

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

READER, you are empannelled as a juror to try a plain case and bring in an honest verdict. The question at issue is not one of law, but of fact—"What is the actual condition of the slaves in the United States?" A plainer case never went to a jury. Look at it. TWENTY-SEVEN HUNDRED THOUSAND PERSONS in this country, men, women, and children, are in SLAVERY. Is slavery, as a condition for human beings, good, bad, or indifferent? We submit the question without argument. You have common sense, and conscience, and a human heart;—pronounce upon it. You have a wife, or a husband, a child, a father, a mother, a brother or a sister—make the case your own, make it theirs, and bring in your verdict. The case of Human Rights against Slavery has been adjudicated in the court of conscience times innumerable. The same verdict has always been rendered—"Guilty;" the same sentence has always been pronounced, "Let it be accursed;" and human nature, with her million echoes, has rung it round the world in every language under heaven, "Let it be accursed. Let it be accursed." His heart is false to human nature, who will not say "Amen." There is not a man on earth who does not believe that slavery is a curse. Human beings may be inconsistent, but human nature is true to herself. She has uttered her testimony against slavery with a shriek ever since the monster was begotten; and till it perishes amidst the execrations of the universe, she will traverse the world on its track, dealing her bolts upon its head, and dashing against it her condemning brand. We repeat it, every man knows that slavery is a curse. Whoever denies this, his lips libel his heart. Try him; clank the chains in his ears, and tell him they are for *him*. Give him an hour to prepare his wife and children for a life of slavery. Bid him make haste and get ready their necks for the yoke, and their wrists for the coflle chains, then look at his pale lips and trembling knees, and you have *nature's* testimony against slavery.

Two millions seven hundred thousand persons in these States are in this condition. They were made slaves and are held such by force, and by being put in fear, and this for no crime! Reader, what have you to say of such treatment? Is it right, just, benevolent? Suppose I should seize you, rob you of your liberty, drive you into the field, and make you work without pay as long as you live, would that be justice and kindness, or monstrous injustice and cruelty? Now, every body knows that the slaveholders do these things to the slaves every day, and yet it is stoutly affirmed that they treat them well and kindly, and that their tender regard for their slaves restrains the masters from inflicting cruelties upon them. We shall go into no metaphysics to show the absurdity of this pretence. The man who *robs* you every day, is, forsooth, quite too tender-hearted ever to cuff or kick you! True, he can snatch your money, but he does it gently lest he should hurt you. He can empty your pockets without qualms, but if your *stomach* is empty, it cuts him to the quick. He can make you work a life time without pay, but loves you too well to let you go hungry. He fleeces you of your *rights* with a relish, but is shocked if you work bareheaded in summer, or in winter without warm stockings. He can make you go without your *liberty*, but never without a shirt. He can crush, in you, all hope of bettering your condition, by vowing that you shall die his slave, but though he can coolly torture your feelings, he is too compassionate to lacerate your back—he can break your heart, but he is very tender of your skin. He can strip you of all protection and thus expose you to all outrages, but if you are exposed to the *weather*, half clad and half sheltered, how yearn his tender bowels! What! slaveholders talk of treating men well, and yet not only rob them of all they get, and as fast as they get it, but rob them of *themselves*, also; their very hands and feet, all their muscles, and limbs, and senses, their bodies and minds, their time and liberty and earnings, their free speech and rights of con-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)

science, their right to acquire knowledge, and property, and reputation;—and yet they, who plunder them of all these, would fain make us believe that their soft hearts ooze out so lovingly toward their slaves that they always keep them well housed and well clad, never push them too hard in the field, never make their dear backs smart, nor let their dear stomachs get empty.

But there is no end to these absurdities. Are slaveholders dunces, or do they take all the rest of the world to be, that they think to bandage our eyes with such thin gauzes? Protesting their kind regard for those whom they hourly plunder of all they have and all they get! What! when they have seized their victims, and annihilated all their *rights*, still claim to be the special guardians of their *happiness*? Plunderers of their liberty, yet the careful suppliers of their wants? Robbers of their earnings, yet watchful sentinels round their interests, and kind providers of their comforts? Filching all their time, yet granting generous donations for rest and sleep? Stealing the use of their muscles, yet thoughtful of their ease? Putting them under *drivers*, yet careful that they are not hard-pushed? Too humane forsooth to stint the stomachs of their slaves, yet force their *minds* to starve, and brandish over them pains and penalties, if they dare to reach forth for the smallest crumb of knowledge, even a letter of the alphabet!

It is no marvel that slaveholders are always talking of their *kind treatment* of their slaves. The only marvel is, that men of sense can be gulled by such professions. Despots always insist that they are merciful. The greatest tyrants that ever dripped with blood have assumed the titles of “most gracious,” “most clement,” “most merciful,” &c., and have ordered their crouching vassals to accost them thus. When did not vice lay claim to those virtues which are the opposites of its habitual crimes? The guilty, according to their own showing, are always innocent, and cowards brave, and drunkards sober, and harlots chaste, and pickpockets honest to a fault. Every body understands this. When a man’s tongue grows thick, and he begins to hiccup and walk cross-legged, we expect him, as a matter of course, to protest that he is not drunk; so when a man is always singing the praises of his own honesty, we instinctively watch his movements and look out for our pocket-books. Whoever is simple enough to be hoaxed by such professions, should never be trusted in the streets without somebody to take care of him. Human nature works out in slaveholders just as it does in other men, and in American slaveholders just as in English, French, Turkish, Algerine, Roman and Grecian. The Spartans boasted of their kindness to their slaves, while they whipped them to death by thousands at

the altars of their gods. The Romans lauded their own mild treatment of their bondmen, while they branded their names on their flesh with hot irons, and when old, threw them into their fish ponds, or like Cato “the Just,” starved them to death. It is the boast of the Turks that they treat their slaves as though they were their children, yet their common name for them is “dogs,” and for the merest trifles, their feet are bastinadoed to a jelly, or their heads clipped off with the scimitar. The Portuguese pride themselves on their gentle bearing toward their slaves, yet the streets of Rio Janeiro are filled with naked men and women yoked in pairs to carts and wagons, and whipped by drivers like beasts of burden.

