. Wheat bread, often made by a baker, which most southern farm workers mainly subsisted upon, was clearly a more refined, tasty product than crudely-pounded maize cooked in the form of hoecake and johnnycake. Reflecting how the laborers (compared to the slaves) had lost meat, but had gained access to a much finer grain product, J. Boucher, vicar of Epsom observed in late 1800 that: "Our Poor live not only on the finest wheaten bread, but almost on bread alone."[58] Who had superior access to vegetables is not altogether obvious, although those laborers fortunate enough to have an allotment--a serious possibility only towards the end of the period being surveyed--probably were better off than a majority of the slaves, many of whom lived almost exclusively off the "standard rations" of corn and pork. Most farmworkers were not this lucky, and the stories of privation noted above (pp. 40-43,51-52) suggest what vegetables they had were limited to potatoes. The regional variations within England complicate this picture: The minority (c. one-fourth) of farmworkers fortunate enough to live in the north near where industry and mining pushed up their wages were certainly better off materially than most American slaves, even before considering any more ethereal quality of life criteria. As

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[58]as cited in Thompson, "Moral Economy," 82.

for American regional variations, the Border States such as Virginia or Kentucky may have treated their slaves better, but this may not have been primarily in the form of better food as in less brutal treatment, since the varying descriptions of rations given by Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Charles Ball in Maryland and Virginia do not seem much different from the evidence encountered from elsewhere in the South. (Variations in the food given slaves regionally need much more research, however). The differences between America, a sparsely populated, newly settled country, and England, a relatively densely populated and intensively farmed land suffering from the Malthusian effects of rapid population growth during its period of industrialization (and the mismanagement of enclosure) helps explain the following supreme irony: The free farm laborers of southern England arguably had an inferior diet to that of American bondsmen in Mississippi or Georgia. If those kept in slavery--the worst human rights abuse of America, all things considered--may have eaten better than English rural laborers, that is deeply to the shame of England's elite--"old corruption."[59]

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[59]Edward Butt, a relief officer for Petworth union, Sussex, stated that he resigned from that position not just because of a 20l./year salary cut, but also because: "I was hurt in my feelings to see the pitiful cries of the poor; it would hurt any man to see a parcel of young children, and have no more to give, it would touch the heart of a flint-stone; I could not bear it; I did not wish to mention that [initially to the Committee]." Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 6.

4. SLAVE CLOTHING

How Well Were the Slaves Clothed?

The amount of clothing slaves received is relatively well documented, because it was a significant item of expense often bought off-plantation and then shipped and issued to the slaves instead of being made right on it. This generalization does not deny the prevalence of homespun clothing in the South, but shows often planters and other masters chose not to run truly self-sufficient plantations or farms in matters of clothing. Low quality purchases were made, so not many months passed before their "new" clothes became loose-fitting half-rags. Bennet Barrow recorded a not-atypical clothing ration per year, at least for the larger planters. In his "Rules of Highland Plantation" he stated: "I give them cloths twice a year, two--one pair shoues for winter evry third year a blanket--'single negro--two.'" His relatively frequent issue of blankets may have been somewhat unusual. He dutifully noted issuing at least some of them in his diary. Escaped slave Francis Henderson, from "Washington City, D. C.," recalled his master was less generous with blankets--he received only one before running away at age nineteen. "In the summer we had one pair of linen trousers given us--nothing else; every fall, one pair of woolen pantaloons, one woollen jacket, and two cotton shirts." In Virginia, Olmsted heard that:

> As to the clothing of the slaves on the plantations, they are said to be usually furnished by their owners or masters, every year, each with a coat and trousers, of a coarse woollen or woollen and cotton stuff (mostly made, especially for this purpose, in Providence, R. I.) for winter, trousers of cotton osnaburghs for summer, sometimes with a jacket also of the same; two pairs of strong shoes, or one pair of strong boots and one of lighter shoes for harvest; three shirts, one blanket, and one felt hat.

This optimistic description probably pertained to the more ideal masters and what slaveowners by reputation, etc. were supposed to do, or reflected the better treatment of slaves the border states such as Virginia had a reputation for. Later, in a conversation with an old free black man, he observed: "Well, I've been thinking, myself, the niggars did not look so well as they did in North Carolina and Virginia; they are not so well clothed, and they don't appear so bright as they do there." Additionally, Christmas gifts of certain finery could supplement the basic yearly ration of two summer suits and one winter suit, as Olmsted noted of four large adjacent plantations owned by one normally absentee master "situated on a tributary of the Mississippi." Slaves also could buy clothes with earnings from working on Sundays, holidays, or late nights.[60] Hence,

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[60]Davis, Plantation Life, p. 409. See also pp. 46-47. On p. 114 he wrote: "Gave women Calico dress." For blankets given, see pp. 219-20 (seventy bought); p. 377 (thirty bought); Drew, Refugee, pp. 155-156 (Henderson) Admittedly, since he was mostly a child during this period, he was not likely to be issued a blanket individually; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:105, 193, 200-210, 211; For pay for working irregular times, see Ball, Slavery in the United States, p. 44.

the slaves normally were issued a certain amount of clothing yearly, but was it enough?

Bad Clothing Conditions for Slaves

Evidence repeatedly points to the everyday work clothes of enslaved blacks being near rags. The semi-tropical weather of the Deep South no doubt contributed to the slaveowners' complacency with ill-dressed slaves. Perhaps the reason why Olmsted had observed better dressed slaves in Virginia and North Carolina was due to planters and other slaveholders considering the colder climates these states experienced compared to the Deep South, and so they distributed more and/or better clothes. Even so, ill-clothed slaves were common throughout the South. Born free in North Carolina, Thomas Hedgebeth had worked for various slaveholders. He saw how badly dressed the slaves were at one place, including not having hats while having to work in the fields in summer:

> They were a bad looking set--some twenty of them--starved and without clothing enough for decency. It ought to have been a disgrace to their master, to see them about his house. If a man were to go through Canada [where he was living at the time] so, they'd stop him to know what he meant by it--whether it was poverty or if he was crazy,--and they'd put a suit of clothes on him.

The slaves Olmsted saw while passing by on a train in Virginian fields were "very ragged." At one farm in Virginia, "the field-hands wore very coarse and ragged

garments." A different problem was found on the rice-island estate Kemble stayed at. Being issued thick cloth to turn into clothes, in coastal lowland Georgia's hot climate these garments were virtually intolerable during summer, even to the blacks accustomed to the climate.[61] Simply put, their clothes were so bad because their owners largely determined how much would be spent on their clothing, not themselves. Their masters' self-interest naturally led to them to minimize "unnecessary clothing expenditures."

Slave children suffered most from inadequate clothing rations. Often they ended up with just a long shirt, or would be virtually naked. Aged freedwoman Mary Reynolds of Louisiana recalled what she wore when she was young: "In them days I weared shirts, like all the young-uns. They had collars and come below the knees and was split up the sides. That's all we weared in hot weather." Frederick Douglass recalled his want of clothing when he was a child:

> I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked--no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees.

He found the thought of owning a pair of trousers at the age of seven or eight--offered because he was being sent to Baltimore to work as a servant--"great indeed!" Aged freedman Cicero Finch of Georgia remembered how both slave boys and girls wore the same basic piece of clothing:

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[61]Drew, Refugee, p. 278; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:40, 52; Kemble, Journal, pp. 52-53.

> An' de chillun? When dey big 'nough ter put on anything, it's a shirt. Boys an' girls de same. Run roun' in dat shirt-tail. Some de gals tie belt roun' de middle, an' dat's de only diffrunts.

In an upbeat recollection likely blurred by nostalgia, old ex-slave Kike Epps of South Carolina described a still lower standard that prevailed for children's clothing on his master's plantation: "Dis hy'ar [banyan] shu't . . . wuh made jus' lak a sack. Got hole in top fo' de haid, an' holes fo' de arms. Pull it over yo' haid, push yo' arms t'rough de side holes, an' dar yo' is!" They would wear this bag with holes "till dey mos' growed up!" Due to South Carolina's warm climate even in the winter, he wore this outfit without complaint, making for a decidedly different memory from Frederick Douglass's bitter experience in Maryland's much harsher winters. Although this pattern had exceptions, generally little was spent on children's clothes because they did not do field labor when young, causing the less forward-looking "entrepreneurial" slaveowners to "invest" less in their "human capital" at this point in their lives, to use the desiccated cliometric terminology.[62]

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[62]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 122; For exceptions, see pp. 81, 85; Douglass, Narrative, pp. 43, 44; For Finch's and Epp's recollections, see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 72, 73; Charles Ball of Maryland stated that "Children not able to work in the field, were not provided with clothes at all, by their masters." Slavery in the United States, p. 44.

Differences in Clothing Provided for Slaves with Different Positions

Just as for food, different groups of slaves received different types and/or amounts of clothing. Most obviously, house servants were issued better clothes than the field hands, since those of at least the larger planters had to look presentable to visitors.[63] They also received cast-offs of the master's family, in the same way they enjoyed the scrapings and leftovers of the master's table. Old freedman Henry Coleman remembered that as a child when he was made a servant that his mother said this to his father about him: "That black little nigger over there, he got to git hisself some pants 'cause I's gwine to put him up over the white folks's table." His job was to swish away flies with a brush of peacock feathers while suspended over his owner's table in a swing: Only wearing a shirt from that elevated position might prove to be too revealing! Slaves with managerial duties also acquired better attire. Olmsted described the "watchman"--the top slave who served virtually as a steward and storekeeper for a large South Carolina rice planter--to be as well-dressed and well-mannered as any

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[63]Stampp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 289-90; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:52. However, this was not always the case, as Kemble described the barefoot, "half-naked negro women" who "brought in refreshments" while visiting one neighboring (and declining) plantation on a Georgian sea island. Journal, p. 296. Similar standards likely prevailed for many rural small slaveholders in the interior regions of the South.

other gentleman. One ex-slave said his father, a driver, was "de only slave dat was give de honor to wear boots."[64] So at the cost of living under a master or mistress' closer supervision, drivers and domestic servants enjoyed greater material benefits such as possessing better clothes.

Many slaves saved their better clothing for going to church on Sundays or special occasions, but reserved the worst for work. Gus Feaster, a South Carolinian freedman, remembered:

> Us wore the best clothes that us had [at church]. . . . Us kept them cleaned and ironed just like the master and the young masters done theirn. Then us wore a string tie, that the white folks done let us have, to church. That 'bout the onliest time that a darky was seed with a tie.

Solomon Northrup, held in bondage in Louisiana, recalled that on Christmas slaves would dress up the best they could:

> Then, too, 'of all i' the year,' they array themselves in their best attire. The cotton coat has been washed clean, the stump of a tallow candle has been applied to the shoes, . . . [and, perhaps] a rimless or crownless hat . . . [was] placed jauntily upon the head.

Many women wore red ribbons in the hair or handkerchiefs over their heads then as well. Kemble saw a similar phenomenon, comparing it to poor Irish emigrants who spent (as seen from her middle class standpoint) too much on clothes after coming to America:

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[64]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 141-42; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:242; George P. Rawick, ed., The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography 19 vols. (1972-: Westport), South Carolina Narratives, II (2), 36, quoted in Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 370.

> I drove to church to-day in the wood-wagon, with Jack and Aleck, Hector being our charioteer, in a gilt guard-chain and pair of slippers to match as the Sabbatic part of his attire. . . . The [male] Negroes certainly show the same strong predilection for finery with their womenkind.

Most strikingly, Olmsted interviewed a free black man from North Carolina peddling tobacco in South Carolina who described how differently the slaves dressed while on the job compared to church:

> Well, master, Sundays dey is mighty well clothed, dis country; 'pears like dere an't nobody looks better Sundays dan dey do. But Lord! workin' days, seems like dey haden no close dey could keep on 'um at all, master. Dey is a'mos' naked, wen deys at work, some o[f] 'em.[65]

Of course, since they normally worked six days out of seven, bondsmen could not wear good clothes every work day without ruining all they had. Most did not have enough changes of shirts and pants to do that. Dressing badly at work compared to church or other special occasions also may reflect their different attitude towards these two situations. On the day they are free from work and "own their own time," they dressed to express themselves. But when they are in the fields, six days out of seven, and their time is the master's time, they avoided dressing above average or trying to impress their companions in bondage, unlike at church on Sundays. Doing so might well bring the

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[65]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 145; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 164; Kemble, Journal, p. 281; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:211. He commented while in Virginia, p. 105: "On Sundays and holidays they usually look very smart, but when at work, very ragged and slovenly."

unwanted attentions of the overseer or master against some "uppity" black.[66] Bondsmen and women indulged in what Kemble did call "the passion for dress" not everyday, but only on days where the immediate coercion associated with work ceased, excepting domestic servants and drivers, with their higher clothing standards.

The Factory Versus Homespun: The Master's Decision

Masters acquired clothing for their slaves in two different ways. One was by ordering it from factories in the North or in England, and the other was to make homespun right on the farm or plantation itself. Olmsted time and time again refers to the ubiquity of homespun as worn by whites in the South, including the smaller planters, which he rarely saw in the North. When summarizing the economic backwardness of the South, he pointed out: "How is it that while in Ohio the spinning-wheel and hand-loom are curiosities, and homespun would be a conspicuous and noticeable material of clothing, half the white population of Mississippi still dress in homespun, and at every second house the wheel and loom are found in operation?"[67] One of planter Bennet Barrow's more common diary notations

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[66]Charles Ball chose to stop wearing the straw hat his wife gave him while working. He had found he was the only slave on the plantation with a hat, and feared standing out. Ball, Slavery in the United States, p. [1]47.

[67]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:267-268.

describing his slaves' daily work concerned slave women spinning on rainy days which kept them (at least) busy. Slaves and others recalled the making of homespun clothing.[68] Here the standard of living of the white population constitutes a type of ceiling on the black/slave population's conditions. Slaves are exceedingly unlikely to have anything routinely better than their white neighbors, except for exceptional individuals such as the "watchman" on that one South Carolina rice plantation. Homespun made for coarser cloth and cost a lot of time in producing it, but had the advantage of reducing cash outlays for those living as subsistence farmers, making them more independent of the market at the expense of many extra hours of labor. For there are always trade-offs in whether to submit oneself to the division of labor, accessed by small farmers through the market, or to stay independent, and either go without or put more hours of one's life into producing at home what could be bought instead.

Unfortunately for the slaves, when their masters chose to rely on the market, the clothing often specially manufactured for them was of a cheap, low-grade quality. Clothes made of "Negro cloth" were durable but rough on the skin. Even clothes made from this material may not last

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[68]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 63; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 188, 193-95; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:68-69; Joan Rezner Gundersen, "The Double Bonds of Race and Sex: Black and White Women in a Colonial Virginia Parish," Journal of Southern History, 52 (Aug. 1986):369; Bassett, The Plantation Overseer, p. 180.

that long when they had only one or two sets of clothes to wear, besides any finery they would be fortunate to possess. Clothing shortfalls created difficulties in trying to wash and clean their clothes more than once a week.[69] They often did not have another full set of clothes to change into, making the daily wear on what they did possess nearly ceaseless during the work week. Clearly, the market was no savior in providing better clothes for the slaves to wear, for the slaveowners normally ensured they did the choosing for the slaves of what it produced for them.

Slaves and Shoe Shortages

Slaves also suffered from not having enough pairs of shoes or boots. Fortunately mitigating this shortage's negative effects was the South's warm climate, especially in the Deep South. Old freedwoman Nicey Kinney recalled how the freedmen after emancipation when going to church were "in their Sunday clothes, and they walked barefoots with their shoes acrost their shoulders to keep 'em from gitting dirty. Just 'fore they got to the church they stopped and put on their shoes . . ." This obviously implies that many slaves preferred to go barefoot at times, at least in summer. Still, Barrow knew the dog days of August could torment even his blacks' feet: "ground here verry hot to

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[69]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 551.

the negros feet." But when cold weather closed in, lacking protection for the feet suddenly became much more serious, even deadly. Once the jealous mistress of Harriet Brent Jacobs ordered her to take off her creaking new shoes. Later she was sent on a long errand where she had to walk in the snow barefoot, and, after returning and going to bed, thought she might end up sick, even dead. "What was my grief on waking to find myself quite well!" As a slave child, Frederick Douglass recalled what going barefoot did to his feet in Maryland's winter: "My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes." Freedwoman Mary Reynolds had to wear shoes with brass studs in the toes and sides which hurt her ankles because they were too small. She rubbed tallow into these shoes and put rags around them, but they still left life-long scars. Comparable to their clothing situation, slave children were even more neglected about being given proper shoes--many received none at all. One Virginia slaveowner ruefully regretted the deadly result of failing to shod one slave, telling Olmsted that: "He lost a valuable negro, once, from having neglected to provide him with shoes."[70] Judging from how masters and mistresses

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[70]Bassett maintained going barefoot in warm weather was expected. Plantation Overseer, p. 271; the testimony of Reynolds and Kinney is in Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 82, 122; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 239; Brent, Incidents, pp. 17-18; Douglass, Narrative, p. 43; for an exception, see Cicero Finch of Georgia in Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 72; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:104. In Tennessee, Olmsted found in one area a majority of poor whites routinely went

often neglected supplying their bondsmen with sufficient clothing, that being seen as somewhat optional, especially in the Deep South, supplying sufficient shoes which the slaves themselves might not always wish to wear was even more apt to be neglected. Slaves certainly were not likely to have more shoes than they needed!

