

1952

The Negro in Colonial Virginia 1619-1765

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<https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-hg8f-ke25>

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THE NEGRO IN COLONIAL VIRGINIA
"
1619-1765

A Thesis
Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of William and Mary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts
in the Department of History

by
Francis Moore Hook
August 1952

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to show certain aspects of the life of the Negro in Virginia during the period 1619-1765. It was not until the twentieth century that any writer brought out the fact that Negro slavery was a gradual development from a status similar to that of white servitude in the Colony of Virginia. The gradual change from servitude to slavery, together with the existence of a free Negro class, will be discussed in some detail.

The second chapter is devoted to tracing the gradually increasing numbers of Negroes brought into the Colony; their varying personal traits, which could be predicted to a degree by knowing the part of Africa from which the blacks originated; and some of the early laws and problems created by the Negro.

With the opening of the eighteenth century the Negro slave finally took the place of the white servant as the main source of plantation labor. The final chapter is devoted mainly to the troubles of the Negro slaves during the first half of the century. As they arrived in ever-increasing numbers the colonists became fearful of slave insurrections, and the Assembly passed many special acts designed to reduce the danger from this source.

No attempt has been made to take any stand on the question of Negro slavery. It is the Negro himself, as runaway, plotter, murderer, and suicide with which we are

concerned. The reader should not be influenced by the preponderance of space devoted to the troubles of the Negro to think of these things as forming the main pattern of Negro life in the Colony. On the contrary the majority of the Negroes, whether bond or free, were probably fairly content with their lot, and most of them managed to avoid serious trouble.

Although a few cases of slave suicides in the 1770's have been included, our story really ends in the 1760's. No attempt has been made by the writer to show the changing attitude toward slavery by some of the owners in the closing years of the Colonial Period.

CHAPTER I

FROM SERVITUDE TO SLAVERY;
THE FREE NEGRO

CHAPTER I

The year 1619 was a notable one in the infant colony of Virginia. A new governor, Sir George Yeardley, arrived in April of that year bringing important commissions, ordinances, and instructions from the Virginia Company in London. These instructions were designed to institute much needed reforms in the struggling little colony. Among the more important reforms were the abolition of martial law, the establishment of the Virginia Assembly, and the settlement of land tenure.

Since the problem of land tenure was inextricably bound up with the labor system in Virginia, it will be dealt with at some length. The Virginia Company made provision for the various classes of shareholders as follows: The "adventurers," those men who had risked only their money in Company stock, would receive dividends on their investments in the form of land grants at the rate of 100 acres for each share of stock. The "ancient planters," those who had come over before Governor Dale's departure from Virginia in the spring of 1616, were entitled to 100 acres for their personal adventure, plus an additional 100 acres for each share of stock they might own in the Company. Others who had settled before that date, but at the Company's charge, were to be granted, after their term of service on the public land had expired, 100 acres to be held by them in return for an

annual quit-rent of two shillings. Those who had come at their own cost after the spring of 1616 would receive 50 acres, and were required to pay a quit-rent of one shilling. Those coming to the Colony in the future would receive 50 acres upon a first division after a residence of three years, and a like amount on a second division, allotted after the first land was occupied. Land so granted was subject to an annual quit-rent of one shilling for each 50 acres. But the most important method of obtaining a patent for land was that which became known as the head-right. This method was also provided for in the instructions to Governor Yeardley, and became more important with each passing year until it became the principal basis for title. Every shareholder who transported an emigrant, whether bond or free, to the Colony, acquired thereby a claim to 50 acres if the person remained in Virginia for three years, or even if he died after he boarded ship on the outward voyage. Not even in the few remaining years of the Company was the acquisition of fifty acres through the head-right confined to the shareholders. Anyone who emigrated to the Colony, or who took or sent over another person, became entitled to the same area of land. After the dissolution of the Virginia Company in 1624, the head-right became still more common as the basis of securing a patent. When the charter of the Company was recalled, there was a feeling of profound uneasiness in the Colony that all titles to land might be questioned. However their

fears were entirely removed by a grant of letters patent from the King on the 14th of March, 1625, in which the ordinance with reference to the head-right received royal approval.¹

The plantation system, which was to be the main way of life throughout the whole colonial period in Virginia, required three elements for its development: an abundant supply of cheap virgin land, a staple crop, and a dependable source of agricultural labor. The head-right, plus the unlimited supply of rich virgin land, assured the first element.