Slaveholders, the world over, have sung the praises of their tender mercies towards their slaves. Even the wretches that plied the African slave trade, tried to rebut Clarkson’s proofs of their cruelties, by speeches, affidavits, and published pamphlets, setting forth the accommodations of the “middle passage,” and their kind attentions to the comfort of those whom they had stolen from their homes, and kept stowed away under hatches, during a voyage of four thousand miles. So, according to the testimony of the autocrat of the Russias, he exercises great clemency towards the Poles, though he exiles them by thousands to the snows of Siberia, and tramples them down by millions, at home. Who discredits the atrocities perpetrated by Ovando in Hispaniola, Pizarro in Peru, and Cortez in Mexico,—because they filled the ears of the Spanish Court with protestations of their benignant rule? While they were yoking the enslaved natives like beasts to the draught, working them to death by thousands in their mines, hunting them with bloodhounds, torturing them on racks, and broiling them on beds of coals, their representations to the mother country teemed with eulogies of their parental sway! The bloody atrocities of Philip II., in the expulsion of his Moorish subjects, are matters of imperishable history. Who disbelieves or doubts them? And yet his courtiers magnified his virtues and chanted his clemency and his mercy, while the wail of a million victims, smitten down by a tempest of fire and slaughter let loose at his bidding, rose above the *Te Deums* that thundered from all Spain’s cathedrals. When Louis XIV. revoked the edict of Nantz, and proclaimed two millions of his subjects free plunder for persecution,—when from the English channel to the Pyrennees the mangled bodies of the Protestants were dragged on reeking hurdles by a shouting populace, he claimed to be “the father of his people,” and wrote himself “His most *Christian Majesty*.”

But we will not anticipate topics, the full discussion of which more naturally follows than

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction.*

9

precedes the inquiry into the actual condition and treatment of slaves in the United States.

As slaveholders and their apologists are volunteer witnesses in their own cause, and are flooding the world with testimony that their slaves are kindly treated; that they are well fed, well clothed, well housed, well lodged, moderately worked, and bountifully provided with all things needful for their comfort, we propose—first, to disprove their assertions by the testimony of a multitude of impartial witnesses, and then to put slaveholders themselves through a course of cross-questioning which shall draw their condemnation out of their own mouths. We will prove that the slaves in the United States are treated with barbarous inhumanity; that they are overworked, underfed, wretchedly clad and lodged, and have insufficient sleep; that they are often made to wear round their necks iron collars armed with prongs, to drag heavy chains and weights at their feet while working in the field, and to wear yokes, and bells, and iron horns; that they are often kept confined in the stocks day and night for weeks together, made to wear gags in their mouths for hours or days, have some of their front teeth torn out or broken off, that they may be easily detected when they run away; that they are frequently flogged with terrible severity, have red pepper rubbed into their lacerated flesh, and hot brine, spirits of turpentine, &c., poured over the gashes to increase the torture; that they are often stripped naked, their backs and limbs cut with knives, bruised and mangled by scores and hundreds of blows with the paddle, and terribly torn by the claws of cats, drawn over them by their tormentors; that they are often hunted with blood hounds and shot down like beasts, or torn in pieces by dogs; that they are often suspended by the arms and whipped and beaten till they faint, and when revived by restoratives, beaten again till they faint, and sometimes till they die; that their ears are often cut off, their eyes knocked out, their bones broken, their flesh branded with red hot irons; that they are maimed, mutilated and burned to death over slow fires. All these things, and more, and worse, we shall *prove*. Reader, we know whereof we affirm, we have weighed it well; *more and worse WE WILL PROVE*. Mark these words, and read on; we will establish all these facts by the testimony of scores and hundreds of eye witnesses, by the testimony of *slaveholders* in all parts of the slave states, by slaveholding members of Congress and of state legislatures, by ambassadors to foreign courts, by judges, by doctors of divinity, and clergymen of all denominations, by merchants, mechanics, lawyers and physicians, by presidents and professors in colleges and *professional* seminaries, by planters, overseers and

drivers. We shall show, not merely that such deeds are committed, but that they are frequent; not done in corners, but before the sun; not in one of the slave states, but in all of them; not perpetrated by brutal overseers and drivers merely, but by magistrates, by legislators, by professors of religion, by preachers of the gospel, by governors of states, by “gentlemen of property and standing,” and by delicate females moving in the “highest circles of society.” We know, full well, the outcry that will be made by multitudes, at these declarations; the multifarious cavils, the flat denials, the charges of “exaggeration” and “falseness” so often bandied, the sneers of affected contempt at the credulity that can believe such things, and the rage and imprecations against those who give them currency. We know, too, the threadbare sophistries by which slaveholders and their apologists seek to evade such testimony. If they admit that such deeds are committed, they tell us that they are exceedingly rare, and therefore furnish no grounds for judging of the general treatment of slaves; that occasionally a brutal wretch in the *free* states barbarously butchers his wife, but that no one thinks of inferring from that, the general treatment of wives at the North and West.

They tell us, also, that the slaveholders of the South are proverbially hospitable, kind, and generous, and it is incredible that they can perpetrate such enormities upon human beings; further, that it is absurd to suppose that they would thus injure their own property, that self interest would prompt them to treat their slaves with kindness, as none but fools and madmen wantonly destroy their own property; further, that Northern visitors at the South come back testifying to the kind treatment of the slaves, and that the slaves themselves corroborate such representations. All these pleas, and scores of others, are bruited in every corner of the free States; and who that hath eyes to see, has not sickened at the blindness that saw not, at the palsy of heart that felt not, or at the cowardice and sycophancy that dared not expose such shallow fallacies. We are not to be turned from our purpose by such vapid babblings. In their appropriate places, we propose to consider these objections and various others, and to show their emptiness and folly.