As was the case with clothing, masters and mistresses could get their slaves shoes from two different basic sources. One standard approach, commonly used by the larger planters, was to order them from some company in the North. Such basic, hard, and heavy work shoes, called brogans, were not purchased while meditating on the tenderness of the slaves' feet. They were often ordered a size large, since the certainty of the fit was questionable when ordering from a distance. Barrow recorded a number of times the issue of shoes to his slaves, always in October when noted. He meant it when he said they were issued for winter yearly, which has its implications about the rest of the year. Shoes also could be made locally and individually by a shoemaker, perhaps by a slave craftsman owned by the planter himself.[71] Either way, the ration of shoes given out each year was not terribly likely to last until the next year's new allowance

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barefoot in winter, even when the snow was four or five inches deep. Curiously, it was not seen as much of a problem! Cotton Kingdom, 2:128.

[71]Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 271; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 82, 101, 133, 213, 342, 409; for the use of local cobblers, see Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 188; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 63.

while suffering under the strain of heavy field work. The bondsmen's children were unlikely to get any shoes at all, since they normally did not work with the crops seriously.

Fogel and Engerman's Optimistic Take on Slaves' Clothing Rations

Fogel and Engerman in Time on the Cross press forward a rather optimistic notion of slave clothing allowances:

> These [records from large plantations] indicate that a fairly standard annual issue for adult males was four shirts (of cotton), four pairs of pants (two of cotton and two of wool), and one or two pairs of shoes. Adult women were issued four dresses per year, or the material needed to make four dresses. Hats were also typically issued annually (women received headkerchiefs). Blankets were issued once every two or three years.

They also mention sometimes socks, underclothes, petticoats, jackets, and coats were issued, the latter for winter months. Such a high yearly issue was likely reserved only for the most paternalistic masters. Two or three sets of clothes seems a more likely average annual ration, as Sutch argues. Barrow issued blankets every three years, but Francis Henderson's master was far less generous. The exemplary planters such as Fogel and Engerman cite must be offset against the very neglectful ones. Ball gave his editor one horror story about a lack of clothing on a large cotton plantation in South Carolina. In the work gang, none had a full set of clothes, with "not one of the others [besides himself] had on even the remains of two pieces of

apparel," and many of the teenage slaves were naked. While perhaps this tale is somewhat exaggerated due to an abolitionist editor's bias, there is no question most slaves looked terribly ragged by Northern free white standards on workdays.[72]

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[72]Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:116-17; Sutch in David, Reckoning, pp. 298-99; Ball, Slavery in the United States, pp. 146-[1]47; cf. Stampp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 289, 291-92.

5. FARMWORKER CLOTHING

How Well Were Farmworkers Clothed?

Turning to the English case, there are significantly greater difficulties in documenting conditions. Sources similar to that of the planters' records of clothing bought for their slaves do not exist for agricultural workers, since they normally bought clothing on their own. Furthermore, the type of clothing the lower classes wore in England was potentially not especially different in general appearance from that of the middle class. Unlike other European societies, England did not have a required "peasant costume" that automatically marked off those actually working the land from the rest of society. However, similar to many French peasants, many of the agricultural workers wore smocks. Somerville once saw a crowd of at least one thousand men, women, and children, which gathered to hear anti-corn law speeches. Two-thirds were men, and they mostly wore "smock-frocks or fustian coats, just as they had come from their work." This outfit's prevalence gradually declined as the nineteenth century wore on. As a youth in Warwick (c. 1840), Joseph Arch remembered being given a smock of the coarsest cloth to wear, like other plowboys in his village. This stood out against the sons of the local artisans, who wore cloth-coats, but of shoddy material. The latter felt superior to the farmworkers' sons, resulting in

"regular pitched battles of smock-frock against cloth-coat." In Sussex, Cobbett saw a boy wearing a faded, patched blue smock, which made him reflect on how he had worn the same when he was young himself (c. 1775). This boy also wore nailed shoes and a worn but clean shirt.[73] Conspicuously, by comparison, African-American slaves, the lowest of the low in their society, did not wear smocks while in the fields, nor did white farmers either.

The Low Standards for Farmworkers, especially in Southern England

Clothing standards for agricultural workers, at least those in southern England, were near the bottom of the heap even for the working class. Cobbett, while critiquing the hypocrisy of the upper class on this issue, quoted Sir John Pollen, an M.P. for Andover. He attempted to justify the corn laws as a means of helping the agricultural laborers, saying the "poor devils" had "hardly a rag to cover them!" Somerville knew of one child who lent his shoes to another because he had none while they played together. Many of the budgets collected by researchers of farmworkers normally lacked anything devoted to purchasing clothing. Cobbett constructed a fairly reasonable, non-luxurious budget, and

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[73]Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 66-67; Somerville, Whistler, p. 382; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 31; Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 96.

found that with a family of five allowed five pounds of bread a day, one pound of mutton, and two of pork, that the cost of this alone was (c. 1825) over sixty-two pounds a year. This figure was over twice what their average annual wages would likely total, when nine to ten shillings a week is taken as an average, with parish relief being still less (if it was just seven shillings six pence per week, as Cobbett suggests). Of course, they did not eat anything near this amount of meat in reality, ensuring their budgets were closer to balance than this. Clothing could be bought only, perhaps, with the special harvest earnings which briefly put the agricultural workers somewhat above subsistence in this area of England. Otherwise, they had to gain them by charity or even begging. The Hampshire girls Cobbett saw in their Sunday best had received from charity a camlet gown, white apron and a plaid cloak each. But the upper class's generosity was unreliable, especially when by promoting enclosure and high excise taxes it had forcibly taken from the laborers much more than it gave back. As a result, many agricultural laborers could only afford to own one change of clothes altogether, which puts them right at or below many slave field hands in America.[74] This result is not surprising because of the cost of food for large families where the father was the main or sole support,

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[74]Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 51, 306, 433; Somerville, Whistler, p. 281; Having one set of clothes is mentioned in Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 68.

especially when the family was scraping bottom during its family life cycle. When the parents faced raising a large number of children, and only one (perhaps) could start earning a little at age eight or nine, with household duties tying down the mother substantially, a virtually guaranteed family financial crisis lasting some years struck working class families until their children became teenagers and more could be sent out to work. In these situations, clothing expenses had to be cut to the bare bones.

Clothing, while necessary for life, was often an easily postponable purchase, since the laborer's wife (almost inevitably) could somehow patch and mend what near-rags the family had for another year or more in the event of a major crisis for the family or region. Somerville, encountering a laborer in northern Hampshire along the road, found he had four children and a wife to support on a mere eight shillings per week. They, being near the bottom of the family life-cycle, with a wife who could not easily leave home everyday and one twelve-year-old earning two shillings a week, could not think of buying new clothes: "Clothes, bless you! we never have no clothes, not new--not to speak on as clothes. We thought to have something new as bread was getting cheaper, but wages came down, and we ben't better nor afore; it take all we earn to get a bit of bread . . ." Many laborers locally did raise pigs, but they did not eat many of them--they were sold to pay the rent, and maybe buy some clothing. When the trade of Poole,

Dorset was low in 1843, and its surrounding countryside was held in the grip of economic distress, its people did not come into town to buy clothes. Similarly, Somerville heard, when the potato blight wiped out the potatoes of southern and western England in 1845, and bread prices were high, with little or no increase in wages that:

"The village shopkeepers and tradesmen feel it [the potato famine], and complain that the labourers are neither paying what they owe for clothes and groceries, nor are they making new purchases."[75] So when a family or general distress hit, laborers put off buying new clothes, since bread or potatoes were more immediately important to life.

Homespun More Common in America than England before c. 1830

One conspicuous difference between the America of 1860 and that which Cobbett remembered from living there (1792-1800, 1817-1819) was how commonly farm families in the North had once made their own homespun clothing. As he observed: "I once saw about three thousand farmers, or rather country people, at a horse-race in Long Island, and my opinion was, that there were not five hundred who were not dressed in home-spun coats." This state of affairs had plainly changed by the eve of the Civil War. Olmsted had a farm on Staten Island, so he certainly had a reasonable idea of conditions

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[75]Somerville, Whistler, pp. 119, 120, 413, 414.

on Long Island, yet he commented how rare homespun was in the North, even in a more recently settled state such as Ohio, as cited above (pp. 76-77). Cobbett saw the lack of the home manufacture of clothing as a real privation for farm families, and condemned the concentration of its manufacture in the factories of the "Lords of the Loom." Noting the bad effects on keeping women employed at home, he points to the downside of the regional division of labor:

> The women and children, who ought to provide a great part of the raiment, have nothing to do. The fields must have men and boys; but, where there are men and boys there will be women and girls; and, as the Lords of the Loom have now a set of real slaves, by the means of whom they take away a great part of the employment of the country-women and girls, these must be kept by poor-rates in whatever degree they lose employment through the Lords of the Loom.

Regional specialization and the division of labor had its costs in economic displacement. Since the industrial belt in the Midlands made most of England's cloth, and tailors in London stitched many of them together, their making most of the clothes for everyone else undermined the economic independence of agricultural workers and farmers throughout England. In this case, the advantages of (normally) higher quality and less time spent on making clothes were strongly counter-balanced for rural families where their womenfolk had much less to do, causing a type of generalized and semi-hidden underemployment. The sharper regional and sexual division of labor, and general population growth pushing up the unemployment rate, which helped increasingly push women

out of fieldwork as the eighteenth century drew to the close and the nineteenth century opened, combined to increase the poverty of southern English agricultural workers. One farmer/relieving officer in Sussex remembered how in the past (c. 1794) that the poor used to make their own clothing, but that had changed by 1837.[76] By contrast, in America, with a wilderness to settle and nearly limitless farmland available, far more work was available for everyone, and women need not suffer such want, in part due to male wages or work bringing in much more income. Hence, differing national conditions led to this paradoxical result: Olmsted sees the American South's heavy dependence on homespun clothing as a sign of its poverty/economic backwardness, but Cobbett sees England's lack of it as a sign of poverty.

Special Measures Used to Buy Clothes

The rather desperate clothing situations faced by the southern English agricultural worker is perhaps best illustrated by one typical self-help measure being employed to solve it sometimes: benefit clubs. In Dorset, Caird knew of a clothing club that was set up in the area around Blandford. Similar to medical clubs and friendly societies in concept, this particular one was created to help meet the

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[76]Cobbett, Rural Rides, pp. 99-100; Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 14.

clothing needs of rural workers and their families. The workers would contribute one penny for themselves and per child per week, the employer one penny also, in equal proportion as a contribution. At the end of the year, those in the club received clothing equal in value to their account's totals. While this approach merely placed a bandage over the wound of low wages, it still encouraged laborers to exercise more self-discipline since they had to operate so necessarily carefully within low incomes to meet their most immediate needs outside food and shelter (rent). One anonymous resident rector had the program of selling "blankets, shoes, and various articles of clothing, at two-thirds of the prime cost" but only to the sober, reliable, and church-going, earlier having sold them to all in his parish. An anonymous Christian paternalist, in a pamphlet published during the Swing riots stating the laborer's case as against that of the farmer's and landlord's, calculated the cost of a "reasonable" set of men's clothes and shoes per year as £3 14s. 6d. and women's (much of it in cloth, not ready-to-wear) at £2 18s. 2d. Since the list for men included just three shirts, one pair of "trowsers," one jacket, one waistcoat, two pairs of socks, and one pair of shoes, it indicates that clothing standards must have been lower than this on average for southern rural districts in England. Including other basic items such as soap and candles, this writer noted the expenses for them "must be raised by the extra work of the labourer, by his profits in

the hay and corn harvest, by the produce of his garden, by the leasings of his family, and by the earnings, if any, of his wife and children."[77] The regular weekly earnings of farmworkers south of Caird's wage line simply generally did not cover anything outside of food and perhaps rent when the male head of household was the sole support for a large family. Special measures such as a "clothing club" or the use of harvest earnings for this vital necessity for a low level of purchases--the anonymous Christian paternalist's clothing budget's list of items being less than what many larger U.S. planters issued their slaves annually--help demonstrate what desperate clothing conditions the southern English agricultural workers endured.

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[77]Caird, English Agriculture, p. 73; Anonymous, A Country Rector's Address to His Parishioners (London: Hatchard & Son; and C.J.G. & F. Rivington; and J. Swinnerton, Macclesfield, 1830), p. 19; A Plain Statement of the Case of the Labourer; for the Consideration of the Yeomen and Gentlemen of the Southern Districts of England (London: Whittaker, Treacher, and Arnot, 1830; and Winchester: Robbins and Wheeler, 1830), p. 24; reprint ed., Kenneth E. Carpenter, ed., The Rising of the Agricultural Labourers: Nine Pamphlets and Six Broadsides 1830-1831, British Labour Struggles: Contemporary Pamphlets 1727-1850 (New York: Arno Press, New York Times Co., 1972). The latter's sample budgets, with their modicum of comfort, are found on pp. 4, 21-23. They are fairly realistic when compared to the testimony of Thomas Stuart, a Bedfordshire farm laborer, who spent fifteen shillings a year "for a pair of strong shoes to go to work in," and the sample budget said men's shoes cost thirteen shillings. However, he spent less on shoes for the rest of his family than the sample budget did, stating for his whole family in one year "stands me in 2 £ for shoe bills." See the excerpt of the Select Committee on Labourers' Wages, BPP, 1824, vol. VI, in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, p. 67.

6. SLAVE HOUSING

Variations around a Low Average Standard

The housing conditions of American slaves were normally quite bad, often consisting of crude log cabins with dirt floors. The impulse to heap indignation against these conditions should still be somewhat restrained, at least to the extent the slaves were living in frontier conditions where their master and mistress' "big house" often was only a couple steps above what their slaves endured. The housing slaves had in (say) South Carolina or Virginia in the 1800s illustrated how long settled areas treated their slaves, but this cannot be wisely extrapolated to what blacks endured when moving westward with their white owners into Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and especially Texas. Correspondingly, the slaves suffered with very crude housing when they were first taken to America *en masse* in the early 1700s, as slavery became much more common. But as time went by, at least *some* more paternalistic masters upgraded their slaves' dwellings to something more reasonable, even if still below that of most northern free workers. Hence, some antebellum defenses of slavery focused on the conditions of slaves of big planters in long-settled regions such as lowland Georgia or South Carolina, and Tidewater Virginia, where due to (by the mid-1800s) several generations of

slaves being owned by the same white family some authentic paternalism and outgoing concern may have developed between them. The planter's white sons and daughters, having played with the children of slaves when young would, when they became older and the master or mistress of the plantation themselves, have long-standing personal relationships with at least some of their bondsmen.[78] These relationships simply did not exist when earlier colonialists imported newly enslaved Africans direct from west Africa. This situation was inapplicable to non-hereditary slaveowners on the make on the frontier, where housing conditions were going to be worse anyway. Hence, variations in slave housing partly correspond to how long a given area of the South had been settled, and how paternalistically inclined the slaveowners were, which also was tied to how long they and their ancestors had lived in one area with the same slave families over the generations.

Overwhelming evidence points to slave quarters normally consisting of "houses" little better than the barns and sheds many animals occupied during winter in the North or in England. One room was all many, perhaps most, slaves had, with perhaps a loft for the children to sleep in, such as where former slave Charley Williams lived in Louisiana. As freedwoman Harriet Payne commented: "Everything happened in

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[78]cf. Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:236.

that one room--birth, sickness, death and everything."[79] Repeatedly, slaves often lived in log cabins where they could see through the chinks between the logs, and dirt floors were standard.[80] Henderson, who escaped from slavery near Washington, D.C., described housing conditions thus: "Our houses were but log huts--the tops partly open--ground floor,--rain would come through. . . . in rains I have seen her [his old aunt] moving about from one part of the house to the other, and rolling her bedclothes about to try to keep dry,--every thing would be dirty and muddy." Booker T. Washington recalled that as a child he was born and lived "a typical log cabin, about fourteen by sixteen feet square," which had no glass windows, a dirt floor, a door that barely clung to its hinges, and numerous significant holes in the walls. And this cabin also was where the plantation's cooking was done, for both whites and blacks, since his mother was the cook! Olmsted in South Carolina's high country noted conditions worse than what animals in the

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[79]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 112, 147.