Even prior to 1619 it was evident that the culture of tobacco would fulfill the requirement of a staple crop. John Rolfe's experiments in 1612 with sweet-scented and Orinoco tobacco with seeds brought in from the West Indies and Venezuela soon caught on, and the planting of tobacco became in a very short time almost universal with the colonists. So popular did the raising of tobacco become that when Governor Argall arrived in Jamestown in May, 1617, he found it planted even in the market-place and the streets of the little town.² There were several reasons why tobacco became the main export commodity of the Colony. It occupied much less bulk in proportion to its value; an important consideration due to the high freight charges for the long haul to the European markets. The leafy mould of the newly-cleared lands of Virginia was ideally suited to its growth. And there was

a growing demand for Virginia tobacco in the markets of England and Holland. But the most compelling reason of all was the one offered by Captain John Smith in testimony before the royal commissioners at the time the question of repealing the charter of the Company was agitated. He was asked why it was that the Colony, in spite of the fertility of its soil and the variety of its natural products, exported but one commodity. His reply, in substance, was, that grain brought only two shillings and six pence a bushel, while tobacco brought three shillings a pound. And, on this basis, a man's labor in tobacco was calculated to be worth fifty or sixty pounds, but in grain not over ten pounds a year.³ For these reasons, and despite ruinously low prices during certain periods, together with high export duties, the colonists clung to the culture of tobacco throughout the whole of the Colonial Period.

Now that the planter had the means for obtaining land, and a money crop suited to it, his crying need was for labor to handle the heavy work of clearing away the forest, and to perform the tedious tasks of planting, cultivating, and harvesting the crops. The richest lands, the ones promising the largest returns in tobacco, were those bearing the heaviest growths of timber. This was particularly true of the bottom lands in the valleys of the rivers along the banks of which the earlier settlers located. It was in the slow, back-breaking work of clearing the timber from the land

that the settler most needed the aid of others. And the natural character of tobacco, which soon exhausted even the richest land, demanded a continuation of this aid for clearing new fields to plant in place of those worn out by a few years of tobacco culture. It was many years before the Virginia planter made any attempt to enrich worn out lands by the use of manures. Instead he cleared the growth from another section of virgin land, used the riches in this land for a few crops of tobacco, and then repeated the process. It was this periodic replacement of old land with new, plus the ambition to have more and more acres of tobacco, that created such an acute demand for servants.⁴

The term "servant" has been misinterpreted in modern times due to the menial significance which has gradually become associated with the word. The members of this class in Colonial Virginia included all those who had bound themselves by a formal written document or indenture, or by the equally binding force of the universal custom of the country, to continue for a prescribed time in another's employment. The term was applied mainly to those who had contracted to work as agricultural laborers, or as artisans and mechanics; but it was also used to describe anyone who served another in any capacity.⁵

We have seen how the settlement of land tenure by the head-right system, plus the widespread culture of tobacco, created a very strong demand for the importation of

agricultural labor into Virginia. At the same time there were conditions in England which equally favored an exodus of just such persons out of the mother country. Under the provisions of a statute dating back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth no one was permitted to follow a trade unless he had first served an apprenticeship therein; and all those not otherwise employed were required to take part in husbandry. The practical effect of this regulation was to create a privileged class of artisans who were assured of steady and remunerative work, while the great masses of the people were thrown into agricultural labor as their only possible means of obtaining a livelihood. The rates of wages of those who could secure employment were laid down by the justices at the quarter sessions. Even allowing for the greater purchasing power of money in that age as compared with the present, the wages of the laboring classes seem amazingly small. For example, the county of Rutland in 1610 set the following rates: the annual wages of a ploughman were fifty shillings; of an ordinary workingman, forty shillings; of women who could bake and brew, twenty-six shillings; of a common female drudge, sixteen shillings; of girls under sixteen years of age, fourteen shillings. Among those paid daily rates an average mower received five pence a day plus an allowance of meat; a male reaper, four pence; a female reaper, three pence; and a female haymaker, two pence. When food was not provided by the employer, these amounts were doubled.