The foregoing declarations touching the inflictions upon slaves, are not hap-hazard assertions, nor the exaggerations of fiction conjured up to carry a point; nor are they the rhapsodies of enthusiasm, nor crude conclusions, jumped at by hasty and imperfect investigation, nor the aimless outpourings either of sympathy or poetry; but they are proclamations of deliberate, well-weighed convictions, produced by accumulations of proof, by affirmations and affidavits, by writ-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ten testimonies and statements of a cloud of witnesses who speak what they know and testify what they have seen, and all these impregnably fortified by proofs innumerable, in the relation of the slaveholder to his slave, the nature of arbitrary power, and the nature and history of man.

Of the witnesses whose testimony is embodied in the following pages, a majority are slaveholders, many of the remainder have been slaveholders, but now reside in free States.

Another class whose testimony will be given, consists of those who have furnished the results of their own observation during periods of residence and travel in the slave States.

We will first present the reader with a few PERSONAL NARRATIVES furnished by individuals, natives of slave states and others, embodying, in the main, the results of their own observation in the midst of slavery—facts and scenes of which they were eye-witnesses.

In the next place, to give the reader as clear and definite a view of the actual condition of slaves as possible, we propose to make specific

points, to pass in review the various particulars in the slave's condition, simply presenting sufficient testimony under each head to settle the question in every candid mind. The examination will be conducted by stating distinct propositions, and in the following order of topics.

1. THE FOOD OF THE SLAVES, THE KINDS, QUALITY AND QUANTITY, ALSO, THE NUMBER AND TIME OF MEALS EACH DAY, &c.
2. THEIR HOURS OF LABOR AND REST.
3. THEIR CLOTHING.
4. THEIR DWELLINGS.
5. THEIR PRIVATIONS AND INFLICTIONS.
6. *In conclusion*, a variety of OBJECTIONS and ARGUMENTS will be considered which are used by the advocates of slavery to set aside the force of testimony, and to show that the slaves are kindly treated.

Between the larger divisions of the work, brief personal narratives will be inserted, containing a mass of facts and testimony, both general and specific.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES.

Mr. NEHEMIAH CAULKINS, of Waterford, New London Co., Connecticut, has furnished the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society, with the following statements relative to the condition and treatment of slaves, in the south eastern part of North Carolina. Most of the facts related by Mr. Caulkins fell under his personal observation. The air of candor and honesty that pervades the narrative, the manner in which Mr. C. has drawn it up, the good sense, just views, conscience and heart which it exhibits, are sufficient of themselves to commend it to all who have ears to hear.

The Committee have no personal acquaintance with Mr. Caulkins, but they have ample testimonials from the most respectable sources; all of which represent him to be a man whose long established character for sterling integrity, sound moral principle and piety, have secured for him the uniform respect and confidence of those who know him.

Without further preface the following testimonials are submitted to the reader.

"This may certify, that we the subscribers have lived for a number of years past in the neighborhood with Mr. Nehemiah Caulkins, and have no hesitation in stating that we consider him a man of high respectability and that his character for truth and veracity is unimpeachable."

PETER COMSTOCK. D. G. OTIS.
A. F. PERKINS, M.D. PHILIP MORGAN.
ISAAC BEEBE. JAMES ROGERS, M. D."
LODOWICK BEEBE.
Waterford, Ct., Jan. 16th, 1839.

Mr. Comstock is a Justice of the Peace. Mr. L. Beebe is the Town Clerk of Waterford. Mr. J. Beebe is a member of the Baptist Church. Mr. Otis is a member of the Congregational Church. Mr. Morgan is a Justice of the Peace, and Messrs. Perkins and Rogers are designated by their titles. All those gentlemen are citizens of Waterford, Connecticut.

"To whom it may concern. This may certify that Mr. Nehemiah Caulkins, of Waterford, in New London County, is a near neighbor to the subscriber, and has been for many years. I do consider him a man of *unquestionable veracity* and certify that he is so considered by people to whom he is personally known. EDWARD R. WARREN."
Jan. 15th, 1839.

Mr. Warren is a Commissioner (Associate Judge) of the County Court, for New London County.

"This may certify that Mr. Nehemiah Caulkins, of the town of Waterford, County of New London, and State of Connecticut, is a member of the first Baptist Church in said Waterford, is in good standing, and is esteemed by us a man of truth and veracity."

FRANCIS DARROW, Pastor of said Church."
Waterford, Jan. 16th, 1839.

"This may certify that Nehemiah Caulkins, of Waterford, lives near me, and I always esteemed him, and believe him to be a man of truth and veracity."

ELISHA BECKWITH."
Jan. 16th, 1839.

Mr. Beckwith is a Justice of the Peace, a Post Master, and a Deacon of the Baptist Church.

Mr. Dwight P. Janes, a member of the Second Congregational Church in the city of New London, in a recent letter, says;

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Personal Narratives—Mr. Caulkins.*

11

“Mr. Caulkins is a member of the Baptist Church in Waterford, and in every respect a very worthy citizen. I have labored with him in the Sabbath School, and know him to be a man of active piety. The most *entire confidence* may be placed in the truth of his statements. Where he is known, no one will call them in question.”

We close these testimonials with an extract, of a letter from William Bolles, Esq., a well known and respected citizen of New London, Ct.

“Mr. Nehemiah Caulkins resides in the town of Waterford, about six miles from this City. His opportunities to acquire exact knowledge in relation to Slavery, in that section of our country,

to which his narrative is confined, have been very great. He is a carpenter, and was employed principally on the plantations, working at his trade, being thus almost constantly in the company of the slaves as well as of their masters. His full heart readily responded to the call, [for information relative to slavery,] for, as he expressed it, he had long desired that others might know what he had seen, being confident that a general knowledge of facts as they exist, would greatly promote the overthrow of the system. He is a man of undoubted character; and where known, his statements need no corroboration.