[80]Jenny Proctor of Alabama remembered as a little girl some cracks were chinked up and some were not. Marion Johnson, who had been a slave in Louisiana, could count the stars through the cracks in his mother's cabin. Millie Evans of North Carolina recalled that "nice dirt floors was the style then." In a quarters of twelve cabins she regarded as good in quality, Rose Williams of Texas commented, showing the master could not have been especially neglectful: "There am no floor, just the ground." Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 62, 89, 139, 161. Solomon Northrup described his cabin as being built of logs, without window or floor, with large crevices letting in the necessary light and unnecessary rain! Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 128.

north endured:

> The negro-cabins, here, were the smallest I had seen--I thought not more than twelve feet square, inside. . . . They were built of logs, with no windows--no opening at all, except the doorway, with a chimney of stick and mud; with no trees about the, no porches, or shades, of any kind. Except for the chimney . . . . I should have conjectured that it had been built for a powder-house, or perhaps an ice-house--never for an animal to sleep in.

Providing scant comfort to the slaves, the local poor whites' homes were "mere square pens of logs" of little better quality.[81]

While in Virginia, Olmsted passed larger plantations that had "perhaps, a dozen rude-looking little log-cabins scattered around them [the planters' homes], for the slaves." In Louisiana he saw a creole-owned plantation where "the cabins of the negroes upon which were wretched hovels--small, without windows, and dilapidated." In the frontier conditions of Texas, he described one planter's slave quarters as being

> of the worst description, though as good as local custom requires. They are but a rough inclosure of logs, ten feet square, without windows, covered by slabs of hewn wood four feet long. The great chinks are stopped with whatever has comes to hand--a wad of cotton here, and a corn-shuck there.

They provided little protection against the cold. Kemble

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[81]Drew, Refugee, p. 155. Kemble found similar conditions at St. Annies, in which the rain was not kept out of the bondsmen's homes. Journal, p. 239; Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery (1901; reprint ed., New York: Airmount Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 15-16; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:207.

thought she had found the worst slave accommodations by far at the Hampton estate on St. Annie's in Georgia, but later found far worse ones nearby: "The negro huts on several of the plantations that we passed through were the most miserable habitations I ever beheld. . . . [They were] dirty, desolate, dilapidated dog-kennels." One master "provided" the worst housing of all for his slaves--none! He had moved himself and his slaves to Texas after getting into trouble with the law in Georgia, as aged freedman Ben Simpson remembered: "We never had no quarters. When nighttime come, he locks the chain around our necks and then locks it round a tree. Boss, our bed were the ground."[82] These examples illustrate that slave housing was generally crude, below what most whites in the contemporaneous North would have found tolerable, even if they lived in more recently settled states such as Illinois or Wisconsin.

Cases of Good Slave Housing

Sometimes a higher standard of slave housing prevailed on some plantations. One particularly impressive case, pointed out as such earlier by Olmsted, was a certain rice plantation not too far from Savannah, Georgia:

> Each cabin was a framed building, the walls boarded and whitewashed on the outside, lathed and plastered within, the roof shingled; forty-two

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[82]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:38, 340, 373; Kemble, Journal, p. 242; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 75.

> feet long, twenty-one feet wide, divided into two family tenements, each twenty-one by twenty-one; each tenement divided into three rooms.

They had doors that could be locked, and each room had a window with a wooden shutter to close it, as well as a loft. Only five people on average lived in each of these homes, and they were provided with an "allotment" (to use English terminology) of a half-acre garden as well as an area that served as a combination coop and sty for pregnant sows. Orland Armstrong, an interviewer seeking nostalgic reminiscences from freedmen, drew attention to this higher standard when visiting the ruins of an old plantation: "Some of the old cabins are only heaps of debris, while others are better preserved. They were built of brick, in the substantial manner of many of the fine old South Carolina plantation servant [slave] houses." A good, but somewhat lower standard than these was found by Olmsted on a farm in Virginia where he found

> well-made and comfortable log cabins, about thirty feet long by twenty wide, and eight feet wall, with a high loft and shingle roof. Each divided in the middle, and having a brick chimney outside the wall at either end, was intended to be occupied by two families.

They even had windows with glass in the center, an unlikely sight on the frontier for anyone's dwelling, but unsurprising in a long-settled country. Housing that reflected frontier conditions--"log huts" many of the slaves lived in--began to be replaced by "neat boarded cottages," reflecting a more settled life, on four large adjacent

plantations on a "tributary of the Mississippi." However, while whites would look upon the frontier as a means of getting ahead in exchange for the privations of living in the wilderness, for slaves it would merely mean having to endure more work and less comfort, especially in housing, without getting anything more than they would have had to begin with had they stayed back east toiling on some large planter's estate. Although exceptional conditions such as these existed for some slaves, they were hardly representative for most of those living in the interior of the South, away from the lowland coastal areas of Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina, where it was much more likely the slaves inhabited a house where they could count the stars through the cracks, as Marion Johnson did, in "the usual comfortless log-huts" (Olmsted) than in a three-room wood frame duplex.[83]

Was Poor White Housing Little Better than the Slaves'?

Perhaps the best indication that slave housing was not all its apologists might have claimed was the crude housing for many whites in the South. Even the master's home might not be all that impressive, especially on the frontier, especially when he was a small slaveholder. Kemble visited

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[83]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:52, 237-38; 2:166, 193, 195; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 57; Marion Johnson's testimony in Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 139.

her neighboring mistress's home on a sea island of Georgia, saying it was much worse than that of farmhouses in the North: "To be sure, I will say, in excuse for their old mistress, her own habitation was but a very few degrees less ruinous and disgusting [than her slaves' homes]. What would one of your Yankee farmers say to such abodes?" Similarly, seeing through her Englishwoman's eyes while visiting a mistress's home in a nearby village in Georgia, although noting the homes may have signs of a former splendor or elegance, she observed: "As for the residence of this princess, it was like all the planters' residences that I have seen, and such as a well-to-do English farmer would certainly not inhabit." This condemnation is particularly noteworthy, considering she was living in a long-settled region of the South. Olmsted stayed overnight in one old settler's home in Texas. It was a room fourteen feet square, where "it was open to the rafters," and the sky could be seen between the shingles. He actually spent the night in a lean-to between two doors, keeping on all his clothes in the winter weather. He, while in Mississippi, deliberately decided to spend a night in a poor white's cabin seen as typical from all the other ones he had passed that day. Since this family had a horse and wagon, and a fair amount of cotton planted, but owned no slaves, they were likely a bit above average for poor whites. It was twenty-eight by twenty-five feet, made of logs, open to the roof, possessed a door on each of its four sides, had a

large fireplace on one side--and no windows. In northern Alabama, an area populated by more whites than blacks, most of the houses he passed were "rude log huts, of only one room, and that unwholesomely crowded. I saw in and about one of them, not more than fifteen feet square, five grown persons, and as many children." The conditions whites in the South experienced are significant, since their standard of housing serves as a type of ceiling on what the enslaved blacks could normally expect at best. Such bad housing conditions (admittedly, in part a function of a frontier environment) for many whites indicates the bondsmen should not be expected to have much better, and normally they would have had something much worse.[84]

Fogel and Engerman's Optimistic View of Slave Housing

Fogel and Engerman view rather optimistically the average slave house. They say it was eighteen by twenty feet, had one or two rooms, likely had a loft for children to sleep in, was built of logs or wood, the floors being "usually planked and raised off the ground." They considerably exaggerate the size of the slaves' homes, since the free white rural population often did not live in something that large, or much larger. The travelers'

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[84]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:360, 373-74; 2:44-45 (generally), 2:4-5 (Texas), 2:105-106 (Mississippi), 2:112 (Alabama); Kemble, Journal, p. 116, 248; see also Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 532-34.

accounts that do mention the specific size of the slaves' cabins do not give a figure this high often. Sutch, after scrounging through various travelers' accounts, secondary sources, etc. properly maintains fifteen by fifteen feet was typical, with sixteen by eighteen "an occasionally achieved ideal size." What Kemble encountered at her husband's rice island estate was the best of the housing conditions she noted of her spouse's two estates. They were better than other places she visited or knew of locally. Nevertheless, she described appalling conditions of crowding, while naming a specific size as well:

> These cabins consist of one room, about twelve feet by fifteen, with a couple of closets smaller and closer than the state-rooms of a ship, divided off from the main room and each other by rough wooden partitions, in which the inhabitants sleep. . . . Two families (sometimes eight and ten in number) reside in one of these huts, which are mere wooden frames pinned, as it were, to the earth by a [huge] brick chimney outside.

Bassett describes a situation, on the new Polk estate in Mississippi, of eighteen men, ten women, seven children, and two evidently half-grown boys, thirty-seven in all, crowded into four rough-hewn houses, built in a mere eighteen days. "The trivial character of the buildings on the plantation is shown in the fact that a few years later, 1840, all these buildings were abandoned and others built in what was considered a more healthy location." Olmsted remarked about seeing slave houses twelve by twelve in South Carolina, and ten by ten in Texas (p. 95). Genovese maintains, based on his sources, contrary to Fogel and Engerman above, that

slaveholders even into the 1850s usually did not "provide plank floors or raised homes . . . although more and more were doing so." Blassingame states that most of the slave autobiographers said they lived in crude one-room cabins with dirt floors and lots of cracks in the walls that allowed winter weather to come in. Stampp, while admitting the existence of some with higher standards, nevertheless maintained: "The common run of slave cabins were cramped, crudely built, scantily furnished, unpainted and dirty." Those that fell beneath this "average" were "plentiful" as well.[85] Fogel and Engerman clearly are excessively optimistic about the slaves' housing conditions.

Genovese's Overly Optimistic Analysis of Slave Housing

Rather like Fogel and Engerman, Genovese places an overly optimistic spin on slave housing relative to the rest of the world:

> Their [the slaveholders'] satisfaction [with their slaves' housing] rested on the thought that most of the world's peasants and workers lived in dirty, dark, overcrowded dwellings and that, by comparison, their slaves lived decently. . . . During the nineteenth century such perceptive travelers as Basil Hall, Harriet Martineau, James Stirling, and Sir Charles Lyell thought the slaves

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[85]Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:116; Sutch in David, Reckoning, p. 294; Kemble, Journal, p. 30. The housing comparisons with the sea-island cotton estate, etc. are on pp. 178-79, 187, 234, 236, 242; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 262; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 525; Blassingame, Slave Community, p. 254; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, pp. 294-95.

> at least as well housed as the English and Scottish poor, and Olmsted thought the slaves on the large plantations as well situated as the workmen of New England. . . . Even Fanny Kemble thought conditions no worse than among the European poor. . . . The laboring poor of France, England, and even the urban Northeast of the United States . . . lived in crowded hovels little better and often worse than the slave quarters.

While such a point has merit relative to the conditions of the southern English farm laborers, or those of the Eurasian masses, peasants and artisans, it bypasses how compared to most American free laborers, most slaves were worse off materially. The conditions of blacks in the United States, if they had not been slaves or discriminated against, would have been higher than that of most of the world since the United States was largely a vast wilderness full of raw natural resources waiting to be exploited by (then) modern technology. Such conditions made for an intrinsically higher standard of living compared to (say) England, suffering from the Malthusian effects of rapid population growth. Furthermore, as Sutch's reply to Fogel and Engerman over the quality of housing in the North generally demonstrates, and even in New York's slums in the depression year of 1893, Genovese is too pessimistic about Northeastern urban housing standards.[86]

Genovese also reads too much into Olmsted and Kemble here. Olmsted was not making a general point about all slaves who lived on big plantations having housing as good

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[86]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 526; Richard Sutch in David, et al., Reckoning, pp. 292-98.

as that of New England workers when he said about a sugar plantation in Louisiana: "The negro houses were exactly like those I described on the Georgia rice plantation [quoted above, pp. 96-97], except that they were provided with broad galleries in front. They were as neat and well-made externally as the cottages usually provided by large manufacturing companies in New England, to be rented to their workmen." Such conditions, even on larger plantations, were hardly automatic, as Kemble's Journal shows concerning her husband's estates and those around them. On the page Genovese cites of Kemble, she was describing sanitary conditions, and rebutting the (racist) contention that the smell of blacks and their quarters was intrinsic to their race rather than due to their ignorance of proper habits of cleanliness and poverty. She was not discussing so much the intrinsic size or construction of the house in question, but how the peculiar institution created "dirty houses, ragged clothes, and foul smells." After making a comparison between the smell of slaves and with a "low Irishman or woman," perhaps some displaying class or national bias in the process, maintaining both resulted from "the same causes," she said:

> The stench in an Irish, Scotch, Italian, or French hovel are quite as intolerable as any I ever found in our negro houses, and the filth and vermin which abound about the clothes and persons of the lower peasantry of any of those countries as abominable as the same conditions in the black population of the United States.

That she saw the difference between cleanliness and the intrinsic quality of building construction is shown by her "exhorting them to spend labor in cleaning and making [their homes] tidy, [yet admitting she] can not promise them that they shall be repaired and made habitable for them." She also felt the difference between what homes slave servants lived in and their master's house to be much greater than what existed between what a free white servant lived in and where he or she worked: "In all establishments whatever, of course some disparity exists between the accommodation of the drawing-rooms and best bedrooms and the servants' kitchen and attics; but on a plantation it is no longer a matter of degree." Focusing on their lack of furnishings in particular, she said the slave servants

> had neither table to feed at nor chair to sit down upon themselves; the 'boys' lay all night on the hearth by the kitchen fire, and the women upon the usual slave's bed--a frame of rough boards, strewed with a little moss of trees, with the addition of a tattered and filthy blanket.[87]

In light of the above, Genovese appears too optimistic in his reconstruction of how good slave housing was relative to many free workers, at least concerning his citations of Kemble and Olmsted.

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[87]Frederick Law Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-1854 with Remarks on Their Economy (New York, 1856; reprint ed., New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 2:317. Genovese's reference to pp. 659-60 is to the 1856 edition. Also see Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:320; Kemble, Journal, pp. 24, 134-315, 234; cf. pp. 66-67.

The Moral Hazards of Crowded, One-Room Slave Houses

Often living in one-room cabins or shacks had negative effects on slave family life in the realm of sexual morality, unless the slaves took special precautions. In language reminiscent of the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture in England that described the hazards of promiscuously mixing the sexes of different ages together (see pp. 115-17 below), Olmsted cites similar Victorian reasoning on sexual matters by a Presbyterian minister and professor of theology about slaves. The basic problem here, although it was not normally put so bluntly, was how to shield the children from the sights and sounds of parental love-making and the consequent negative moral effects. With such limited space, with often just one room and a loft to place the children, these concerns were legitimate, but often ignored by slaveowners in a quest to reduce expenses on housing. Slave fathers and mothers themselves found solutions to this problem, even under such wretched housing conditions. Some hanged up clothes or quilts to create privacy, while others used scrap wood for the same purpose of subdividing what was a one-room home into something closer to two. A few resourceful slave parents even made special trundle beds to ensure at least some sexual privacy. According to Genovese, these measures had at least some

success.[88] The poor housing masters and mistresses provided to their slaves clearly was not calculated to promote the Victorian ideals of sexual morality they nominally upheld, at least by profession if not necessarily by deed.

Slave Housing--Sanitation and Cleanliness

A related but separate consideration for housing quality concerns cleanliness and how much the principles of sanitation were applied to where the slaves lived. It is quite possible to have a relatively spacious or well-built home, at least for its time and place, yet have terrible standards of cleanliness. Further, this aspect of housing quality more clearly, at least in rural areas, burdens the occupants of the housing in question, instead of its owners. In other words, it is not the duty of the master to enforce good housekeeping practices among his bondsmen, at least after setting some basic guidelines to help them keep themselves (i.e., his property) from getting sick. The slaves are the ones who have to clean up after themselves in the quarters, not the master or mistress. Kemble described how two old slaves lived in which lacked "every decency and every comfort," but then visited the home of others, some of their younger relatives, which was "as tidy and comfortable

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[88]Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 2:218; Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Our Mothers' Grief: Racial Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families," Journal of Family History, 13 (1988):420; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 462-63.

as it could be made." Such a contrast under the same master demonstrates some level of responsibility falls on the slaves themselves. But considering the limited amounts of time slaves could wring out of their typical week due to working for their masters often six days a week sunup to sundown, little time remained for housecleaning anyway due to intrinsic burdens of bondage. Since the master class did not believe in the ideology of "separate spheres" when applied to field hands, housekeeping was inevitably going to suffer when members of both sexes were driven out into the fields to work. So the scene Kemble describes was likely fairly typical in the quarters:

> Instead of the order, neatness, and ingenuity which might convert even these miserable hovels into tolerable residences, there was the careless, reckless, filthy indolence which even the brutes do not exhibit in their lairs and nests, and which seemed incapable of applying to the uses of existence the few miserable means of comfort yet within their reach. Firewood and shavings lay littered about the floors, while the half-naked children were cowering round two or three smouldering cinders. The moss with which the chinks and crannies of their ill-protecting dwellings might have been stuffed was trailing in the dirty and dust about the ground, while the back door of the huts . . . was left wide open for the fowls and ducks, which they are allowed to raise, to travel in and out, increasing the filth of the cabin by what they brought and left in every direction.