Although another statute provided for regular assessments for the benefit of the poor, the amounts collected were so small that many among the working classes perished from want. In 1622 several English parishes turned loose upon the country a flood of idle or disabled laborers which was so great as to threaten a dangerous pestilence of vagabonds. No matter how willing they may have been to work, they could not find employment. This condition was not confined to a few communities but was, in varying degree, common to all England. Each parish, for its own protection, was forced to adopt the most stringent measures to keep such persons in other parts of England from overflowing into its own boundaries. The effect of such measures was to confine the great mass of laborers to their own native parishes, thus not only restricting their personal liberties, but making it even more difficult for them to gain a livelihood.

In addition to all his other woes, the agricultural laborer of seventeenth-century England was exposed to heavy penalties for the smallest infractions of law. There were no less than three hundred offenses punishable by death, many of which would not even be classed as felonies in our present code of laws. Is it any wonder then that large numbers of these laborers should be willing and anxious to exchange a few years of servitude for the opportunity to gain a new home and a new life in Virginia?⁶

When Governor Yeardley arrived in Virginia in 1619 he did not bring freedom to all the old planters, but only to those who had gone at their own expense previous to the departure of Dale in 1616, and to those sent at the Company's expense who had already worked out the full time of their servitude to the Company.⁷ Many were retained in servitude until the end of their terms, and the Company continued to send out servants at its own charge until the dissolution of the Company in 1624. However the bulk of the servants coming over after 1619 were brought in by private persons to work their lands, and, by means of head-rights, to add to their holdings. But it was the example of servitude under the Virginia Company which set the pattern by which the new landowners of the Colony would fulfill their labor needs for many years to come. In its simplest form, this system called for the master to pay the transportation of the laborer and his upkeep, in exchange for his services during a specified number of years. This system, which became known as "indented servitude," received recognition in the laws passed by the very first Assembly in 1619.⁸ The name came about through the indenture, or contract, by which the servant bound himself to his master. The servitude thus developed was limited and conditional. With respect to its origin it was of two kinds, resting on definite principles, These two general kinds of servitude were voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary servitude was based on free contract

with the London Company or with private persons for definite terms of service, in consideration of the servant's transportation and maintenance during servitude. Involuntary servitude was of two types. The first resulted when legal authority in England condemned a person to a term of servitude judged necessary to deter him from an idle course of life, or to take the place of punishment for crimes already committed. The second type of involuntary servants were those men, women, and children, usually of the poor vagrant class, who were kidnapped by the so-called "spirits" and shanghaied for profit.

The great body of servants that went to Virginia was comprised of the voluntary class. They were free persons, largely from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, who wished to go to the Colony as settlers to better their condition, but were too poor to pay the cost of transportation. They consequently entered into a voluntary contract with any one that would assume these charges, and in turn placed themselves for a limited time at the disposal of such person for any reasonable service. The contract was made in Great Britain with resident planters, or the agents of colonists, or even more frequently with shipmasters who traded in Virginia, and disposed of the servants on their arrival there as they saw fit.⁹

In the light of what has been said above let us look again at the Colony of Virginia as it was in the year

1619. The Virginia Company, through its officials in England and its governor with his assistants in Virginia, still controlled the destiny of the little colony. There were public lands on which servants of the Company still labored to pay the salaries of appointed officials, and to work out their terms of servitude. There were private lands also, owned by those who were no longer indebted to the Company, and on which indented servants worked out their terms, so that they too might become tobacco planters. This then was the state of affairs when the first Negroes came into the Colony of Virginia.

From the quaint narrative of John Rolfe, who probably was an eyewitness of the event, we learn that "About the last of August [1619] came in a dutch man of warre that sold us twenty Negars."¹⁰ Thus in a few laconic words was announced the arrival of the first actors in a drama that would later so drastically affect the life of the Colony, the Commonwealth, and the Nation. It is regrettable that so little was recorded about this new inhabitant of the little Colony, for many misapprehensions as to his early status have been handed down to us. It shall be my purpose in the balance of this chapter to attempt to trace the status of the Negro from his first arrival until the system of Negro slavery was definitely fixed in statutory law.