Yours, &c. WILLIAM BOLLES.

NARRATIVE OF MR. CAULKINS.

I feel it my duty to tell some things that I know about slavery, in order, if possible, to awaken more feeling at the North in behalf of the slave. The treatment of the slaves on the plantations where I had the greatest opportunity of getting knowledge, *was not so bad* as that on some neighboring estates, where the owners were noted for their cruelty. There were, however, other estates in the vicinity, where the treatment was better; the slaves were better clothed and fed, were not worked so hard, and more attention was paid to their quarters.

The scenes that I have witnessed are enough to harrow up the soul; but could the slave be permitted to tell the story of his sufferings, which no white man, not linked with slavery, is *allowed to know*, the land would vomit out the horrible system, slaveholders and all, if they would not unclinch their grasp upon their defenceless victims.

I spent eleven winters, between the years 1824 and 1835, in the state of North Carolina, mostly in the vicinity of Wilmington; and four out of the eleven on the estate of Mr. John Swan, five or six miles from that place. There were on his plantation about seventy slaves, male and female: some were married, and others lived together as man and wife, without even a mock ceremony. With their owners generally, it is a matter of indifference; the marriage of slaves not being recognized by the slave code. The slaves, however, think much of being married by a clergyman.

The cabins or huts of the slaves were small, and were built principally by the slaves themselves, as they could find time on Sundays and moonlight nights; they went into the swamps, cut the logs, backed or *hauled* them to the quarters, and put up their cabins.

When I first knew Mr. Swan's plantation, his overseer was a man who had been a Methodist minister. He treated the slaves with great cruelty. His reason for leaving the ministry and becoming an overseer, as I was informed, was this: his wife died, at which providence he was so enraged, that he swore he would not preach for the Lord another day. This man continued on the plantation about three years; at the close of which, on settlement of accounts, Mr. Swan owed him about \$400, for which he turned him out a negro woman, and about twen-

ty acres of land. He built a log hut, and took the woman to live with him; since which, I have been at his hut, and seen four or five mulatto children. He has been appointed a *justice of the peace*, and his place as overseer was afterwards occupied by a Mr. Galloway.

It is customary in that part of the country, to let the hogs run in the woods. On one occasion a slave caught a pig about two months old, which he carried to his quarters. The overseer, getting information of the fact, went to the field where he was at work, and ordered him to come to him. The slave at once suspected it was something about the pig, and fearing punishment, dropped his hoe and ran for the woods. He had got but a few rods, when the overseer raised his gun, loaded with duck shot, and brought him down. It is a common practice for overseers to go into the field armed with a gun or pistols, and sometimes both. He was taken up by the slaves and carried to the plantation hospital, and the physician sent for. A physician was employed by the year to take care of the sick or wounded slaves. In about six weeks this slave got better, and was able to come out of the hospital. He came to the mill where I was at work, and asked me to examine his body, which I did, and counted twenty-six duck shot still remaining in his flesh, though the doctor had removed a number while he was laid up.

There was a slave on Mr. Swan's plantation, by the name of Harry, who, during the absence of his master, ran away and secreted himself in the woods. This the slaves sometimes do, when the master is absent for several weeks, to escape the cruel treatment of the overseer. It is common for them to make preparations, by secreting a mortar, a hatchet, some cooking utensils, and whatever things they can get that will enable them to live while they are in the woods or swamps. Harry staid about three months, and lived by robbing the rice grounds, and by such other means as came in his way. The slaves generally know where the runaway is secreted, and visit him at night and on Sundays. On the return of his master, some of the slaves were sent for Harry. When he came home he was seized and confined in the stocks. The stocks were built in the barn, and consisted of two heavy pieces of timber, ten or more feet in length, and about seven inches wide; the lower one, on

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)

the floor, has a number of holes or places cut in it, for the ancles; the upper piece, being of the same dimensions, is fastened at one end by a hinge, and is brought down after the ancles are placed in the holes, and secured by a clasp and padlock at the other end. In this manner the person is left to sit on the floor. Harry was kept in the stocks *day and night for a week*, and flogged *every morning*. After this, he was taken out one morning, a log chain fastened around his neck, the two ends dragging on the ground, and he sent to the field, to do his task with the other slaves. At night he was again put in the stocks, in the morning he was sent to the field in the same manner, and thus dragged out another week.

The overseer was a very miserly fellow, and restricted his wife in what are considered the comforts of life—such as tea, sugar, &c. To make up for this, she set her wits to work, and, by the help of a slave, named Joe, used to take from the plantation whatever she could conveniently, and watch her opportunity during her husband's absence, and send Joe to sell them and buy for her such things as she directed. Once when her husband was away, she told Joe to kill and dress one of the pigs, sell it, and get her some tea, sugar, &c. Joe did as he was bid, and she gave him the offal for his services. When Galloway returned, not suspecting his wife, he asked her if she knew what had become of his pig. She told him she suspected one of the slaves, naming him, had stolen it, for she had heard a pig squeal the evening before. The overseer called the slave up, and charged him with the theft. He denied it, and said he knew nothing about it. The overseer still charged him with it, and told him he would give him one week to think of it, and if he did not confess the theft, or find out who did steal the pig, he would flog every negro on the plantation; before the week was up it was ascertained that Joe had killed the pig. He was called up and questioned, and admitted that he had done so, and told the overseer that he did it by the order of Mrs. Galloway, and that she directed him to buy some sugar, &c. with the money. Mrs. Galloway gave Joe the lie; and he was terribly flogged. Joe told me he had been several times to the smoke-house with Mrs. G, and taken hams and sold them, which her husband told me he supposed were stolen by the negroes on a neighboring plantation. Mr. Swan, hearing of the circumstance, told me he believed Joe's story, but that his statement would not be taken as proof; and if every slave on the plantation told the same story, it could not be received as evidence against a white person.