Kemble herself knew these appalling conditions were a function of sheer ignorance and lack of education--presumably, the master or mistress's job--not just the slaves' fault. The latter, having been born and raised in this environment, could not be expected to

necessarily know better. She knew this since she mentioned how the some slaves would be so dirty and smelly she did not like to be attended by them at meals, saying it was due to "ignorance of the laws of health and the habits decent cleanliness" and nothing intrinsic to the black race.[89] Another pest slave housekeeping faced is suggested (though not fully proved) by an archeological discovery at Monticello: Rodent gnaw marks on the bones were left where slaves had lived in or around, especially in the root cellar of one of their homes. Now some masters did care about improving conditions of sanitation. For example, planter Bennet Barrow inspected his slaves' quarters, finding them "generally in good order" while reproving some of his slaves as "the most careless negros I have." He even once gave them an evening to "scoure up their Houses" and "clean up the Quarter &c." Some slaves themselves, at least by their own standards (as opposed to the higher ones of a middle class observer such as Kemble) kept their homes fairly clean.[90] Nevertheless, such concern by bondsmen or masters

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[89]Kemble, Journal, p. 23, 24, 30-31, 213. Interestingly, Kemble's work features not only an almost complete lack of racism, but a nearly continual rebuttal against it, which was surely rare for whites living in America. Perhaps it was in part due to her being an Englishwoman, for Jacobs experienced no racism in England, unlike in the North: "During all that time [ten months in England], I never saw the slightest symptom of prejudice against color." Incidents, p. 190; compare pp. 180-82.

[90]Crader, "Slave Diet," pp. 694, 713; Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 153, 190. See also Stampp, Peculiar Institution, p. 311; Note Harriett Payne's comments, Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 147.

should not be seen as usual, although Fogel and Engerman like to think it was.[91] Most slave dwellings, for good reasons, were not especially neat or orderly places.[92] While the bondsmen did have some responsibility for the bad conditions within their homes, still the state of ignorance they were left in by largely indifferent masters on such issues, the lack of time caused by a long workweek for both sexes, as well as flaws in building construction that let the elements in, were mainly responsible for the unkempt, even filthy, conditions of their homes.

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[91]As Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:121 note: "Few matters were more frequently emphasized in the instructions to overseers than the need to insure not only the personal cleanliness of slaves but also the cleanliness of their clothes, their bedding, and their cabins." Since such instructions were likely those written by the owners of the largest and best-established plantations, naturally any paternalistic impulses on hygiene would show up disproportionately in whatever records Fogel and Engerman examined. Nevertheless, as Kemble's husband's two plantations demonstrate, even large, long-established plantations could be very ill-kept places populated with ill-washed slaves.

[92]Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 528.

7. FARMWORKER HOUSING

What Was the Quality of Farmworkers' Housing?

In England, the economic dynamics of building housing for farmworkers were very different from America's for constructing slave quarters. Due to the poor law, both old and new, the (major) ratepayers of a parish had a financial incentive to avoid building new cottages in their parishes, and to pull down those already extant. By reducing the number of people eligible for relief, they could lower their taxes.[93] Ideally, the "powers that be" in a given parish would wish to have no more people living in a parish than could be employed year around, and thus consistently kept off the dole. They would strive to reduce the number of people who could claim a settlement, in "their" parish.[94] Since the poor could have a settlement in only one parish at a time, and they could only claim relief from the parish which they had a settlement in (under the Elizabethan poor law), given the ratepayers' incentives to lower the rates, those with sufficient power could combine to keep out new migrants to their parish. "Closed parishes" were those in which ratepayers, normally the gentry and (large) farmers

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[93]David Hoseason Morgan, Harvesters and Harvesting 1840-1900: A Study of the Rural Proletariat (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 184-85.

[94]Caird, English Agriculture, p. 95.

who rented from them, were few enough in number that they could operate as a cartel that kept out all newcomers without a settlement in their parish.[95] When the number of ratepayers was so large and/or unequal in income that they could not conspire to keep out the poor without settlements in their community, an "open parish" resulted. Under the settlement laws, a new migrant to another parish could be "deported" (removed) to the parish of his of origin (where he did have a settlement legally) when he became chargeable to his new parish.[96] Consequently, the ratepayers of open parishes, which included the better-off artisans, professionals, and tradesmen, paid through the rates poor relief for the seasonally discharged/underemployed work force who worked in nearby closed parishes for at least part of the year, especially during the summer.[97] Clearly, the local elite's machinations to lower their taxes under the poor law (old and new) had a major impact on the availability and quality of housing for the laborers.

Undeniably, the English farmworkers faced some mighty

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[95]Ibid., pp. 75-76. See also Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxv.

[96]Under the settlement law of 1662, a newly-arrived worker to one parish could be forcibly removed to his parish of origin/settlement if he was likely to become chargeable (i.e., take relief) within 40 days of arrival, at the expense of the parish of settlement. In 1795, this process was changed to prohibit eviction of the poor until they were actually chargeable to the parish, and the expense of removal was changed to the parish ordering the eviction. See Deane, First Industrial Revolution, p. 153.

[97]Cf. Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 75-76.

miserable conditions in housing. Their conditions were less excusable than the poor level of housing the slaves faced: England was hardly a newly-settled land, unlike the harsh frontier conditions many slaves and their masters faced. Rule, while recognizing how poor much of English rural housing was, nevertheless stated that: "Housing is as much a matter of existing stock as of production." On the other hand, much of England, especially in the southern arable counties, faced serious wood shortages for building, or even cooking, which explained some of the problems faced by the poor. Arch contrasted his father's fortunate situation, who actually owned the home his family lived in, with conditions commonly found elsewhere in England:

> In one English county after another I saw men living with their families--if living it could be called--in cottages which, if bigger, were hardly better than the sty they kept their pigs in, when they were lucky enough to have a young porker fattening on the premises.

As the farmworkers' union developed, he described their housing thus: "The cottage accommodation was a disgrace to civilisation; and this, not only in Somersetshire, but all over the country. As many as thirteen people would sleep all huddled up together in one small cottage bedroom." Somerville noted that in most counties, "the meanest hovels are rented as high" as two pounds ten shillings per year, while in Dorset "the worst of houses" the landlords charged "the poorest of labourers" three and four pounds a year without any garden ground. Emma Thompson in 1910 recalled

how life was in Bedfordshire some 80 years earlier: "I well remember three families living in one house and two families, and only one fire place. When I was first married I had one room to live in." In a two-room house, including the loft, she had ten children, seven surviving into adulthood. It was noted in 1797 that some cottages were so bad they let in the bad weather--a situation certainly familiar to many American slaves. Mark Crabtree, examined by the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act (1838), maintained that one cottage he saw was fairly typical of the laborers' homes: It had a dirt floor, half of a window's diamond squares of glass missing, and an outside wall that had nearly fallen down. Somerville, while observing specifically of his native area in southern Scotland, still was generalizing to general British conditions when he found it noteworthy that some new cottages were built of stone and plastered inside, "with a boarding over-head, instead of the bare roof, which is so common."[98] Clearly, England's farmworkers and American slaves faced many of the same housing conditions.

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[98]Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 76; Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 44, 127. He cites the 1867-68 Parliamentary Commission on conditions in agriculture to buttress his views. Admittedly, as a union leader, he had an incentive to exaggerate how common bad conditions were; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 172, 380; See the testimony of Emma Thompson and Mark Crabtree in Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 90-91, 127; Parliamentary History, February 12, 1797, as cited in the Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. iv.

Poor Housing Leads to Sexual Immorality?

Conditions were tight enough in space that Anglican clerics feared the poor would be (literally) de-moralized concerning sexual standards of conduct. Overcrowding became a significant problem, due to increased population growth coming from, among other factors, the decline of service lowering marriage ages, and the pulling down of cottages to reduce poor law taxes as the first half of the nineteenth century passed, as Rule noted. One vicar, for Terrington in Norfolk, said most of his parish's cottages had two or three rooms. Often in the latter case, one of the three rooms would be let to a lodger, thus squeezing the family into the remaining two rooms. Some had only one room to live in, with the vicar particularly describing one case of a father, mother, three sons, and a grown-up daughter dwelling in such a home. He commented: "I fear that much immorality, and certainly much want of a sense of decency among the agricultural labouring classes, are owing to the nature of their homes, and the want of proper room."[99] Somerville maintained that in the general neighborhood of Farnham, Surrey and Maidstone, Kent, where the hop harvesting season in September brought in hordes of temporary migrant workers,

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[99]Rule, Labouring Classes, pp. 78-81; The Vicar of Terrington as quoted in John Patrick, "Agricultural Gangs," History Today, March 1986, p. 24. Similar concerns also were voiced in Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, pp. 24-25. Caird incidently noted this problem. English Agriculture, p. 516.

the housing situation was bad even before the temporary workers showed up. The migrants simply made the existing crowding only worse, with a low priority placed on segregating the sexes. "The undivided state of the larger families acting upon the scantiness of house room and general poverty, or high rents, often crowds them together in their sleeping apartments, so as seriously to infringe on the decencies which guard female morals." Hart, a professional gentleman of Reigate, was appalled that brothers and sisters lived in the same room until they moved out as teenagers or adults. Beating this low point was not difficult: Commonly in Cuckfield, Sussex the children of both genders slept not merely in the same room, but the same bed. Clergyman W. Sankie of Farnham knew a case where two sisters and a brother, all over fourteen, routinely slept together in the same bed. Facing general housing situations like these, the laboring classes understandably never acquired "that delicacy and purity of mind which is the origin and the safeguard of chastity." Certainly similar concerns were also voiced about crowding the slaves into crude one-bedroom shacks, but since they were generally regarded as inferior beings more driven by animalistic desires, masters and mistresses in the U.S. South more easily rationalized poor housing conditions. The English upper and middle classes often just simply ignored the negative conditions and the correspondingly degraded character of the English agricultural workers. Olmsted

writes of encountering a "most intelligent and distinguished Radical" who replied to him concerning their situation: "We are not used to regard that class in forming a judgment of national character."[100] Two surveys, one in 1842 and another in 1864 of 224 cottages in Durham and Northumberland, found most had just one room. Hence, while one part of the elite and middle class (justifiably) moralizes about the effects of bad, crowded housing, another determinedly ignores the need to improve such conditions altogether to save money, or to find ways to keep the poor permanently dependent on them.[101]

An Artist's Eye Can Be Self-Deceiving When Evaluating Cottage Quality

As Rule noted, the physical appearance of farmworkers' cottages can be deceiving because they may appear picturesque to the eye, especially to an urban dweller's, but still be unhealthy or unpleasant to live in. Arch stated that laborers' cottages with "their outside trimmings of ivy and climbing roses, were garnished without, but they

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[100]Somerville, Whistler, p. 271; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 239. Similarly, Somerville denied a certain Mr. Bennet's statement that England was "highly civilized" if he included the laborers, especially with them no longer eating and living much in the farmers' own homes. Whistler, p. 147.

[101]Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 81; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 239 mentions a minister who maintained society intentionally and permanently should always have one part dependent on the charity of another part.

were undrained and unclean within." Olmsted, stopping to sketch a farmhouse he encountered near Chester, thinking the cottages nearby were "very pretty to look at," noted that all the houses in the hamlet he was visiting were built similarly to what he was drawing: timber, whitewashed walls, and thatch roofs. (I do not recall him doing this for any slave dwelling!) The farmer living in this house described the cottages nearby

> as exceedingly uncomfortable and unhealthy--the floors, which were of clay, being generally lower than the road and the surrounding land, and often wet, and always damp, while the roofs and walls were old and leaky, and full of vermin.

The walls were made of layers of twigs and mud. Thatched roofs had the advantage of being cheaper than slate or tiles, of giving more protection against the heat and cold, and of being more picturesque, but were more apt to catch fire (it was feared) and they bred vermin. Olmsted maintained laborers' cottages had walls normally made of stone, brick and timber, or of clay mixed with straw, the latter being very common. This last method could make for walls of high quality, and was even used for villas and parsonages.[102] But the homes of laborers often were ill-maintained, and became much worse than the local elite's, even if the same quality of construction had been put into their walls, roofs, etc.

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[102]Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 78; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 44; Olmsted, Walks and Talks, pp. 76, 208-10.

Again, laborers in southern England was significantly worse off than in northern England, with the evident exception of Northumberland. Arch described southern English housing above. The commissioners on the conditions in agriculture in 1867-68 noted that cottages in Yorkshire were in much better shape than in the southern counties. They were more comfortable, and often had gardens attached to them or allotments, even "cow gates" for pasturing the family's female bovine. Still, bad housing conditions could be found in the north. Somerville, after saying Dorset had the worst houses and the poorest laborers, corrected himself some--in Northumberland "the houses were worse than ever they have been in Dorsetshire"--which means they had to be pretty awful! Caird found in well-off Northumberland that some laborers still lived with their cows and other animals. The animals even went out the same door as the humans! The cowhouse was "divided only by a slight partition wall from the single apartment which serves for kitchen, living and sleeping room, for all the inmates." Admittedly, he also found a newly built village where all cottages were of two or four rooms each, with gardens attached, with access to a cowhouse and pasture.[103] So even in an area well-known for having good material conditions for its laborers, the

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[103]Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxv; Somerville, Whistler, p. 380; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 389.

cottages constituted the most neglected aspect of laborers' material well-being.

How Rentals and the Poor and Settlement Laws Made for Bad Housing

Necessarily "freeborn Englishmen" got housing differently than American slaves. For the slaves, it was automatically provided to them by their masters, although they likely would have built under their owners' direction what they dwelled in. For the agricultural laborers, if they were not unmarried men and women living as farm servants in housing their master (the farmer) provided them, they had to rent it. (Very few could hope to aspire to home ownership). Due to the decline of service, especially in the southern arable districts as the eighteenth century waned and the nineteenth waxed, an increasing number of farmworkers had to find and pay for their own housing. Matters were not helped by rents rising in the period from about c. 1790 to 1837, at least in the memory of one farmer/relief officer in Sussex. While this gave them a freedom the slaves almost totally missed, to choose where they lived, laborers still suffered from many serious practical restraints in their choice of housing besides financial ones. Because the larger farmers and gentry of a closed parish had a vested self-interest in reducing the number of potential claimants for poor relief, they would

intentionally neglect or even tear down cottages for laborers not absolutely necessary for their operations. As was told to the Parliamentary Commissioners for the 1867-68 Report: "He [the landlord] does not care if they all tumble down." Intentional neglect also occurred due to the inability of laborers to pay the rents to begin with, which made landlord's business in renting cottages simply unprofitable. One owner of several cottages informed the Rector of Petworth, who told the Parliamentary Committee the economic dynamics involved: "If cottages brought no rent, the owners of them would not repair them, and they would by degrees take them away." The tenants found they, with their likely meager carpentry skills and inferior materials, had to make the repairs on "their" dwelling, not the landlord owning it. Other legal hurdles impeded attempts to improve laborers' cottages. In comments recorded by Somerville, Charles Baring Wall, M.P. for Guildford, Hampshire, found landowners really had no power over cottages held on life-holds. He had to wait until they fell in, giving him the "opportunity of 'doing what he like with his own,' . . . to improve the cottages upon them."[104] The laws of England, between the Poor Law, the settlement laws, and sometimes

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[104]Edward Butt remembered before the French Revolution that cottages went for 40-50s./year. Two guineas for a cottage with a garden was common. Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 8; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xxv; For the cottage-owner's comments, see Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 14; Somerville, Whistler, p. 416.

even those concerning tenure, created major incentives for the owners of laborers' cottages to neglect them.

The ultimate reason for landlords not maintaining their cottages well, beyond the customary tendency of rental housing to be ill-maintained (something many contemporary college students can identify with!), was the combination of the settlement and poor laws. The latter created an interest in ratepayers to try to minimize and eliminate the amount of poor relief paid, while the former encouraged them to drive the poor out of one given parish so that the legal claims that their settlements created would financially burden some other parish. As a result, the "freeborn Englishman" lacked the liberty often to choose the parish he would settle in, because the rich of many parishes would declare him potentially (or, after 1795, when) chargeable to the parish, and remove him (and his family) to his parish of origin. One of the surprisingly similar features of the lives of both American slaves and English agriculture workers were restrictions on freedom of movement, for although these were far more stringent on the former, the latter suffered more in this regard than is commonly realized.