The twenty Negroes that were brought in by the Dutch privateer had been taken from a captured slaver, and

were certainly slaves in the hands of their Dutch sellers. But what was their status in the hands of their Virginia buyers? At this time there was neither law nor custom establishing the institution of slavery in the Colony. There was, however, the institution of servitude, which in this very year had obtained recognition in the laws of the Colony. And the relations of these servants to their masters during the period of their service somewhat closely resembled the relations of slavery. But such temporary servitude must be distinguished from slavery. The difference between the two conditions is fundamental. The loss of liberty to the servant is temporary; the bondage of the slave is perpetual. Dr. J. C. Ballagh in A History of Slavery in Virginia was the first to point out the error in the assumption that slavery was introduced into Virginia. His thesis in the chapter entitled "Development of Slavery" is that "Servitude . . . was the historic base upon which slavery, by the extension and addition of incidents, was constructed."¹¹ It is my contention, as well as his, that the earlier Negroes brought to Virginia were sold as servants, and it is hoped that the facts here set forth will bear this out.

One of the most convincing evidences that the first Negroes were servants and not slaves is the way they are noted in "Lists of living and dead in Virginia"¹² in 1623, and the "Muster Rolls of the Settlements in Virginia,"¹³

a census made in 1624-25. In both of these there are twenty-three Negroes reported, and in every case they are listed as "servants," thus receiving the same class name as many white persons enumerated in the lists. They were distributed as follows: Abraham Piersey, 7; George Yeardley, 8; Captain William Piercey, 1; Richard Kingsmall, 1; Edward Bennett, 2; Captain William Tucker, 3; Captain Francis West, 1. All these persons held other servants besides the Negroes; and some of these men, being officers in the Colony, may have had merely the right of an officer over company servants.¹⁴ In the opinion of Thomas Jefferson, "the right to these negroes was common, or, perhaps, they lived on a footing with the whites, who, as well as themselves, were under the absolute direction of the president."¹⁵

In the records of the county courts dating from 1632 to 1661 Negroes are designated as "servants," "negro servants," or simply as "negroes," but never as slaves.¹⁶ There is an interesting entry in the general court records for 1640-41, which is an example of Negro servants receiving treatment similar to that of white servants. An order of the court reads as follows:

March 31, 1641. Whereas it appeareth to this court that John Geaween being a negro servant unto William Evans was permitted by his said master to keep hogs and make the best benefit thereof to himself provided that the said Evans might have half the increase, which was accordingly returned unto him by the said negro and the other half reserved for his own benefit.

By this same court order Geaween was permitted to purchase his child's freedom from Lieutenant Robert Sheppard who was master of the child's mother. By order of the court the child was declared to be "free from the said Evans or his assigns and to be and remain at the disposing and education of the said Geaween and the child's godfather who undertaketh to see it brought up in the christian religion as aforesaid."¹⁷

At the same period in which we find such evidence of the equal treatment of white and Negro servants, there are other cases which point clearly to the beginning of Negro slavery. When the court records are examined for the purpose of determining the time of the transition, it appears that between 1640 and 1660 slavery was fast becoming an established fact. Apparently at the time some of the Negroes were servants and some were slaves.

In 1640 the general court rendered in an interesting case a judgment which is very instructive as to the earliest development of slavery. It seems that three servants ran away from their master, Hugh Gwyn--one a Dutchman called Victor, one a Scotchman named James Gregory, and John Punch, a Negro. All three were sentenced to whipping, each to receive thirty stripes. The Dutchman and the Scotchman were to serve their master one year after their respective terms expired, and then to serve the Colony for three years. But the third offender " . . . being a negro named John Punch shall serve his said master or his assigns for the time of

his natural life here or elsewhere."¹⁸ Here is clear proof that Negroes who had been servants were, as early as the year 1640, sentenced to be slaves.

A case which came up for trial before the general court three months after the case cited above indicates that some Negroes were already being held as slaves as early as 1640. The record, on the complaint of Captain William Pierce, reads in part: ". . . that six of his servants and a negro of Mr. Reginald's has plotted to run away unto the Dutch plantation." In addition to the fact that the Negro is not called a servant here, the nature of the penalties inflicted indicated that he was a slave. The "prime agent" in the case was a Dutchman named Christopher Miller. The punishments meted out to him were thirty stripes, burning the letter "R" on his cheek, the wearing of shackles on his leg for a year, and seven years' service to the Colony when his term to his master should expire. The punishments ordered for the other white servants were less severe, but all of them had to serve the Colony at least two years after their terms expired. The Negro was given exactly the same punishment as the prime agent except the addition to his time of service. This would seem to indicate that the Negro was a slave and therefore "incapable of making satisfaction by addition of time."¹⁹