To show the manner in which old and worn-out slaves are sometimes treated, I will state a fact. Galloway owned a man about seventy years of age. The old man was sick and went to his hut; laid himself down on some straw with his feet to the fire, covered by a piece of an old blanket, and there lay four or five days, groaning in great distress, without any attention being paid him by his master, until death ended his miseries; he was then taken out and buried with as little ceremony and respect as would be paid to a brute.

There is a practice prevalent among the planters, of letting a negro off from severe and long-

continued punishment on account of the intercession of some white person, who pleads in his behalf, that he believes the negro will behave better; that he promises well, and he believes he will keep his promise, &c. The planters sometimes get tired of punishing a negro, and, wanting his services in the field, they get some white person to come, and, in the presence of the slave, intercede for him. At one time a negro, named Charles, was confined in the stocks in the building where I was at work, and had been severely whipped several times. He begged me to intercede for him and try to get him released. I told him I would; and when his master came in to whip him again, I went up to him and told him I had been talking with Charles, and he had promised to behave better, &c., and requested him not to punish him any more, but to let him go. He then said to Charles, "As Mr. Caulkins has been pleading for you, I will let you go on his account;" and accordingly released him.

Women are generally shown some little indulgence for three or four weeks previous to childbirth; they are at such times not often punished if they do not finish the task assigned them; it is, in some cases, passed over with a severe reprimand, and sometimes without any notice being taken of it. They are generally allowed four weeks after the birth of a child, before they are compelled to go into the field, they then take the child with them, attended sometimes by a little girl or boy, from the age of four to six, to take care of it while the mother is at work. When there is no child that can be spared, or not young enough for this service, the mother, after nursing, lays it under a tree, or by the side of a fence, and goes to her task, returning at stated intervals to nurse it. While I was on this plantation, a little negro girl, six years of age, destroyed the life of a child about two months old, which was left in her care. It seems this little nurse, so called, got tired of her charge and the labor of carrying it to the quarters at night, the mother being obliged to work as long as she could see. One evening she nursed the infant at sunset as usual, and sent it to the quarters. The little girl, on her way home, had to cross a run, or brook, which led down into the swamp; when she came to the brook she followed it into the swamp, then took the infant and plunged it head foremost into the water and mud, where it stuck fast; she there left it and went to the negro quarters. When the mother came in from the field, she asked the girl where the child was; she told her she had brought it home, but did not know where it was; the overseer was immediately informed, search was made, and it was found as above stated, and dead. The little girl was shut up in the barn, and confined there two or three weeks, when a speculator came along and bought her for two hundred dollars.

The slaves are obliged to work from daylight till dark, as long as they can see. When they have tasks assigned, which is often the case, a few of the strongest and most expert, sometimes finish them before sunset; others will be obliged to work till eight or nine o'clock in the evening. All must finish their tasks or take a flogging. The whip and gun, or pistol, are companions of the overseer; the former he uses very frequently upon the negroes, during their hours of labor,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Personal Narratives—Mr. Caulkins.*

13

without regard to age or sex. Scarcely a day passed while I was on the plantation, in which some of the slaves were not whipped; I do not mean that they were *struck a few blows* merely, but had a *set flogging*. The same labor is commonly assigned to men and women,—such as digging ditches in the rice marshes, clearing up land, chopping cord-wood, threshing, &c. I have known the women go into the barn as soon as they could see in the morning, and work as late as they could see at night, threshing rice with the flail, (they now have a threshing machine,) and when they could see to thresh no longer, they had to gather up the rice, carry it up stairs, and deposit it in the granary.

The allowance of clothing on this plantation to each slave, was given out at Christmas for the year, and consisted of one pair of coarse shoes, and enough coarse cloth to make a jacket and trowsers. If the man has a wife she makes it up; if not, it is made up in the house. The slaves on this plantation, being near Wilmington, procured themselves extra clothing by working Sundays and moonlight nights, cutting cord-wood in the swamps, which they had to back about a quarter of a mile to the river; they would then get a permit from their master, and taking the wood in their canoes, carry it to Wilmington, and sell it to the vessels, or dispose of it as they best could, and with the money buy an old jacket of the sailors, some coarse cloth for a shirt, &c. They sometimes gather the moss from the trees, which they cleanse and take to market. The women receive their allowance of the same kind of cloth which the men have. This they make into a frock; if they have any under garments they *must procure them for themselves*. When the slaves get a permit to leave the plantation, they sometimes make all ring again by singing the following significant ditty, which shows that after all there is a flow of spirits in the human breast which for a while, at least, enables them to forget their wretchedness.*

Hurra, for good ole Massa,
He giv me de pass to go to de city
Hurra, for good ole Missis,
She bile de pot, and giv me de licker.
Hurra, I'm goin to de city.

Every Saturday night the slaves receive their allowance of provisions, which must last them till the next Saturday night. "Potatoo time," as it is called, begins about the middle of July. The slave may measure for himself, the overseer being present, half a bushel of sweet potatoes, and heap the measure as long as they will lie on; I have, however, seen the overseer, if he think the negro is getting too many, kick the measure; and if any fall off, tell him he has got his measur. No salt is furnished them to eat with their potatoes. When rice or corn is given, they give them a little salt; sometimes half a pint of molasses is given, but not often. The quantity of rice, which is of the small, broken, unsaleable kind, is

* Slaves sometimes sing, and so do convicts in jails under sentence, and both for the same reason. Their singing proves that they *want* to be happy not that they *are* so. It is the *means* that they use to make themselves happy, not the evidence that they are so already. Sometimes, doubtless, the excitement of song whelms their misery in momentary oblivion. He who argues from this that they have no conscious misery to forget, knows as little of human nature as of slavery.—EDITOR.

one peck. When corn is given them, their allowance is the same, and if they get it ground, (Mr. Swan had a mill on his plantation,) they must give one quart for grinding, thus reducing their weekly allowance to seven quarts. When fish (mullet) were plenty, they were allowed, in addition, one fish. As to meat, they seldom had any. I do not think they had an allowance of meat oftener than once in two or three months, and then the quantity was very small. When they went into the field to work, they took some of the meal or rice and a pot with them; the pots were given to an old woman, who placed two poles parallel, set the pots on them, and kindled a fire underneath for cooking; she took salt with her and seasoned the messes as she thought proper. When their breakfast was ready, which was generally about ten or eleven o'clock, they were called from labor, ate, and returned to work; in the afternoon, dinner was prepared in the same way. They had but two meals a day while in the field; if they wanted more, they cooked for themselves after they returned to their quarters at night. At the time of killing hogs on the plantation, the pluck, entrails, and blood were given to the slaves.