The Problem of Cottages Being Distant from Work

Many agricultural workers endured one problem most slaves did not: long walks to work. Due to many being

driven out of closed parishes into open parishes so the landlords and large tenant farmers could lower their taxes, many had to rent accommodations that were uncomfortably far from the farms they labored at. Caird noted one farm owned by the Duke of Grafton in Suffolk where two regularly employed laborers walked four and a half miles one way from Thetford, making for nine miles a day, fifty-four a week. In Lincolnshire, he uncovered cases where farmers lent their men donkeys to ride on since walking six or seven miles one way was too exhausting! The commissioners of the 1867-68 Report on Employment in Agriculture found cottages were often built too far from where the laborers worked, even in Yorkshire where better conditions normally prevailed. These long distances laid the foundations for the infamous gang system, which mainly operated in the swampy clay soil fens districts of the Eastern Midlands and East Anglia. Under this system, a gang master would gather together groups of workers, especially children, to work on some farm a considerable distance from where they lived. If the laborers in question had been farm servants, living with their masters (the farmers), or lived in cottages on or nearby the farms they worked at, such measures never would have been necessary. Living so far from work, which was largely the product of the poor and settlement laws creating the close and open parish system, imposed heavy burdens on the laborers. As Caird observed:

> It is the commonest thing possible to find agricultural labourers lodged at such a distance from their regular place of employment that they have to walk an hour out in the morning, and an hour home in the evening,--from forty to fifty miles a week. . . . Two hours a day is a sixth part of a man's daily labour, and this enormous tax he is compelled to pay in labour, which is his only capital.[105]

So while the slaves had to endure long walks to visit family members, including husbands and wives "living 'broad," the English agricultural workers had to abide lengthy walks to arrive at work. The subordinate class in both cases had to go a distance to do something their betters normally could have at close proximity.

The Aristocracy's Paternalism in Providing Housing, and Its Limits

As the nineteenth century passed its midpoint, a noticeable number of large landowners made moves toward improving cottages on their lands, even if bad conditions still generally prevailed elsewhere. Here paternalism actually took on some practical reality in the hands of some English aristocrats. They surely knew they were not going to receive a good return on investment through the rent the laborers paid for the new cottages they occupied. The laborers had serious trouble in being able to pay more than one shilling six pence to two shillings a week, if their

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[105]Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 161, 197, 516; Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, pp. xvi, xxv, xliv.

wages were nine shillings or fourteen per week. Routinely, indeed, the paupers in the parish of Petworth in Sussex had at least some of their rent paid by the parish, although this practice ceased under the New Poor Law. A semi-reasonable maximum was two shillings six pence to two shillings nine pence a week, although in Surrey rents could range up to three shillings and three shillings six pence. They could only pay (say) one-seventh of their income in rent, and often even that made for a major struggle. If they paid two shillings a week, that added up to an annual rent of five pounds four shillings. If a cottage cost roughly £100 to £140 to build, depending on local building materials and supplies, this would make for a return on investment of only about 4.5 percent annually, ignoring all repair costs based on an average building cost of £120. Some let them at 2.5 percent a year, but this involves self-sacrifice. For so long as farmworkers' wages were low, and the rent they could pay was correspondingly depressed, this discouraged building further cottages from a strict profitability viewpoint, totally ignoring the poor law's negative incentives on construction/maintenance of cottages itself.[106]

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[106]Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, pp. xi, xv (improving cottage quality), lv (profitability problem); Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 14; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 125;

Despite the incentives against building cottages, a number of aristocrats took the lead in improving rural housing conditions. This was unlike many small tradesmen, artisans, and speculators who built cottages in open parishes and charged excessively high rents because closed parishes denied sufficient housing for all the laborers they needed year around. With farmworkers being driven into these tradesmen's areas, they drove up the demand for (and costs of) housing. Self-sacrificing aristocrats in this area included the Duke of Wellington in Berkshire, who rebuilt or improved his laborers' cottages, giving each about a quarter acre for a garden. He charged a mere one shilling a week rent for both cottage and garden. Caird regarded the Duke of Bedford's cottages as "very handsome," having many conveniences as well as gardens attached, and let at fairly low rents. (However, he noted some complained about their rooms' small size). In 1830, according to the Steward at Woburn, the laborers on the Duke of Bedford's estates paid just one shilling a week rent, while elsewhere, they were charged at least two shillings a week for two rooms, "miserable places, [with] no gardens." Lord Beverley let one and a half acres of excellent pasture land, one and a half acres of "mowing-ground for winter food," and a house for just seven pounds per year to his laborers in high-wage Yorkshire. The Duke of Northumberland spent freely to make improvements that would help all the laborers on his huge estates. Similarly, the village of Ford, built by the

Marquis of Waterford, included houses with two or four rooms, gardens, nearby outhouses, water pipes, and use of a common cowhouse and pasture, let at just three or four pounds a year, depending on size. The Duke of Devonshire in Derbyshire built the village of Edensor with cottages of rather elaborate architecture with pasture access for his laborers. The 1867-68 Report mentioned that the Earl of Northumberland had improved or built 931 cottages for his laborers. George Culley discovered that landowners themselves owned the best housing in Bedfordshire, and for all but three villages, it was near or at their seats of residence. Somerville found Lord Spencer in Northampton was building impressive new dwellings for his laborers, although "the old ones . . . were equal and rather superior to the ordinary class of labourers' houses." Some cottages stood in groups of three, with the smaller one with just two or three "apartments" coming between the larger ones. Some even had two rooms upstairs and two below. Potato gardens were placed in back, with flower gardens in front, and fancy Gothic architecture greeted the passerby's eyes. For each four houses a bakehouse and washing-house was provided, and, also, they could rent allotments at reasonable rents.[107]

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[107]Caird, English Agriculture, pp. 76, 98 (Duke of Wellington), 182 (Duke of Bedford), 197, 516. Somerville made similar observations about Wellington's cottages, adding that these were "the best cottages and gardens given to the poor at their rent (£3 10s. a-year) that I have seen in any part of the kingdom." Whistler, p. 131; Agar, Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 21 (Culley's observation), 69 (Duke of Bedfordshire), 301 (Lord Beverly), 389-90

With such acts of building better and/or less expensive housing, these aristocrats showed the upper classes' rhetoric about noblesse oblige had at least some substance behind it.

Despite the altruistic picture painted above, some of the aristocracy's other motives in being fairly content to rent their cottages so cheaply was revealed by Lord Egremont of Sussex. He told the rector of Petworth, Thomas Sockett, that he got no rent for his cottages, and did not rent any above three pounds per year even with a good garden to begin with. He said this matter-of-factly, without grievance. He, like other landlords, did not mind getting little or nothing in rent because, under the New Poor Law, "They save it in diminution of the rate. . . . He stated, that the fact was that the poor men could not now pay the rent." So what the aristocracy may have lost due to low (or zero!) rents was made up by lower taxes, or it could be considered an adjustment for the low wages their laborers were paid to begin with. Furthermore, the aristocracy tended to build improved cottages only near their seats, so as (perhaps) not to be literally looking poverty in the face. These houses might have pretty, overly-ornate facades, but have little additional comfort inside. As Somerville maintained, exaggerating somewhat, but saying this while having traveled

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(Northumberland/Waterford), p. 401-2 (Duke of Devonshire); Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, first report, p. xvi; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 371, 375-76.

extensively in England, such high quality houses "are found only in some pet village near a nobleman's park, or in the park itself, and only there because they are ornamental to the rich man's residence." While the English rural elite undeniably exploited the laborers, as the enclosure movement and the low wages the laborers received demonstrate, still at least some aristocrats made sincere efforts at being paternalistic concerning providing housing. But their efforts must be seen in the context of the low wages and/or lower poor rates paid after the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which meant often they were giving back a slice of the loaf they had grabbed from the laborers to begin with. Despite the efforts of these aristocratic cottage improvers, most farmworkers were not touched by them, as Rule properly observes, where "the majority of [England's] rural inhabitants liv[ed] in damp and squalor."[108]

Little Difference in Slave and Farmworker Housing Quality

Between the slaves and agricultural workers, probably relatively little difference existed in the overall quality of their housing. While in both cases, large landowners may have been somewhat altruistic, with nice houses or cottages

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[108]Committee on New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, 1837, p. 14. In the second report, p. 7, for the parish of Petworth, Lord Egremont charged nearly one-third less rent for comparable housing (tenements for the poor) than the tradesmen who owned houses there; Somerville, Whistler, p. 172; Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 78.

being built on some large plantations or estates, still such superior shelter only benefited for a minority of the slaves or laborers in question. Dirt floors, and non-glazed or broken glass windows, were routine. Bondsmen were more likely to live in a dwelling made nearly exclusively of wood, with (perhaps) some mud daubed in for the nooks and crannies, or on the chimney to provide some fireproofing, than their contemporaneous rural field laborers in England. In England, walls made of mud/clay mixed with sticks or straw often prevailed, with the ratio of the two materials nearly inversed compared to the American case, befitting the relative scarcity of the two materials in those two countries. Probably a thatched roof, being cooler in summer, warmer in winter, and providing more protection against the elements, was better than what the slaves (or many poor whites) normally had in America, where stories of being able to see through the roof (or walls, for that matter) pop up. In both cases, since the slaves and the laborers (normally) did not own the place they lived, they suffered with what others were willing to provide them with. Although the farmworkers were supposed to pay rent, and had the freedom to move, due to the settlement laws and closed parishes, not to mention low wages and the effects of the enclosure acts in causing wage dependence, they often had to make do with what was relatively close to their jobs. Competition in the housing market in England was very imperfect, between all the government restrictions on labor

mobility, ignoring how the latter is (even under the best circumstances) relatively low to begin with compared to most other commodities. Clearly, the bulk of both the bondsmen and laborers lived in rundown, decrepit housing of low quality and few amenities, even if a few fortunate souls benefited from paternalistic planters and aristocrats.

Agricultural Workers--Sanitation/Cleanliness

Sanitation for the England's housing during the industrial revolution was notoriously bad. How could a reader forget Engels's portrait of Manchester's odious slums and filthy, meandering streets in The Condition of the Working Class in England? The appalling death rates produced by poor sanitation practices produced, in Victorian England, a serious public health movement among the middle class to clean up the resulting hazards of urban industrial life. It must be realized, even concerning such pits of despair as cellar dwellings in Liverpool, that this problem was ultimately rooted in the concentration of houses packed together in rapidly growing larger cities without any changes from practices much more appropriate to small villages or sparsely populated rural areas. As Rule noted, the houses of the cities and towns were built of better materials, such as brick or stone, but: "It was not so much their individual deficiencies, but the collective environmental horror which they presented which shocked

contemporaries." Earlier, the death rates of medieval cities and towns were high, being virtual devourers of their inhabitants, because their population's natural rate of increase was actually negative. If people then build still larger agglomerations of buildings, but do not change the sewage and garbage disposal systems, only public health disaster can possibly follow. While rural areas' inhabitants enjoyed superior health to that of city dwellers, that was not due to their having superior sanitation practices. Rather, due to a lower population density, the old, traditional methods took a significantly lower toll in the countryside than within in England's industrial cities. Even the contrast between villages and outlying scattered houses was jarring, as Jeffries saw:

> The cottages in the open fields are comparatively pleasant to visit, the sweet fresh air carries away effluvia. Those that are so curiously crowded together in the village are sinks of foul smell, and may be of worse--places where, if fever comes, it takes hold and quits not.

Engels observed that a dung heap in the country may inflict little damage, being more exposed to the open air. The same practice breeds very different results when a similar pile builds up in a city's alley or dead end.[109] So while the countryside was healthier than the early industrial cities, this was due to the concentration of large amounts of

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[109]Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 87; Jeffries, Hodge, 1:167; Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, eds. and trans. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (New York: Macmillan Co., 1958), p. 110.

housing with barely changed medieval sanitation measures in the latter, such as open sewers along the sides of the streets, not superior measures systematically ensuring cleanliness in the former.

Even into the 1870s and beyond, many villages in England had little or no sanitary arrangements, unlike towns by then. As Joseph Arch put it: "I must not name villages [with bad sanitary arrangements]; any one who travels must observe the bad sanitary condition of the rural districts." Although in an area of England where the laborers were relatively well-paid and fed, Caird found miserable arrangements for sanitation in the village of Wark, Northumberland:

> Wretched houses piled here and there without order--filth of every kind scattered about or heaped up against the walls--horses, cows, and pigs lodged under the same roof with their owners, and entering by the same door--in many cases a pig-sty beneath the only window of the dwelling.[110]

Unlike Olmsted's aforementioned experience (pp. 117-18), the laborers' cottages might not be even picturesque, let alone proving sanitary conditions for their inhabitants.

The housekeeping of the laborers' wives (unlike for the slaves, a strong sexual division of labor generally prevailed among the farmworkers, except during harvest and

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[110]Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 352. But during this same general time period, Jeffries noted that increasing pressure existed for improving sanitary conditions in villages, which the landowners normally had to shoulder the burden of paying for. Even if they delayed making improvements, "it is impossible to avoid them altogether." Hodge, 2:113; Caird, English Agriculture, p. 390.

in the north) may have been perfectly adequate, yet the area around her cottage stink badly. Jeffries explains why, contrasting between the smell of the fields around to the stench emanating from the laborers' cottages:

> The odour which arises from the cottages is peculiarly offensive. It is not that they are dirty inside . . . it is from outside that all the noisome exhalations taint the breeze. . . . The cleanest woman indoors thinks nothing disgusting out of doors, and hardly goes a step from her threshold to cast away indescribable filth.[111]

This mentality may explain why Caird found the inhabitants of Wark tolerating the conditions he observed. Likely the cleanliness of the farmworkers' cottages was normally better than that of the slaves, because the women would be home most of the day, and sink much of their labor into housekeeping, or various tasks connected with it, such as going to market. For unlike the slave women out in the fields all day, the laborers' wives could not blame a time shortage as causing the inside of their houses to be dirty during most of the year.

Slaves--Furniture and Personal Effects

The housing a subordinate class has obviously differs from what items they can put in it. While good housing and numerous personal possessions being kept inside normally correlate with one another, this is not guaranteed. While

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[111]Jeffries, Hodge, 2:70.

comparing the household items of American slaves and English farmworkers is inevitably difficult due to the lack of broad-based statistical data in question, considering what the generally poorest classes of their respective societies owned as household items is still worthwhile. These things constitute some of the enduring surroundings of those having them, unlike food. (Clothing has been separately considered above). They can come to have a sentimental value disproportionately high to their cash value, especially when they had been owned by parents or other ancestors as well. They also can contribute significantly to personal comfort, such as being able to avoid sitting/sleeping somewhere other than a dirt floor.

The slaves normally could only count on some kind of bed to be in their shacks, and these often were made with stuffings or coverings of moss, hay, corn shucks, etc. on top of a wooden frame. But as a child, Frederick Douglass lacked this even, and used a stolen bag that had been used to carry corn to help keep himself warm. Turning to a more normal case, freedwoman Millie Evans of North Carolina recalled how her family's smaller beds in daytime could be easily slid underneath the largest bed. "Our beds was stuffed with hay and straw and shucks, and, believe me, child, they sure slept good." Ex-slave Marion Johnson, once a slave in Louisiana, also thought well of the basic bedding he enjoyed: "Mammy's beds was ticks stuffed with dried grass and put on bunks built on the wall, but they did sleep

so good. I can 'most smell that clean dry grass now." Solomon Northrup less nostalgically and less comfortably described what "bed" his master supplied him with thus:

> The softest couches in the world are not to be found in the log mansion of the slave. The one whereon I reclined year after year, was a plank twelve inches wide and ten feet long. My pillow was a stick of wood. The bedding was a coarse blanket, and not a rag or shred beside. Moss might be used, were it not that it directly breeds a swarm of fleas.