Some time before 1644 one Thomas Bushrod, assignee of Colonel William Smith, sold a mulatto named Manuel "as a

Slave for Ever but in September 1644 the said Servant was by the Assembly adjudged no Slave and but to serve as other Christian servants do and was freed in September, 1665."²⁰ So although some Negroes had been reduced to a state of slavery much earlier than this, others retained their right to freedom as late as 1665, after slavery had been recognized by statutory law. Another Negro was set free this same year by order of the general court "after serving seven years."²¹ Another similar ruling in the same year was transcribed in the Robinson Manuscript simply as "a judgement of a negro for his freedom."

It is interesting to see that all records after the middle of the century indicate that slavery was fast becoming the rule. An entry upon the minutes of the general court in 1656 shows that a "Mullato was held to be a slave and appeal taken."²²

The facts of the case were probably somewhat as follows: the planters hated to break in and train servants only to see them leave shortly after they became really useful. They were bound to know that Negroes were slaves in the islands of the West Indies. These Africans were far from home, were very different in appearance from the white colonists, and, being in the minority and subservient, were the more easily exploited. So gradually, through precedents and court decisions, the status of the Negro changed from one of servitude to one of slavery.

It was not until 1662 that a statute dealing directly with the status of Negroes as slaves was passed. This act said in part:

WHEREAS some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a negro woman should be slave or Free, Be it therefore enacted and declared by this present grand assembly, that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother . . .²³

The wording of this act is clear enough proof that slavery was a well established condition by this time. However it was not until 1670 that a statute was passed declaring who should be slaves. Though it apparently was written to clarify the position of Indians taken in war, it definitely established that Negroes coming into the Colony would be slaves. The act reads:

WHEREAS some dispute have arisen whether Indians taken in warr by any other nation, and by that nation that taketh them sold to the English, are servants for life or terme of yeares, It is resolved and enacted that all servants not being christians imported into this colony by shipping shalbe slaves for their lives; but what shall come by land shall serve, if boyes or girles, untill thirty yeares of age, if men or women twelve yeares and no longer.²⁴

The Assembly had already plugged the loophole of possible freedom through baptism three years earlier than this by passing a law saying that baptism could not be used to exempt from bondage.²⁵

By 1670 the institution of Negro slavery, which had already become the habit through customary law and court decisions was now firmly fixed by statutory law. We must

not get the impression, however, that the statutes enacted in the decade between 1660 and 1670 led to the enslavement of all the Africans in Virginia. They did certainly give legislative recognition and sanction to the institution of Negro slavery; but some of these laws equally recognized and provided for the perpetuation of a free Negro class. For instance, the law of 1662 which said that mulatto offspring should follow the condition of the mother, not only insured that children born of a slave mother would be slaves, but conversely that those born of a free mother would just as surely be free. Nor did these first laws reduce to a state of slavery those Negroes who were free, or who were servants by covenant or contract. In addition to the inferences to be drawn from the statutes, there are court records which give direct testimony of the existence of free Negroes, and those serving only a limited period. In 1673 a judgment was rendered by the general court against Mr. George Light for holding a Negro indented servant beyond his contract term of five years. The court ordered that the Negro should " . . . bee free from his said master, and that the Said Mr. Light pay him Corne and Clothes According to the custome of the Country and Four hundred Pounds tob[acco] & Caske for his service Done him Since he was free, and pay Costs."²⁶

The year 1682 marked the end of the period when it was possible for Negroes to come to Virginia as servants and to acquire their freedom after a limited term. The law of

1670, mentioned above, was intended to enslave all Negroes brought in after its enactment, but in practice it allowed a few to escape. The law of 1682, in a long preamble, recognized the weakness in the earlier one, and so repealed the act of 1670. By the terms of this later act all persons of non-Christian nationality thereafter coming into the Colony were to be slaves whether they came by sea or land, and whether or not they had been converted to Christianity after capture.²⁷

After the enactment of this law the free Negro population of Virginia received no increase from outside the Colony during the balance of the Colonial Period. There were means, however, by which the number of free Negroes grew larger, this increase springing from the population already within the Colony. There were five sources of these free colored people, as follows:

- (1) Children born of free colored parents.
- (2) Mulatto children born of free colored mothers.
- (3) Mulatto children born of white women.
- (4) Children of free Negro and Indian mixed parentage.
- (5) Manumitted slaves.