When I first went upon Mr. Swan's plantation, I saw a slave in shackles or fetters, which were fastened around each ankle and firmly riveted, connected together by a chain. To the middle of this chain he had fastened a string, so as in a manner to suspend them and keep them from galling his ankles. This slave, whose name was Frank, was an intelligent, good looking man, and a very good mechanic. There was nothing vicious in his character, but he was one of those high-spirited and daring men, that whips, chains, fetters, and all the means of cruelty in the power of slavery, could not subdue. Mr. S. had employed a Mr. Beckwith to repair a boat, and told him Frank was a good mechanic, and he might have his services. Frank was sent for, his *shackles still on*. Mr. Beckwith set him to work making *trunnels*, &c. I was employed in putting up a building, and after Mr. Beckwith had done with Frank, he was sent for to assist me. Mr. Swan sent him to a blacksmith's shop and had his shackles cut off with a cold chisel. Frank was afterwards sold to a cotton planter.

I will relate one circumstance, which shows the little regard that is paid to the feelings of the slave. During the time that Mr. Isaiah Rogers was superintending the building of a rice machine, one of the slaves complained of a severe tooth-ache. Swan asked Mr. Rogers to take his hammer and *knock out the tooth*.

There was a slave on the plantation named Ben, a waiting man. I occupied a room in the same hut, and had frequent conversations with him. Ben was a kind-hearted man, and, I believe, a Christian; he would always ask a blessing before he sat down to eat, and was in the constant practice of praying morning and night.—One day when I was at the hut, Ben was sent for to go to the house. Ben sighed deeply and went. He soon returned with a girl about seventeen years of age, whom one of Mr. Swan's daughters had ordered him to flog. He brought her into the room where I was, and told her to stand there while he went into the next room: I

heard him groan again as he went. While there I heard his voice, and he was engaged in prayer. After a few minutes he returned with a large cow-hide, and stood before the girl, without saying a word. I concluded he wished me to leave the hut, which I did; and immediately after I heard the girl scream. At every blow she would shriek, "Do, Ben! oh do, Ben!" This is a common expression of the slaves to the person whipping them: "Do, Massa!" or, "Do, Missus!"

After she had gone, I asked Ben what she was whipped for: he told me she had done something to displease her young missus; and in boxing her ears, and otherwise beating her, she had scratched her finger by a pin in the girl's dress, for which she sent her to be flogged. I asked him if he stripped her before flogging; he said, yes; he did not like to do this, but was *obliged* to: he said he was once ordered to whip a woman, which he did without stripping her: on her return to the house, her mistress examined her back; and not seeing any marks, he was sent for, and asked why he had not whipped her: he replied that he had; she said she saw no marks, and asked him if he had made her pull her clothes off; he said, No. She then told him, that when he whipped any more of the women, he must make them strip off their clothes, as well as the men, and flog them on their bare backs, or he should be flogged himself.

Ben often appeared very gloomy and sad: I have frequently heard him, when in his room, mourning over his condition, and exclaim, "Poor African slave! Poor African slave!" Whipping was so common an occurrence on this plantation, that it would be too great a repetition to state the *many* and *severe* floggings I have seen inflicted on the slaves. They were flogged for not performing their tasks, for being careless, slow, or not in time, for going to the fire to warm, &c. &c.; and it often seemed as if occasions were sought as an excuse for punishing them.

On one occasion, I heard the overseer charge the hands to be at a certain place the next morning at sun-rise. I was present in the morning, in company with my brother, when the hands arrived. Joe, the slave already spoken of, came running, all out of breath, about five minutes behind the time, when, without asking any questions, the overseer told him to take off his jacket. Joe took off his jacket. He had on a piece of a shirt; he told him to take it off: Joe took it off: he then whipped him with a heavy cow-hide full six feet long. At every stroke Joe would spring from the ground, and scream, "O my God! Do, Massa Galloway!" My brother was so exasperated, that he turned to me and said, "If I were Joe, I would kill the overseer if I knew I should be shot the next minute."

In the winter the horn blew at about four in the morning, and all the threshers were required to be at the threshing floor in fifteen minutes after. They had to go about a quarter of a mile from their quarters. Galloway would stand near the entrance, and all who did not come in time would get a blow over the back or head as heavy as he could strike. I have seen him, at such times, follow after them, striking furiously a number of blows, and every one followed by their screams. I have seen the women go to their work after

such a flogging, crying and taking on most piteously.

It is almost impossible to believe that human nature can endure such hardships and sufferings as the slaves have to go through: I have seen them driven into a ditch in a rice swamp to bail out the water, in order to put down a flood-gate, when they had to break the ice, and there stand in the water among the ice until it was hauled out. I have *often* known the hands to be taken from the field, sent down the river in flats or boats to Wilmington, absent from twenty-four to thirty hours, *without any thing to eat*, no provision being made for these occasions.