In Georgia, Kemble saw slave women freely hazarding these risks from moss on the rice-island plantation, placing it upon "a rough board bedstead." Meanwhile, some servant boys slept on the hearth by the kitchen fire. Such rough accommodations--escaped slave Francis Henderson similarly "enjoyed" a "board bed" like Northrup's near Washington, D.C.--could become comfortable, "being used to it." So even though Evans and Johnson reflected back to better bedding conditions than Henderson or Northrup endured, nostalgia combined with acclimation is probably causing them to recall their sleeping arrangements more favorably than they really were. Olmsted's encounter with vermin while in the bed of a fairly typical white family's home serves as a warning of what many slaves undoubtedly would have suffered if they slept on anything softer than boards.[112]

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[112]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 121, 62 (Evans), 315 (Johnson); Douglass, Narrative, p. 43; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, p. 128; Kemble, Journal, pp. 67, 315; Drew, Refugee, 1969, p. 109; At one fairly typical poor white's cabin, Olmsted took off his stockings initially when going to bed, but almost immediately put them back on, pulling them over his pantaloons. "The advantage of this

Besides beds, slave cabins normally were sparsely furnished or equipped. Kemble saw no chairs or tables in the cabins of those servants--presumably the better-off slaves materially--who waited on her at her husband's rice island estate, where conditions were better than average as compared to other plantations locally. Various ceramic objects--pots, cups, etc.--also often were owned by slaves, the distribution of which on plantations reflected the slaves' and overseers' positions in Southern society as subordinate to the planters. Predictably, domestic servants possessed better ceramic objects than field hands. Northrup maintained in his area of Louisiana that slaves were "furnished with neither knife, nor fork, nor dish, nor kettle, nor any other thing in the shape of crockery, or furniture of any nature or description." Only by working on Sunday, their day off, could slaves earn the money to buy these necessary utensils for cooking and food storage. Rose Williams of Texas found her master's quarters pleasing; They were furnished with tables, benches, and bunks for sleeping. A mixed picture presents itself, with some masters providing more than others, or slaves finding ways to obtain or even make more furnishings, such as chairs, and/or utensils themselves, depending on their individual initiative. Mary Reynolds said the men made chairs at night

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arrangement was that, although my face, eyes, ears, neck, and hands, were immediately attacked, the vermin did not reach my legs for two or three hours." Cotton Kingdom, 2:107.

sometimes. Similar to their split on slave housing, Genovese portrays the situation for furniture and utensils more optimistically (but here accurately) than Stampp's quite dire portrait. Nevertheless, what the slaves had acquired by their own efforts, not what their allegedly paternalistic masters provided for them, normally allowed the better-off ones to have some very basic cooking utensils, furniture, and kitchen crockery.[113]

English Agricultural Workers: Home Furnishings, Utensils, Etc.

The farmworkers' cottages were not apt to be much better furnished or equipped than their contemporaries among American slaves. Mark Crabtree, testifying before the parliamentary committee investigating the operation of the New Poor Law, described furnishings similar to many bondsmen's in the American South. He found one cottage, occupied by a laborer who had worked twenty years for one farmer, to have one chair, a chest, three stools, a table of two boards and a piece placed on four hedge-stakes, and two

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[113]Kemble, Journal, pp. 66-67, 314-15; Charles E. Orser, Jr., "The Archaeological Analysis of Plantation Society: Replacing Status and Caste with Economics and Power," American Antiquity, 53 (1988) 737-38, 746-47; Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, pp. 148-49. His testimony conflicts with Stampp's view that a majority of slaveowners provided frying pans and iron pots to their bondsmen. Ironically he states this just after citing Northrup in The Peculiar Institution, p. 287. Compare his treatment (pp. 287-88) with Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, pp. 530-532; Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 121 (Reynolds), 161 (Williams); Blassingame, The Slave Community, p. 255.

straw beds without blankets for nine people. The beds were attached to the wall on one side, and supported on two posts on the other, in a manner similar to at least some slaves' beds. The home of another man, who had been unemployed and whose family had pawned possessions in order to buy food, presented a similar but perhaps more desperate situation. They had two chairs, a similar table built on hedge-stakes, four beds of straw with one blanket among them all, four coverlets, and two basins. Their kitchen utensils consisted of two broken knives, one fork, one tea-kettle, two saucepans, three plates, and two broken plates. Apparently, these pathetically few possessions were all fourteen people had. Somerville's semi-apocryphal "ploughman" living in Wilton, Wiltshire complained of having a "wretched home . . . without any comfort, almost without furniture."[114] And this grinding poverty was in a fairly normal year! When living so close to subsistence to begin with, as illustrated by the difficulties in buying clothes when paid such low wages, the furnishings and utensils of the agricultural laborers were unlikely to be plentiful.

In times of crisis, such as high prices due to crop failure, the laborers' cottages were emptied in order to fill their stomachs. In Dorset, when the port of Poole was nearly at a standstill in 1843, many of the laborers'

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[114]Minutes of Evidence Before Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, BPP, 1838, vol. XVIII, part II, as reprinted in Agar, The Bedfordshire Farm Worker, pp. 90-91; Somerville, Whistler, p. 46.

cottages in the surrounding countryside were nearly empty, or literally were so. Evidently, at least the pawnbrokers were doing brisk business. Another reason for visiting the pawnbroker was to fulfill a condition for going into the workhouse: A family or elderly couple (etc.) had to sell off their furnishings, because otherwise they were too "rich" to get parish relief of any kind. As Somerville commented, a man who personally knew first hand the severe financial stress of laborers in such situations:

> It has always seemed to me a grievous error to deny out-door relief to families in temporary distress, whereby they are compelled to undergo the most cruel privations, or submit to break up their little homes, sell off their furniture, . . . and become thorough, confirmed, irredeemable paupers.

With logic that resonates with even today's welfare state bureaucracies, the poor law was designed only to relieve the most desperate--or those who had to make themselves desperate by selling off nearly everything besides the clothes on their back, before they could receive relief.[115] For these reasons, the homes of laborers under severe stress, such as high food prices or long spells of unemployment, may prove to be nearly empty of household items. The slaves, by contrast, since they did not have to

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[115]Somerville, Whistler, pp. 257, 413. He described (p. 406) that in Heyshot parish, Sussex, laborers owning gardens, small orchards, and houses were forced to sell them in order to get relief. And they only sought it because the local farmers resented their independence, and refused to hire them except at harvest or some other time of high demand.

fend for themselves, did not have to face the calamity of selling off their furniture in the event of financial disaster, but they lacked the advantages of independence and freedom becoming sources of self-respect for themselves.

Fuel--The Slaves' Supply Compared to the Agricultural Workers'

Fuel supplies were undeniably better for the bondsmen than for the farmworkers. In the United States, the problem was having too many trees, because they had to be chopped down and the stumps removed before cultivation began. Here the slaves most clearly benefited from living in sparsely populated frontier areas, as opposed to a long-settled region where most of the trees would have been already cut down, such as in southeast England. Even on Kemble's husband's rice-island estate, where a priori one might think trees would be scarce, a preserve of trees, etc. was allowed to remain so that her husband's "people" could still easily obtain firewood. The attitude of the owners of forested land in the frontier South is perhaps best illustrated by a master Olmsted questioned when he saw his slaves turning wood into charcoal, and being paid for it since it was during the holidays: "He replied that he had five hundred acres covered with wood, which he would be very glad to have any one burn, or clear off in any way." Masters and mistresses normally just let their slaves go collect their

own firewood from uncleared land on or near their property, feeling no need to supply it to them. Olmsted believed the slaves uncommonly liked having fires, and took extra opportunities to create them. On one Virginia plantation, the hands made "a fire--a big, blazing fire at this season, for the supply of fuel is unlimited," in which they cooked their food also.[116] With all the abundant raw material available, slaveholders let them enjoy this minor indulgence since it cost them little or nothing. Indeed, it could even benefit them by helping to clear the land for crops. Hence, in this one case at least, the material abundance of the New World clearly benefited the slaves, for wood approached being a free good like air in America's eastern forests.[117]

In sharp contrast, the agricultural workers of England, especially in arable areas in the southeast after enclosure, often faced a truly desperate fuel situation. Point one, England had been chopping down its forests excessively for centuries; real shortages of wood had developed in many areas. Olmsted encountered one inn-keeper, of a village near Chester in 1850, who thought America's "wood fires"

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[116]Kemble, Journal, pp. 47-48; Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 1:87 (charcoal), 103 (my emphasis, Virginia), 104-5, 215 (like fires), 2:180 (collect firewood).

[117]The South was, Olmsted said, "where fuel has no value." Cotton Kingdom, 2:250. Interestingly, Genovese maintains a sexual division of labor existed for fires and fuel. The men collected the firewood, while the women lit or kept the fires burning. In Africa, the sex roles are reversed, and normally women collect the firewood for the family even to this day. Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 525.

were an unusual phenomenon. Indeed, a growing shortage of wood to turn into charcoal was a major factor in pushing the English into using coking coal for iron making, first starting successfully with Abraham Darby in 1709. However, a number of decades passed before coke was used extensively for smelting iron, as Deane noted.[118] Due to wood shortages, many agricultural laborers used other vegetation for fuel, such as furze, turf, or peat, which were very second rate fuels compared to coal or seasoned firewood.[119] The hedges which fenced off one farm from another often were used to provide fuel, as Young knew. Farmer Edward Butt, who had also worked as a relieving officer in the Petworth parish area, recalled for the 1837 Poor Law Report that when he was younger (c. 1790), laborers found fuel by getting a thousand turf for a half guinea from a nearby commons. The farmers then did not charge their laborers for transporting it to the latter's homes. Fuel was much less expensive for them then. In arable areas, the laborers were normally worse off, as Cobbett noted: "No hedges, no ditches, no commons, no grassy lanes: a country divided into great farms,; a few

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[118]Olmsted, Walks and Talks, p. 73; Deane, First Industrial Revolution, pp. 104, 110.

[119]Young, General Report, pp. 158-61. Coal was used just by blacksmiths near where Isaac Bawcombe lived in Wiltshire in the 1840s, and peat was the main fuel: Hudson, A Shepherd's Life, pp. 75-76. Somerville maintained the turf in Heyshot parish made for a very poor fuel since it was so thin. When elsewhere where it was a thick mold, "the turf is excellent fuel," but one suspects he is judging this by relative English standards. Whistler, p. 405. Note also Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 234.

trees surround the great farm-house. All the rest is bare of trees; and the wretched laborer has not a stick of wood." One plowboy of about sixteen near Abington in southern England described how he had hot food only on the relatively rare occasions when his master let him and other boys working for him boil potatoes once a week. Otherwise, he only ate bread and lard--cold. He normally never had a fire to warm him in winter since he slept in the loft of the farmer who employed him, unless he stayed sometimes with local cottagers.[120] Hence, the shortage of fuel hurt the poor not only in keeping warm during the winter, but also limited what food they could eat or how they could prepare it. In southern England, fuel cost much more, helping to make the diet worse since it cost laborers more to cook it, or forcing the them to buy more expensive ready-made food such as baker's bread.[121] Shortages or privations of wood or other materials for fuel could extract a high cost: In southern Northumberland, the laborers had lots of fuel, so their death rate did not rise as much in the harsh year of 1864 as that of others the same year.[122]

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[120]Young, General Report, pp. 83, 86; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, p. 8; Cobbett, Rural Rides, p. 196; note also pp. 206, 252-53; Somerville, Whistler, pp. 62-63. This example also showed how annual service could be exploitive as labor paid by the day. This boy was paid just three shillings a week.

[121]Rule, Labouring Classes, p. 47; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 126-28.

[122]Commission on Employment in Agriculture, BPP, 1867-68, p. xiv.

Due to shortages of wood or other vegetation to use for fuel, major conflicts developed between the local landowners and the laborers, especially after enclosure eliminated wastelands or commons that had formerly been used for fuel by the latter. A major motivation for the restrictions on gathering fuel was the desire of the landowners to protect their game's habitat. For example, the Earl of Pembroke ordered the villagers of Barford not to take dead wood from his forest, Grovely Wood, in 1825. He had "discovered" they legally had no right to take any. Yet, as a customary right, they had taken wood from this forest for centuries. So in reply Grace Reed and four other women she led decided to resist the Earl, and after defiantly gathering sticks from the Woods, they returned home. After being fined, and refusing to pay, they were sentenced to jail. But the next day, the women were freed, and Pembroke quickly declared, after further investigation, that the people of Barford did have the right to take dead wood from the forest after all. These women's actions were truly courageous, and they saved their customary right only by taking direct action in a type of civil disobedience. In other places the poor were not so lucky. Once again, for the same reason--game protection for such animals as pheasants and rabbits--the gathering of dead wood was prohibited for the people living in the villages next to the Fonthill and Great Ridge Woods in Wiltshire. This forest was full of hazelnut trees, but due to the rabbits multiplying after this area was protected, their

bark was stripped, causing these trees to die off. As a result, people stopped coming, even from long distances, during the mid to late summer to gather nuts from this forest. Here the poor lost out on both fuel and food and had no recourse for decades afterwards, Hudson observing that the dead wood laid around as if it was an undisturbed primeval forest (c. 1910). The cases in which the rich would give away or sell at a non-profitable rate fuel to the poor simply did not make up for the losses caused by enclosure and England's general deforestation. While in America the slaves' struggles with their masters were many, but due to an overabundance of wood which approached a free good at times, conflicts over wood were rare or non-existent, unlike the case for England, where even a child breaking a bough from a tree for any reason could be sentenced to the House of Correction, as the Hammonds noted.[123] Since the slaves were normally free to hunt, their masters did not feel a great need to protect the wild animals in areas only recently hewed from the wilderness. By contrast, the agricultural workers continually struggled

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[123]Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 210-11; R.W. Bushaway, "'Grovely, Grovely, Grovely, and All Grovely': Custom, Crime and Conflict in the English Woodland," History Today, May 1981, p. 43; Hudson, Shepherd's Life, pp. 212-13; Hammond and Hammond, Village Labourer, pp. 128 (charity's limits), 197 (breaking bough). Arch remembered the rector's wife handed out soup and coals in his parish when he was a child, but these handouts were seen as a control device to help make the poor humble before their "betters," and to keep them in the established church. His mother refused, at least eventually, to take them. Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 15, 17-18, 21-22.

against their overlords' restrictions on hunting and its spillover effects on obtaining fuel supplies.

8. SLAVE MEDICAL CARE

What Medical Care Did Slaves Receive?

Due to both self-interest and paternalistic altruism on the part of their owners, slaves often received a significant amount of attention from (white) physicians. Masters and mistresses did not want their property to be destroyed or damaged by treatable diseases or injuries--assuming they were always this rational, which was questionable.[124] Sometimes the slaves received medicine or some other treatment such as bleeding from the master or overseer themselves. The blacks were not without their own resources--many larger plantations had their homegrown "conjurors" who used herbs or spells to help cure their

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[124]Kemble powerfully observed that most Southern slaveholders could not be mistaken for homo economicus. They were not calculating businessmen like "Manchester manufacturers or Massachusetts merchants" who would rarely sacrificed financial interests "at the instigation of rage, revenge, and hatred." Further, she maintained, in a portrait not surprising to readers of Olmsted's travels: "The planters of the interior of the Southern and Southwestern states, with their furious feuds and slaughterous combats, their stabbings and pistolings, their gross sensuality, brutal ignorance, and despotic cruelty, resemble the chivalry of France before the horrors of the Jacquerie . . . With such men as these, human life, even when it can be bought or sold in the market for so many dollars, is but little protected by considerations of interest from the effects of any violent passion." Kemble, Journal, pp. 301, 303. The existence of the roughneck, non-calculating culture of Southern slaveowners seriously weakens the standard apologetic for slavery: The self-interest of the owner restrains the ill-treatment of his property.

fellow slaves of affliction. They also had their own midwives to assist women at birth, and did not necessarily have to rely on doctors for deliveries. Unfortunately for them, and most everyone else in Southern society except maybe the physicians themselves, antebellum medical science was so crude and backward that it delivered at least as much harm as cure. Going to the plantation's resident witch doctor arguably was more effective than being bled by leeches by a white physician for many sick bondsmen. Despite its general ineffectiveness, even lethalness, the doctor bills still could pile up for large planters such as Barrow. In a day and age when doctors charged on average roughly $1 to $5 for a house call, Barrow spent (assuming accurately kept figures) just $69.18 for 1838-39, but $288.25 for 1839-40, and routinely $300/year or more after that.[125] The slaveholders' investment in their bondsmen encouraged such high expenditures on medical care for them, even when paternalism did not.

Masters willingly had the same doctor treat both their families as well as their slaves on the same visit, showing some impartiality in providing medical help. Planter Bennet Barrow noted in his diary: "Dr King practising on two of my negros--& my family &c."[126] And this "race mixing" was taken

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[125]Eugene Genovese, "The Medical and Insurance Costs of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt," Journal of Negro History 45 (July 1960):152; Davis, Plantation Life, p. 48.

[126]Davis, Plantation Life, p. 278. Fogel and Engerman note that doctors' bills exist which list both the slaves

for granted by a man who was very insistent in enforcing the color line in other situations.[127] So long as it was on the terms of being absolute rulers of blacks, whites under slavery necessarily accepted situations that would have appalled many a diehard post-reconstruction segregationist. Correspondingly, Barrow lightly passes over a white physician treating blacks and whites on the same visit living on the same piece of land.

The General Backwardness of Antebellum Medical Care

Just because a slaveholder spent the money to bring a doctor in does not mean good necessarily came of it. Between bad treatments (such as bleeding) and professional incompetence, good did not come necessarily from providing medical care. Barrow commented harshly about one doctor who visited his place during a small epidemic: "number of sick ones, asked Dr Hail to see Marcus and a more undecisive man I never saw. made great many attempts to bleed him, but failed & large veins at that, Died at 11 ok." Other planters evidently had less faith in bleeding, at least if it was done by the overseer. Plowden C. J. Weston, rice

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and owning family's members treated on the same visit: Time on the Cross, 1:120.