Where both parents were free Negroes no special comment is required; during the whole of the slavery period children of such parents were recognized as freemen, and their natural increase was a substantial factor in the increase of the free Negro population. The most numerous class of mulattoes were those born of slave mothers, but such children were slaves. Both classes of free mulattoes were the product

of illegitimacy since the law forbade the intermarriage of whites and Negroes.²⁸ The same law of 1691 provided that free mulatto bastards should be bound out by the church wardens to responsible white persons as apprentices until they reached the age of thirty years.²⁹ In the revision of this act in 1705 the age at which such apprenticeship ended was placed at thirty-one years.³⁰ In 1765 the Assembly felt this was "an unreasonable severity towards such children," and reduced the term of apprenticeship so that males served only to age twenty-one, and the females to age eighteen.³¹ The children born of mixed Indian and free Negro parentage, if they had no visible means of support, were also bound out as apprentices in the same manner as the free mulatto children.

Although manumission was to become the most important method by which the free Negro population was increased, it never added materially to their numbers during the Colonial Period. As a matter of fact there was no law passed regarding manumission until the year 1691, and this law was designed to reduce private manumissions very drastically. It required the master to pay the charges for transporting such Negroes beyond the limits of the Colony within six months after setting them free.³² It is true, however, that private manumissions had been made for many years prior to this date. They probably grew out of the close relationship of indented servitude and slavery in the seventeenth

century. Although the servant himself was not regarded as property, his term of service was; and the master felt he had a perfect right to dispose of a part of this service just as he might any other property. That is, the unexpired time of a servant could be alienated, like other property, by gift, sale, or bequest. The servant was capable of contracting and of holding property. Therefore if a master chose to sell or make a gift of his unexpired time to the servant himself, the servant was capable of receiving it, and would thereafter owe service to no one. An example of the above is shown by the following item in the will of Samuel Thacker of Essex County: "I give unto my servant, John Glary, one year of his time."³³ Seventeenth-century masters of Negroes probably considered they had this same right whether the Negroes were servants or slaves. Just as slavery grew out of the institution of indented servitude, so apparently did private manumission of slaves develop from the right of a master to alienate the unexpired time of a servant. It achieved a standing through custom and liberal construction by the courts. Unlike slavery, however, private manumission, instead of being encouraged and confirmed by statutory law, was greatly discouraged in 1691, and practically prohibited in 1723.³⁴ It was not until after the American Revolution, which was accompanied by a growing anti-slavery sentiment in Virginia, that private

manumission was granted statutory recognition by the law of 1782.

Since we are considering the Negro, whether bond or free, in Colonial Virginia, we must give some cognizance to him as a freeman. But it should be borne in mind that the free Negro class was never large during the Colonial Period. In 1671 when Governor Berkeley reported his estimate of the population to the Commissioners of Trade and Foreign Plantations, he made no mention of a free Negro class. He reported a total population of 40,000, of which 6,000 were Christian servants, and 2,000 were "black slaves."³⁵

We know there were some free Negroes at this time, but the number was probably so small that the Governor did not consider them worthy of mention. In his monograph on The Free Negro in Virginia, Professor John H. Russell puts the number of free Negroes at about three hundred and fifty at the time of the law restricting private manumission in 1691.³⁶ At this time the slave population exceeded 4,000. Even in 1782, the year that private manumission was authorized by statute, and after the close of our period, the number of free Negroes had reached only 2,800.³⁷ The slaves in Virginia at this time numbered about 280,000. At the time of the first federal census in 1790, just eight years later, the number of free Negroes had jumped to 12,866, showing that about 10,000 had been freed in the short space of eight years. At the beginning of the Civil War there were over

58,000 free Negroes in Virginia. So while the free Negro became a considerable element of the population after private manumission was authorized in 1782, he never constituted more than a very small percentage of the black population during colonial days. It is the Negro slave then that shall require most of our attention.