Galloway kept medicine on hand, that in case any of the slaves were sick, he could give it to them without sending for the physician; but he always kept a good look out that they did not sham sickness. When any of them excited his suspicions, he would make them take the medicine in his presence, and would give them a rap on the top of the head, to make them swallow it. A man once came to him, of whom he said he was suspicious: he gave him two potions of salts, and fastened him in the stocks for the night. His medicine soon began to operate; and *there he lay in all his filth till he was taken out the next day.*

One day, Mr. Swan beat a slave severely, for alleged carelessness in letting a boat get adrift. The slave was told to secure the boat: whether he took sufficient means for this purpose I do not know; he was not allowed to make any defence. Mr. Swan called him up, and asked why he did not secure the boat: he pulled off his hat and began to tell his story. Swan told him he was a damned liar, and commenced beating him over the head with a hickory cane, and the slave retreated backwards; Swan followed him about two rods, threshing him over the head with the hickory as he went.

As I was one day standing near some slaves who were threshing, the driver, thinking one of the women did not use her flail quick enough, struck her over the head: the end of the whip hit her in the eye. I thought at the time he had put it out; but, after poulticing and doctoring for some days, she recovered. Speaking to him about it, he said that he once struck a slave so as to put one of her eyes entirely out.

A patrol is kept upon each estate, and every slave found off the plantation without a pass is whipped on the spot. I knew a slave who started without a pass, one night, for a neighboring plantation, to see his wife: he was caught, tied to a tree, and flogged. He stated his business to the patrol, who was well acquainted with him, but all to no purpose. I spoke to the patrol about it afterwards: he said he knew the negro, that he was a very clever fellow, but he had to whip him; for, if he let him pass, he must another, &c. He stated that he had sometimes caught and flogged four in a night.

In conversation with Mr. Swan about runaway slaves, he stated to me the following fact:—A slave, by the name of Luke, was owned in Wilmington; he was sold to a speculator and carried to Georgia. After an absence of about two months the slave returned; he watched an opportunity to enter his old master's house when the family were absent, no one being at home but a

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Personal Narratives—Mr. Caulkins.*

15

young waiting man. Luke went to the room where his master kept his arms; took his gun, with some ammunition, and went into the woods. On the return of his master, the waiting man told him what had been done: this threw him into a violent passion; he swore he would kill Luke, or lose his own life. He loaded another gun, took two men, and made search, but could not find him: he then advertised him, offering a large reward if delivered to him or lodged in jail. His neighbors, however, advised him to offer a reward of two hundred dollars for him *dead or alive*, which he did. Nothing however was heard of him for some months. Mr. Swan said, one of his slaves ran away, and was gone eight or ten weeks; on his return he said he had found Luke, and that he had a rifle, two pistols, and a sword.

I left the plantation in the spring, and returned to the north; when I went out again, the next fall, I asked Mr. Swan if any thing had been heard of Luko; he said he was *shot*, and related to me the manner of his death, as follows:—Luke went to one of the plantations, and entered a hut for something to eat. Being fatigued, he sat down and fell asleep. There was only a woman in the hut at the time: as soon as she found he was asleep, she ran and told her master, who took his rifle, and called two white men on another plantation: the three, with their rifles, then went to the hut, and posted themselves in different positions, so that they could watch the door. When Luke waked up he went to the door to look out, and saw them with their rifles, he stepped back and raised his gun to his face. They called to him to surrender; and stated that they had him in their power, and said he had better give up. He said he would not; and if they tried to take him, he would kill one of them; for, if he gave up, he knew they would kill him, and he was determined to sell his life as dear as he could. They told him, if he should shoot one of them, the other two would certainly kill him: he replied, he was determined not to give up, and kept his gun moving from one to the other; and while his rifle was turned toward one, another, standing in a different direction, shot him through the head, and he fell lifeless to the ground.

There was another slave shot while I was there; this man had run away, and had been living in the woods a long time, and it was not known where he was, till one day he was discovered by two men, who went on the large island near Belvidere to hunt turkeys; they shot him and carried his head home.

It is common to keep dogs on the plantations, to pursue and catch runaway slaves. I was once bitten by one of them. I went to the overseer's house, the dog lay in the piazza, as soon as I put my foot upon the floor, he sprang and bit me just above the knee, but not severely; he tore my pantaloons badly. The overseer apologized for his dog, saying he never knew him to bite a *white* man before. He said he once had a dog, when he lived on another plantation, that was very useful to him in hunting runaway negroes. He said that a slave on the plantation once ran away; as soon as he found the course he took, he put the dog on the track, and he soon came so close upon him that the man

had to climb a tree, he followed with his gun, and brought the slave home.

The slaves have a great dread of being sold and carried south. It is generally said, and I have no doubt of its truth, that they are much worse treated farther south.

The following are a few among the many facts related to me while I lived among the slaveholder. The names of the planters and plantations, I shall not give, *as they did not come under my own observation*. I however place the fullest confidence in their truth.

A planter not far from Mr. Swan's employed an overseer to whom he paid \$400 a year; he became dissatisfied with him, because he did not drive the slaves hard enough, and get more work out of them. He therefore sent to South Carolina, or Georgia, and got a man to whom he paid I believe \$800 a year. He proved to be a cruel fellow, and drove the slaves almost to death. There was a slave on this plantation, who had repeatedly run away, and had been severely flogged every time. The last time he was caught, a hole was dug in the ground, and he buried up to the chin, his arms being secured down by his sides. He was kept in this situation four or five days.

The following was told me by an intimate friend; it took place on a plantation containing about one hundred slaves. One day the owner ordered the women into the barn, he then went in among them, whip in hand, and told them he meant to flog them all to death; they began immediately to cry out "What have I done Massa?" "What have I done Massa?" He replied; "D—n you, I will let you know what you have done, you don't breed, I haven't had a young one from one of you for several months." They told him they could not breed while they had to work in the rice ditches. (The rice grounds are low and marshy, and have to be drained, and while digging or clearing the ditches, the women had to work in mud and water from one to two feet in depth; they were obliged to draw up and secure their frocks about their waist, to keep them out of the water, in this manner they frequently had to work from daylight in the morning till it was so dark they could see no longer.) After swearing and threatening for some time, he told them to tell the overseer's wife, when they got in that way, and he would put them upon the land to work.