[127]For example, he condemned the repairman of his gin for talking to his blacks as if they were his equals. He ran off his property the proud, well-dressed mulatto son of a nearby planter who dared to pass through his plantation's quarters. Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 186-87, 206-7.

planter of South Carolina, prepared a standard contract his overseers signed which included the statement that: "Bleeding is Under All Circumstances Strictly Prohibited, Except by Order of the Doctor." Counting a completed bleeding as an accomplishment and a botched one a failure, as Barrow did, assumed the premises of a backward medical "science" still practicing treatments better suited to the Dark Ages. But as crude as antebellum medical science was, still some recognizably modern treatments were performed. Planter Barrow noted one day in his diary: "Number of cases of Chicken Pox, Vaccinated all my negros, Old & Young Most of them with good taking scars, but have now the appearance genuine." But regardless of what treatments the doctor gave, patients sometimes did die. Overseer George W. Bratton wrote to his employer, planter (and later U.S. President) James Polk, concerning the fate of one of his slaves: "Losa died the sixteenth of this month [November 1838] I had good atten[tion] paid to her I call in and other phisian to Loosa she died with the brest complaint."[128] Good intentions sometimes still bred bad results!

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[128]Davis, Plantation Life, pp. 198, 280. Barrow had vaccinated himself and his children against some (unnamed) disease earlier (p. 87); Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 29 (Plowden), p. 115.

Masters Sought Ways to Reduce Medical Expenses

No doubt many masters and mistresses pursued a policy of cutting corners that called in physicians only when their slaves were really sick or injured. Freedman Tines Kendricks of Georgia, after describing the Old Miss as stingy when providing food rations, said she was the same about getting a doctor to help Mose, a young slave boy:

> Aunt Hannah, she try to doctor on him and git him well, and she tell Old Miss that she think Mose bad off and ought to have the doctor. Old Miss she wouldn't git the doctor. She say Moses ain't sick much, and, bless my soul, Aunt Hannah she right. In a few days from then Mose is dead.

Jenny Proctor of Alabama remembered getting cheap medicine and doctors being called in only as a last resort:

> We didn't have much looking after when we git sick. We had to take the worst stuff in the world for medicine, just so it was cheap. That old blue mass and bitter apple would keep us out all night. Sometimes he have the doctor when he thinks we going to die, 'cause he say he ain't got anyone to lose, then that calomel what that doctor would give us would pretty night kill us. Then they keeps all kinds of lead bullets and asafetida balls round our necks.[129]

Apologists for slavery may have claimed that slaves automatically got medical care from their owners, unlike the "wage slaves" of the North from their employers. However, since slavery also gave the masters practically unlimited freedom in determining how to control their bondsmen, there was no guarantee medical care would be provided, even if the

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[129]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, pp. 71, 92-93.

law said otherwise. One cannot legally give slaveholders total freedom to make the slaves' will their will, and yet easily stop those who neglect to provide what supposedly gave slaves material security (here, medical care) in place of the uncertainties of freedom. Since the master had nearly 100 percent freedom practically to order his slaves about and treat them as he willed, barring truly extreme cases where white neighbors may mobilize against his excessive cruelty by their (likely low) standards, the slaves really had neither security nor freedom.

Masters and Overseers as Amateur Healers for Slaves

On his or her own a master or mistress might provide medicines or even a building that served as an infirmary. Administering medicines sometimes allowed him or her to avoid calling in a doctor to begin with, allowing some to save a dollar or two possibly. Certainly slaveowners had at least a financial motive for seeking medical information, since it could save the lives of their property while simultaneously keeping the doctors away. Freedwoman Mary Reynolds of Louisiana remembered the (rather dubious) medicines her owner gave out: "Massa give sick niggers ipecac and asafetida and oil and turpentine and black fever pills." As Stampp observes, often overseers or the masters themselves diagnosed and treated cases of sick slaves, using doctors only as a last resort. Granted this, Fogel and

Engerman sensibly maintain that: "Planters sought to be, and overseers were expected to be, knowledgeable about current medical procedures and about drugs and their administration." Planter Weston had his overseers pledge not to use strong medicines, "such as calomel, or tartar emetic: simple remedies such as flax-seed tea, mint water, No. 6, magnesia, &c., are sufficient for most cases, and do less harm. Strong medicines should be left to the Doctor." No doubt, due to the low educational levels most overseers had attained, with a correspondingly minimal knowledge of medical science, discouraged this master from entrusting too much of his slaves' lives and health to their medical judgment. Kendricks recalled that his mistress dispensed medicine where he lived: "Old Miss, she generally looked after the niggers when they sick and give them the medicine. And, too, she would get the doctor iffen she think they real bad off 'cause like I said, Old Miss, she mighty stingy, and she never want to lose no nigger by them dying." This mistress knew being penny-wise may be pound-foolish. However, she still hesitated to admit slaves may be really sick since they shammed sickness to avoid work: "Howsomever, it was hard sometime to get her to believe you sick when you tell her that you was, and she would think you just playing off from work. I have seen niggers what would be mighty near dead before Old Miss would believe them sick at all." Kemble's husband's rice-island estate provided a six-roomed infirmary to its slaves. This looked fine on

paper, but in actuality it contained weakened bodies dispersed amongst an appalling spectacle of filth, rubbish, darkness, and cold. And this place was where the inmates within supposedly went to recover from sickness! Some bondswomen attempted to receive a little warmth from a feeble fire in its enormous chimney, while "these last poor wretches lay prostrate on the floor, without bed, mattress, or pillow, buried in tattered and filthy blankets, which, huddled round them as they lay strewed about, left hardly space to move upon the floor." She found the "hospital" on her husband's sea island cotton estate still worse.[130] Hence, the paternalism of masters when providing health care for their slaves was not necessarily all that it was cracked up to be, between the crude medicines and primitive buildings provided for medical treatment.

Black Medical Self-Help: Conjurors and Midwives

The slaves also had their own resources, and did not entirely depend on their owners for medical help, in the

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[130]Botkin, Lay My Burden Down, p. 122 (Reynolds), 71-72 (Kendricks); Stampp, Peculiar Institution, p. 315; Fogel and Engerman, Time on the Cross, 1:120; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 29. Weston also provided a hospital for his slaves, p. 28; Kemble, Journal, pp. 32-33, 214; Stampp (p. 313) notes an ideal hospital built on James Hamilton Couper's Georgia rice plantation, but these ideal conditions, which included steam heat and floors swept daily and scrubbed once a week, should not be seen as normal. Kemble said that her husband's slaves were better off than many owned by other masters in their neighborhood.

form of conjurers, i.e., shamans or witch doctors, as well as midwives. The black community did not just passively accept what "ole massa" may have provided them with--scanty as it was often--but looked to help themselves, in health care and other needs. Similar to the slave preacher, the plantation conjurer served as an independent source of authority (religious, not just medical) to the slaves separate from the white-dominated chain of command, unlike drivers and domestic servants with their more prestigious positions (at least to the whites). Sometimes white medical science even adopted the "cures" slaves used on themselves in its own practice. Kemble mentioned how one physician told his white patient to bind the leaves of the poplar tree around his rheumatic knee, "saying he had learned that remedy from the negroes in Virginia, and found it a most effectual one." "Auntie Rachael," living in a cabin near Raleigh, North Carolina, gave a long list of treatments for diseases based on black folk wisdom. Her mother had been a "docterin' woman," and she had learned from her. Her "cures" included giving mare's milk for whooping cough, smearing the marrow of a hog jowl on the skin lesions caused by the mumps, putting on a mud plaster and wearing little bag around the neck with a hickory nut to cure shingles, various buds and herbs for making tea to cure bad colds, and tying a charm around a child's neck to ward off disease: "A bag o' asafetida is good [for such a charm]; er, de toe-

nails of a chicken is mos' pow'ful!"[131] While such "cures" seem positively naive and superstitious nowadays, they may have often followed better the principle of medicine that runs "First, do no harm" than the white doctor's bag of tricks.

Slave midwives also were valuable to their masters, as well as to their fellow bondswomen. Kemble noted that the "midwife of the [rice-island] estate--[was] rather an important personage both to master and slave, [for] as to her unassisted skill and science the ushering of all the young negroes into their existence of bondage is intrusted." Births attended by midwives enabled the master to reduce the number of doctor's visits to the plantation, thus reducing his medical expenses. The slave women benefited from having someone of their own race and sex serving them in such an intimate passage of life. Slave midwives helped rebut the view black women could not assist or serve competently in some crucial position in the slave community's life. Zack Bloxham of Florida recalled his mother was a field hand, but added, likely with some exaggeration: "She was a midwife, too, an' treated right special on 'count of it. Dey didn' need no doctor wid Mammy dar!" So while her main position at the plantation was very ordinary, possessing the role of midwife gave Bloxham's mother much higher respect than she

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[131]On independent source of authority the conjurors had, see Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, p. 221; Kemble, Journal, p. 63; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, pp. 64-66.

otherwise would have enjoyed, evidently from both blacks and whites. "Aunt" Florida of Georgia described how her grandmother, the "sworn midwife" of the plantation, attended on both blacks and whites in her locality of "Hurricane an' Briefiel'." Her attendance on women of both races again reflects the pattern of how under slavery whites often did accept "race mixing," but only under the condition of a social system that theoretically ensured almost absolute control of the bulk of the blacks by the whites. Illustrating the importance midwives potentially had, overseer John Garner blamed the death of a newborn baby slave on Matilda telling him only at the last minute she was going to have a child, which kept him from getting a midwife soon enough: "I cold not get the old woman there in time, her lying up at the same time." Of course, the "help" some midwives gave to women in labor could be outright harmful. Kemble mentioned the example of a "ignorant old negress" who, in cases of greatly long and difficult labor, "tie[d] a cloth tight round the throats of the agonized women, and by drawing it till she almost suffocated them she produced violent and spasmodic struggles, which she assured me she thought materially assisted the progress of the labor."[132] Despite this caveat, slave midwives were generally vital

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[132]On the value of slave midwives, see Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1980), p. 31; Kemble, Journal, pp. 28-29, 317; Armstrong, Old Massa's People, p. 176; Bassett, Plantation Overseer, p. 141.

members of the plantation, and received respect from black and white alike.

9. FARMWORKER MEDICAL CARE

How Much Medical Care Did Farmworkers Receive?

English farmworkers had one major advantage over the slaves in medical care, and one major disadvantage. On the one hand, they were potentially free to go to any doctor or not to, and to accept or reject any treatment offered. However, making a mockery of this freedom, their poverty normally forced to rely on parish-provided medical care. On the other, the employing farmers did not necessarily care directly what happened to their (often overly plentiful) employees, since their self-interest was not so directly tied to the health of their laborers as the case for planters owning slaves. People tend to care more for what they OWN than for what they do NOT own, although the self-interest of slaveowners only unreliably restrained their conduct, as Kemble observed above (p. 148). The agricultural workers were clearly more on their own, for good or for ill, quite literally. Paternalism, whether that of slaveowners or landed gentry, necessarily involves the subordinate class giving up some degree of freedom in exchange for greater security, and the slaves' social system had more paternalism than farmworkers'. The slaves received (white) medical care whether they wanted it or not, while the agricultural workers were given the freedom to fend for themselves, unless the parish paid for a doctor to attend on

them when sick. And when the parish did it, that means no individual farmer or landowner provided it, unless some act of private charity happened.

In Petworth Union, Sussex, standard practice indicated that the parish should pay for the medical care of paupers, under both the New and Old Poor Laws.[133] The union hired two doctors to attend the poor, in the workhouse and without, at ninety and one hundred pounds a year each.[134] Even with the New Poor Law of 1834 prohibiting outdoor relief to the able-bodied non-elderly, and using the workhouse as a "test" of destitution (i.e., desperation) to discourage applications for relief, it still allowed medical aid to paupers not in the poorhouse. Initially, this union disputed with William Hawley, an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, over whether the husband as head of the family and as a pauper was the only one legally entitled to medical relief, or whether his wife and children also were covered. The tradition of the union (including before Petworth parish became part of a union in 1835) had been to relieve medically the poor, even if they did not legally fit the definition of being a pauper. The clerk to the local board of guardians even asserted that

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[133]In northeast England after about 1720 it became routine for parishes to hire doctors to care for the parish poor. Earlier cases, such as Newcastle paying a surgeon in the 1560s, also appear. P. Rushton, "The Poor Law, the Parish, and the Community in North-East England," Northern History 25 (1989):146.

[134]Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, pp. 22, 50, 67.

while this was his union's standard practice, other unions, he believed, did not. The doctor, Mr. Hall, assisted all those who asked him who were poor for medical assistance, although strictly legally by contract he only had to help when requisitioned by the relieving officer or workhouse master.[135] In times of medical emergency, however, Hawley did not consider it necessary that a formal order for relief be drawn up if the relieving officer was not nearby, but that the doctor should attend immediately. A letter, dated August 22, 1836, by Edwin Chadwick, the Secretary of the Poor Law Commission in London, settled the matter in favor of relieving the whole family as to be standard practice for England.[136] This union's board of guardians evidently operated by a more compassionate ethos than the New Poor Law required or even permitted. First, at least one of their doctors by tradition aided any poor person who asked for help, not just those strictly meeting the legal definition of "pauper." Second, even before receiving Chadwick's letter, they had opted for the broader legal interpretation of helping the whole family, not just the father. Under the fairly liberal administration of Petworth Union, the

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[135]One doctor told Edward Butt, the relieving officer for Petworth parish under Gilbert's act, and briefly relieving officer for Petworth and Kirdford parishes under the New Poor Law, that he would not wait to get the relief orders from him before aiding the poor: "I shall never stop for your orders, because you may away at a distance; before I can get the order from you, a person may be dead." Ibid., second report, p. 2.

[136]Ibid., first report, pp. 51-52, 67.

laborers were guaranteed a reasonable degree of medical care, but more restrictive ones would have covered only those legally declared to be paupers, which normally meant only the able-bodied in the workhouse, and the non-able-bodied (including the elderly) without.

Extrapolating from Petworth to all of England is an obviously hazardous procedure. More restrictive policies operated elsewhere. Thomas Sockett, the rector for Petworth parish, described a case involving a man named Holden, living in Tillington of Midhurst parish. He found, when asking for relief, that the union would not give medical aid. Initially, it was denied because such aid was only given to men who were heads of households, not to wives or children. Later, he was told it was because he was renting a house worth eight pounds a year--which was true, but ignored how he had sublet half of it to a man for three pounds eighteen shillings per year. He did not get relief in the end, except perhaps two weeks later. Significantly, illustrating how English medical practice was about as crude as the antebellum South's, the laborer attempted to aid his wife in a manner similar to how the physician had done for his wife before. He got some leeches, and applied them as the doctor had, who "had blistered her head and put on leeches."[137] When providing such primitive medical help for the poor, the conflict between intentions and results is

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[137]Ibid., pp. 18-19.

obvious. Granted the routine application of these types of medical treatments, the skinflint board of guardians at Midhurst, by denying such medical "aid," perhaps did more good for the poor than the more compassionate Petworth board!

Medical Clubs: Farmworker Self-Help

Establishing medical clubs were another way to help laborers and others who were poor pay for medical care. Similar to the clothing club mentioned above (p. 89-90), and friendly societies in general, they guaranteed benefits when the member was sick in return for paying some small amount weekly or monthly. As Thompson noted: "Small tradesmen, artisans, labourers--all sought to insure themselves against sickness, unemployment, or funeral expenses through memberships of 'box clubs' or friendly societies." As Huggett described, a typical laborer as a member might pay one shilling a month in return for potential benefits of one shilling a day for six weeks and six pence a day for another six weeks when sick and unable to work. Why were these clubs not especially common among laborers, unlike the artisans, at least before c. 1815? The slower development of class consciousness or political activism among the laborers may have played a role, since the unskilled were less likely to be politically concerned, and more likely possessed more fatalistic attitudes towards accepting

conditions as they were, as Mayhew observed of London's unskilled workers. But a more immediate, practical issue was involved: If a laborer and his family are barely above subsistence as it is, spending an extra shilling or two a month may be an impossible burden to bear. As Rector Sockett commented: "I think it quite a mockery to propose a medical club to a man that has not shoes to his feet." The local parish authorities might set their face against a club, because it would make the laborers too independent. Arch remembered his local parish's parson refused to preach a sermon to help it raise funds, although it still was organized anyway. Further problems with clubs could come from mismanagement by members who had only grade school educations at best, or by some type of fraud. Fraud destroyed the benefit society shepherd Caleb Bawcombe had been a member of by around 1885 for 30 years. He took to court its secretary, who refused to pay him for the six weeks he was laid up for narrow legalistic reasons. With the aid of others, he won his case, but the club was ordered dissolved by the judge and its money turned over to its members since its secretary was condemned as a cheater.[138]

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[138]Thompson, Making, pp. 241 (Mayhew), 419 "Most were artisans," 421. Thompson sees such benefit clubs as one of the main sources of the development and expression of class consciousness and the working class's sense of organization in resisting the elite in English society; Frank E. Huggett, A Day in the Life of a Victorian Farm Worker (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1972), p. 60; Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, first report, p. 18; Arch, Joseph Arch, p. 34; Hudson, A Shepherd's Life, pp. 299-304.

While friendly societies for laborers were hardly a panacea due to their tight financial circumstances, they still represented a level of freedom in open collective action that American slaves could only dream about.

The laborer's right to reject a medical treatment seems unimportant, but it demonstrates the difference between a free man and a bondsman. At times it mattered, even though it seems purely theoretical. Arch described his struggles with the local authorities when he opposed their desires to vaccinate his children. He went to court four times, representing himself, and won each time to stop such treatment, something of which no slave could boast. How did he justify his opposition? He disliked the mass vaccinations at school, saying he was not going to have his "children treated as if they were cattle." He stated to the bench that his children were healthy, no hereditary diseases can be traced back for many generations, and their blood could be tainted by the "filthy matter . . . too often used for vaccination purposes." His reasoning was specious, for even the crude inoculations of the eighteenth century were a major cause of the overall death rate declining, even before the introduction of Jenner's improved process of smallpox vaccination (1796).[139] Nevertheless, this situation illustrates how laborers, as mistreated as a class they

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[139]Arch, Joseph Arch, pp. 54-56; On the value of inoculations early on, see John Rule, The Vital Century: England's Developing Economy, 1714-1815 (New York: Longman Group, 1992), pp. 11-12.

generally were through the process of enclosure and a multitude of petty tyrannies by the local gentry, large farmers, and parsons, were in a sharply different legal category from American black slaves. Slaves could not testify in courts of law against whites. But laborers, if they were well-informed (which, admittedly, was not often), could wrest favorable decisions from even hostile magistrates, as Arch did. Sometimes they could reject what the local authorities wished to impose, in medical matters or certain other areas of life, even though the costs of insubordination could be high, while the slaves had far less choice concerning what they received from their masters, where disobedience likely brought much harsher, swifter punishments.

Workhouse infirmaries operated under a regime of regimentation, but likely presented decidedly more orderly and clean conditions than what larger plantation owners in the South provided for their bondsmen. Illustrating its level of control over the inmates, Petworth Union's workhouse for the elderly at Kirdford, Sussex denied them the freedom to walk anywhere without permission except for the garden/backyard area outside it.[140] Jeffries described such a place where an elderly agricultural worker stayed lacked the freedom and sentimental values of his own cottage, but which provided better food and care than he

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[140]Committee on the New Poor Law, BPP, 1837, second report, pp. 8-9.

could have received had he remained in his own house. "In the infirmary the real benefit of the workhouse reached him. The food, the little luxuries, the attention were far superior to anything he could possibly have had at home. But still it was not home."[141] Certainly the cleanliness of this particular workhouse beat hands down the disorderly squalor and filth of what Kemble encountered on a plantation whose general treatment of the slaves was above average, compared to neighboring masters' standards. While the workhouse inmates were not treated much as individuals, it sure beat the dirt floor of some "infirmary" as a place to regain health compared to staying at home.

Whose Medical Care Was Better?

Since the health care of the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth century was undeniably backward and crude, the provision of medical care for slaves or agricultural workers by their superiors remains for us today a test of intentions more than results. The fewer slaves or farmworkers doctors bled or blistered or gave useless patent medicines to, the better off they were. The stingy board of guardians or master who refused to pay for doctors may have benefited those in their care more than the seemingly compassionate authorities who paid the fees of physicians

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[141]Jeffries, Hodge, 2:145. See also p. 144.

producing more pain and death than cure and life. Based on the sources above, parishes and unions who provided doctors for the paupers in their midst may have given more regular care than the average slave received, if for no other reason than England's higher population densities made it easier for doctors to serve more people in a given day through less travel. But those English workers not declared official paupers at the time they fell ill probably received a lower level of services since they would have to pay for such expenses out of pocket or lean on the doctor's sense of altruism. Those fortunate enough to live in a parish or union that allowed basically all laborers, not just the legal paupers, to use parish medical help, likely were better off than a majority of slaves. As for the bondsmen, the masters and mistresses owning them may have had more immediate self-interest in helping them when sick, like a farmer who owns a cow will call in a veterinarian when it is sick. But such self-interest was not a reliable force for guaranteeing slaves received medical help. Self-interest may also dictate cutting corners on providing medical care, such as not calling in doctors until the last minute, and slaveowners or overseers trying to administer medicines or treatments on their own. Slaves in areas where doctors were reasonably accessible may have on average received more professional medical attention than those English farmworkers who were not paupers legally, putting them on their own.

The measures that the subordinate classes themselves undertook to provide their own medical aid were quite different, reflecting their different cultures and legal statuses. The slave conjurors, who were warlocks or witches as well as healers, did provide slaves with someone in their own community as a source of authority independent of the white establishment. Outside the problems caused by the "magical" side of their healing arts, the conjurors probably helped the suffering slaves they treated, outside of psychosomatic cures, no less than the white physicians did (and hurt them no more!). The slave midwives did more good on average for their community by helping fellow slave women through the travail of birth, but if not employing the magical arts of the conjurors as well, they did not have the same level of power. The English agricultural workers, having some limited freedom to organize medical benefit clubs, were able to engage in collective action to try to meet their medical needs. But their very tight finances often made the sparing of a shilling or two a month very difficult, thus discouraging many from joining or organizing such groups. And as always possible when engaging in collective action, one or more persons involved may let down the group by not doing their job effectively, through bankruptcy or fraud. What these subordinate groups did in providing themselves with medical care varied due to the agricultural workers' greater freedom legally, while the slaves, due to having a very different cultural background

from their white masters, led to the conjurer's treatments and his perceived magical powers in their community.

10. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Overall Material Standard of Living: Who Was Better Off?

Without reliable, broad-based quantitative statistics, it remains difficult to decisively settle who was materially better off when comparing the standard of living of different groups, or between different generations of the same group. Regional variations of conditions merely add further complications, such as the differences between the Border States and Deep South for the slaves, or northern and southern England for the farmworkers. Variations within the subordinate group cannot be ignored, such as individual ability, family relations, the character of specific masters, etc. Finally, the quality of life is only partially captured by the material standard of living. Having a full or empty belly *is* part of the quality of life, but hardly makes up the full picture. So when making generalizations of this kind--comparing the group of all Southern slaves to all English agricultural workers to see who was materially better off--these caveats must be remembered, and dogmatism avoided. But even in this realm where one literary source can be pitted against another, some generalizations *are* possible.

For the southern English agricultural workers (who composed a solid majority of such laborers) and typical rural slaves probably few differences appeared in the

quality and supply of their clothing and housing. Perhaps the slaves of smaller planters and farmers of the Deep South had worse clothes--but they had less need for it than those in England did, which somewhat justified the complacency of their owners. Apparently, most of both classes probably had only one or two changes of clothes, excluding the nicer clothes some slave servants had, or the "Sunday best" saved for church. The houses for both were often one-room affairs, perhaps with a loft to put the kids in, with dirt floors and non-glazed windows. The slaves might have had a marginal advantage here, in that wood was plentiful in the New World, making construction, repairs, even a complete rebuilding, cheaper than in much of England. In the latter, other materials often had to be used, which may have been harder for nonskilled people to build with than using logs to build a frontier cabin. As for medical care, the average slave may have had superior access to a physician's care than the average English farm laborer who was not legally a pauper, assuming the lower population densities of the Southern U.S. did not too seriously interfere with access to it, and that smaller planters and farmers paid for such services as much as large planters. Turning to diet, the evident trade-off concerned the slaves having much more meat and probably more food overall, but southern English agricultural workers ate white wheat bread that was undeniably less coarse than the crude corn bread many slaves consumed. The great irony was that the <u>free</u> southern rural

laborers of England were closer to a bare subsistence than the African-American bondsmen, thanks to enclosure, rapid population growth in a long-settled realm, and the belt-tightening of the New Poor Law (1834), which heavily burdened larger families when special allowances for children ceased. The northern English agricultural worker--composing perhaps one-fourth or more of the farmworker population--was significantly better off than the slave normally.[142] In regards to diet, his higher wages (and superior access to allotments or other land) allowed meat to solidly stay in his diet, and he was able to pay for more clothing and better cottages. Similarly, but not as dramatically, slaves in the Border States enjoyed somewhat better treatment and conditions than those in the Deep South. Hazarding a broad-brushed judgment, it appears that farmworkers' material standard of living was no higher than the slaves' on average, and when <u>southern</u> English agricultural workers <u>only</u> are considered, the slaves often were marginally better off, at least in diet.

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[142]This crude approximation of the relative proportion of northern English farmworkers is supported by the figures for total population by county found in Phyllis Deane and W.A. Cole, <u>British Economic Growth 1688-1959 Trends and Structure</u>, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 103.

Trickle-Down Economics with a Vengeance: How the Slaves Benefited

How could a slave labor force have a marginally higher standard of living than (much of) a free one? This is not the expected result! First, even American slaves benefited some from living in a part of the world with a low population density and abundant natural resources, especially wood and land. True, the white slaveholders expropriated most of the benefits that would have been slaves' if they had been free. This is "trickle-down economics" with a vengeance! In the South, wood for homes, heating, and cooking often nearly amounted to a free good, and masters knew slaves put to work growing some corn and raising some hogs in addition to cash crop could nearly cover most of their living expenses. The prudent planter or slaveowner had his slaves pursue subsistence by raising corn and hogs, whom he controlled as a collective. With land being so cheap, this strategy made many a slaveowner rich, since the cash crop's receipts greatly exceeded the direct cash expenses, at least in good years. By contrast, land was expensive in England, and zealously retained by the landlords and gentry--even most farmers owned little or none, let alone the farmworkers. England's increasing population as the industrial revolution began ensured competition for land ownership would not slacken. Due to a general deforestation in much of southern England, especially in the southeast, fuel for cooking and heating

was expensive, and often had to be transported a considerable distance, raising its cost. The landlords and farmers used access to land as a social control device. Often they hesitated to lease even the tiny parcels of land that constituted allotments to their agricultural workers. They wished to ensure they always had a labor force totally dependent on wages available to do their bidding, and which could not attempt to scrape by on a subsistence strategy. (The American slaves were made to pursue a subsistence strategy under their masters' direction and control as a collective per individual plantation or farm). Landlords and their tenants alienated the labor force from the means of production (the land through enclosures), creating a more easily controlled, wage-dependent rural proletariat since farmworkers could not then eke out a living all or part of the time from the local commons. Slaveowners almost whimsically granted his slaves small patches of land to grow vegetables due to the abundance of land in America, but advocates of allotments found getting English landlords and farmers to provide them to farmworkers oftentimes resembled pulling teeth from reluctant patients. In short, the higher population density and lower resource base of southern England compared to the American South helped to ensure the laborers likely had a lower standard of living than the slaves, particularly when it came to food and fuel.

Theoretically, since the slaves and anything they produced were owned by their masters, while the farmworkers

were not, it seems the latter should automatically be better off materially. But since the laborers had all the burdens of freedom without all its advantages, while the bondsmen's theoretically material security (guaranteed food, shelter, clothing, etc.) had some basis in fact. The landlord/farmer class in England tilted the laws against their labor force, devising a system in which the rural laborers still had to fend for themselves, excepting parish relief, especially with service in decline. The process and results of enclosure stand as the most obvious example of this legal bias. The customary rights of non-landowners to the parish commons to raise animals or obtain fuel were routinely ignored by the enclosure commissioners when dividing up the land, for those actually legally owning nothing normally received nothing as an award. Even those fortunate to gain a small piece of property often were forced to sell it because the expenses of building fences around their plot of land, not to mention the legal and expenses run up by the commissioners, exceeded the amount of cash they had.[143] Legal bias against the laborers was also shown by the game laws, which outlawed not just getting food by hunting, but often restricted even the farmers from controlling crop-destroying pests. By contrast, even the slaves in America were normally free to hunt what they could. The poor and

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[143]While still accepting the legal categories of the elite, Young did see the problems in ignoring the poor's customary rights. See General Report, pp. 12-14, 32-33, 155, 158; cf. p. 99.

settlement laws combined to make migration difficult, helping tilt many local rural labor markets still further in the farmers and landlords' favor, by discouraging industry's competition for the farmworkers' labor. So the English landlord/farmer class had hardly set up a class-neutral regime of laissez-faire. Instead, they systematically manipulated the law to limit the laborers' freedom to sell their labor to the highest bidder, and took advantage of the laborers at almost every turn they could get away with. They imposed a laissez-faire regime on the laborers only to the extent it favored their class interests, but inflicted on them anti-free market controls, such as the settlement laws, when the following the principles of classical economics contradicted their collective self-interest.[144] Although the laborers were not slaves, they certainly were oppressed and exploited, which explains how their standard of living often was arguably lower than that of the real slaves of the American South.

Man Does Not Live by Bread Alone: The Quality of Life Briefly Considered

> The people I saw around me [in Steventon, Berkshire] were, many of them, among the poorest poor. But when I visited them in their little thatched cottages, I felt that the condition of even the meanest and most ignorant among them was

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[144]On this general theme, see Eric J. Hobsbawm and George Rude, Captain Swing (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), pp. 17, 47-48, 52.

> vastly superior to the conditions of the most favored slaves in America. They labored hard; but they were not ordered out to toil while the stars were in the sky, and driven and slashed by an overseer . . . Their homes were very humble; but they were protected by law. No insolent patrols could come, in the dead of night, and flog them at their pleasure. The father, when he closed his cottage door, felt safe with his family around him. No master or overseer could come and take from him his wife, or his daughter. . . . The parents knew where their children were going, and could communicate with them by letters. The relations of husband and wife, parent and child, were too sacred for the richest noble in the land to violate with impunity. Much was being done to enlighten these poor people. Schools were established among them, and benevolent societies were active in efforts to ameliorate their condition. There was no law forbidding them to learn to read and write; and if they helped each other in spelling out the Bible, they were in no danger of thirty-nine lashes, as was the case with myself and poor, pious, old uncle Fred. I repeat that the most ignorant and the most destitute of these peasants [laborers, since they were employees, and ordinarily owned no land] was a thousand fold better off than the most pampered American slave.[145]

Above Harriet Brent Jacobs, fugitive slave, working for her employer as a nanny while in England, expertly, eloquently, and concisely states what some quantitative historians seem to overlook at times: The quality of life and the standard of living are <u>not</u> coextensive. Based on the quality of life, the farmworkers were unquestionably better off than the bondsmen. "Quality of life" captures all the aspects of life that contribute to happiness and an informed worldview on life. While material aspects of life, such as food, clothing, housing, and medical care, are included under the

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[145]Brent, <u>Incidents</u>, pp. 188-89.

quality of life, they are but a part of it. The quality of relationships with other people, with family, friends, bosses, agents of the state, etc., weigh heavily in making up the quality of life, as do education and religious experience. The most highly esteemed and influential slaves from the white viewpoint, such as the head driver on a large plantation, lacked basic rights and protections that even the most oppressed and half-starved laborer in Wiltshire possessed. Consider Kemble's description of headman Frank on her husband's rice-island estate. He had the authority to whip a fellow slave three dozen times, could give permission for slaves to leave the island, had the key to the stores, determined who would work where, and handed out the rations. He had many positive personal qualities. But he could only helplessly endure while the white overseer took his wife as a mistress for a time, and have a son by her, knowing full well the ultimate futility of violence. "Trustworthy, upright, intelligent, he may be flogged to-morrow if [the overseer] or [her husband] so please it, and sold the next day, like a cart-horse, at the will of the latter."[146] Since so much contributes to personal happiness other than the material basics, the standard of living can hardly serve as a true proxy for a society's overall social well-being. While above the quality of life, including such aspects as education, family relationships, the position and

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[146]Kemble, Journal, pp. 44, 140-41.

treatment of the elderly and children, and religious activities (as developing part of an informed worldview and broader outlook on life under such highly circumscribed conditions) of English farmworkers and African-American slaves has been omitted, this does not mean it should be ignored in any broader consideration of their overall social well-being. While the quality of life is more ephemeral and resists the application of cliometrics and other techniques of quantification compared to the material standard of living, it is no less real than the number of calories slaves or farmworkers consumed on a daily basis, or the number of square feet their dwelling contained. Unlike what some economic historians sometimes seem to think, man does not live by bread alone.

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