This same planter had a female slave who was a member of the Methodist Church; for a slave she was intelligent and conscientious. He proposed a criminal intercourse with her. She would not comply. He left her and sent for the overseer, and told him to have her flogged. It was done. Not long after, he renewed his proposal. She again refused. She was again whipped. He then told her why she had been twice flogged, and told her he intended to whip her till she should yield. The girl, seeing that her case was hopeless, her back smarting with the scourging she had received, and dreading a repetition, gave herself up to be the victim of his brutal lusts.

One of the slaves on another plantation, gave birth to a child which lived but two or three weeks. After its death the planter called the woman to him, and asked her how she came to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08404-8 - American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses

Edited by Theodore Dwight Weld

Excerpt

[More information](#)

let the child die; said it was all owing to her carelessness, and that he meant to flog her for it. She told him with all the feeling of a mother, the circumstances of its death. But her story availed her nothing against the savage brutality of her master. She was severely whipped. A healthy child four months old was then considered worth \$100 in North Carolina.

The foregoing facts were related to me by white persons of character and respectability. The following fact was related to me on a plantation where I have spent considerable time and where the punishment was inflicted. I have no doubt of its truth. A slave ran away from his master, and got as far as Newbern. He took provisions that lasted him a week; but having eaten all, he went to a house to get something to satisfy his hunger. A white man suspecting him to be a runaway, demanded his pass: as he had none he was seized and put in Newbern jail. He was there advertised, his description given, &c. His master saw the advertisement and sent for him; when he was brought back, his wrists were tied together and drawn over his knees. A stick was then passed over his arms and under his knees, and he secured in this manner, his trowsers were then stripped down, and he turned over on his side, and severely beaten with the paddle, then turned over and severely beaten on the other side, and then turned back again, and tortured by another bruising and beating. He was afterwards kept in the stocks a week, and whipped every morning.

To show the disgusting pollutions of slavery, and how it covers with moral filth every thing it touches, I will state two or three facts, which I have on such evidence I cannot doubt their truth. A planter offered a white man of my acquaintance twenty dollars for every one of his female slaves, whom he would get in the family way. This offer was no doubt made for the purpose of improving the stock, on the same principle that farmers endeavour to improve their cattle by crossing the breed.

Slaves belonging to merchants and others in the city, often hire their own time, for which they pay various prices per week or month, according to the capacity of the slave. The females who thus hire their time, pursue various modes to procure the money; their masters making no inquiry how they get it, provided the money comes. If it is not regularly paid they are flogged. Some take in washing, some cook on board vessels, pick oakum, sell peanuts, &c., while others, younger and more comely, often resort to the vilest pursuits. I knew a man from the north who, though married to a respectable southern woman, kept two of these mulatto girls in an upper room at his store; his wife told some of her friends that he had not lodged at home for two weeks together, I have seen these two *kept misses*, as they are there called, at his store; he was afterwards stabbed in an attempt to arrest a runaway slave, and died in about ten days.

The clergy at the north cringe beneath the corrupting influence of slavery, and their moral courage is borne down by it. Not the hypocritical and unprincipled alone, but even such as can hardly be supposed to be destitute of sincerity.

Going one morning to the Baptist Sunday school, in Wilmington, in which I was engaged, I fell in with the Rev. Thomas P. Hunt, who was going to the Presbyterian school. I asked him how he could bear to see the little negro children beating their hoops, hallooing, and running about the streets, as we then saw them, their moral condition entirely neglected, while the whites were so carefully gathered into the schools. His reply was substantially this:—"I can't bear it, Mr. Caulkins. I feel as deeply as any one can on this subject, but what can I do? MY HANDS ARE TIED."

Now, if Mr. Hunt was guilty of neglecting his duty, as a servant of HIM who never failed to rebuke sin in high places, what shall be said of those clergymen at the north, where the power that closed his mouth is comparatively unfeeling, who refuse to tell their people how God abhors oppression, and who seldom open their mouths on this subject, but to denounce the friends of emancipation, thus giving the strongest support to the accursed system of slavery. I believe Mr. Hunt has since become an agent of the Temperance Society.

In stating the foregoing facts, my object has been to show the practical workings of the system of slavery, and if possible to correct the misapprehension on this subject, so common at the north. In doing this I am not at war with slaveholders. No, my soul is moved for them as well as for the poor slaves. May God send them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth! Principle, on a subject of this nature, is dearer to me than the applause of men, and should not be sacrificed on any subject, even though the ties of friendship may be broken. We have too long been silent on this subject, the slave has been too much considered, by our northern states, as being kept by necessity in his present condition.—Were we to ask, in the language of Pilate, "what evil have they done?"—we may search their history, we cannot find that they have taken up arms against our government, nor insulted us as a nation—that they are thus compelled to drag out a life in chains! subjected to the most terrible inflictions if in any way they manifest a wish to be released.—Let us reverse the question. What evil has been done to them by those who call themselves masters? First let us look at their persons, "neither clothed nor naked"—I have seen instances where this phrase would not apply to boys and girls, and that too in winter. I knew one young man seventeen years of age, by the name of Dave, on Mr. J. Swan's plantation, worked day after day in the rice machine as naked as when he was born. The reason of his being so, his master said in my hearing, was, that he could not keep clothes on him—he would get into the fire and burn them off.

Follow them next to their huts; some with and some without floors:—Go at night, view their means of lodging, see them lying on benches, some on the floor or ground, some sitting on stools, dozing away the night;—others, of younger age, with a bare blanket wrapped about them; and one or two lying in the ashes. These things I have often seen with my own eyes.

Examine their means of subsistence, which consists generally of seven quarts of meal or