CHAPTER II

NUMBERS, ORIGIN, AND CHARACTERISTICS:

EARLY UPRISINGS

CHAPTER II

The number of Negroes in Virginia increased very slowly for a considerable period following their introduction in the year 1619. None came in 1620; one came in the James in 1621; one came in the Margaret and John in 1622; and one in the Swan in 1623. In 1625, when the white population numbered 1209, there were only twenty-three Negroes in the Colony, the same number as reported in 1623. One had died and one child had been born, so apparently there was no importation of Negroes during the years 1624 and 1625.³⁸

The Negroes continued to be brought in slowly and sporadically during the balance of the first half of the seventeenth century. In 1649, thirty years after the original twenty had been landed at Jamestown, the number of Negroes was reckoned at only three hundred out of a total population of fifteen thousand.³⁹ The rate of importation increased somewhat during the next two decades. Governor Berkeley's report on population for the year 1671 is of peculiar interest because he breaks the figures down into three categories. Out of a total population of 40,000 men, women, and children he says:

There are two thousand black slaves, six thousand christian servants, for a short time, the rest are born in the country or have come in to settle and seat, in bettering their condition in a growing country.⁴⁰

From the above we learn that the Negroes at this time comprised one twentieth of the whole population, and were

still outnumbered three to one by the white servants.

From about this time forward the Negro slave began to overtake the white servant as the principal source of plantation labor. Although the yearly importation of white servants continued to be larger than that of Negro slaves for several years to come, the number of slaves coming in yearly was increasing rapidly, while the number of servants began to decrease correspondingly. There were several reasons why white servitude should, from this time on, gradually give way before Negro slavery. The planters were coming to realize the benefits of permanent slave labor over the temporary servitude of the whites. The Negro, without any preliminary period of "seasoning," could stand the work in the fields even on the hottest days of summer. Then too, being a slave for life, the Negro would take his place more readily as one of an organized gang, working with a kind of mechanical obedience, than would the indented servant who was looking forward to his time of freedom.

At the same time that the colonists were becoming aware of the advantages of Negro slavery over indented servitude, thus creating an increased demand for the importation of Negroes, steps were being taken in England to satisfy this demand. In September, 1672, Charles II granted a new charter which allowed a reorganization of the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa. This company, chartered in 1663, had fallen on evil days due to

the Second Dutch War and other casualties, and had become bankrupt. The new company, known as the Royal African Company of England, listed some of England's richest and most influential men as members. The Duke of York headed the list of patentees, as he had that of the Company of Royal Adventurers. The reorganized company was granted an absolute monopoly for the period of one thousand years in "the whole, entire and only Trade, liberty, use and privilege of Trade and Traffic into and from the said parts of Africa above mentioned." The parts of Africa mentioned were "South Barbary, Guinny, Buing or Angola." It was explained further that this monopoly was:

for the buying, selling, bartering and exchanging of, for, or with any Gold, Silver, Negroes, Slaves, goods, wares and merchandizes whatsoever to be rented or found at or within any of the Cities, Towns, places, Rivers situate or being in the Countries, Islands, Places, Ports, and Coasts aforementioned, any statute, Law, grant, matter, customs or privilege to the contrary in any wise, notwithstanding.⁴¹

There had been English stock companies incorporated much earlier than this for trade with Africa. The first genuine one was the Company of Adventurers of London Trading into Parts of Africa created by James I in 1618. Its trading voyages were disastrous failures, and, after three attempts which incurred heavy losses, it gave up the effort and sent out no more expeditions. In 1631 Charles I granted to a group of separate traders the right to the exclusive trade with Guinea, Buing, and Angola for thirty-one years.⁴² During the Interregnum this patent was still considered in

operation. The Puritan party called into question the monopoly it granted, and, although the Council of State renewed or regranted the patent, it was apparently to a new group of men altogether. The new patentees began to have their troubles immediately due to the hostility of both the foreign powers and the Stuart forces. During the Interregnum the losses on the African coast were estimated at £300,000, and this company's efforts to develop the trade were soon abandoned.⁴³

It is evident from the above accounts that these earlier companies, while theoretically enjoying a monopoly of trade to certain portions of the west coast of Africa, actually were unable to successfully carry on this trade. Furthermore they did not confine their efforts to the slave trade. As late as 1665 the Company of Royal Adventurers of England estimated its yearly returns from ivory, wax, hides, woods, and pepper at £100,000, that from Negro slaves at £100,000, and that from gold at £200,000.⁴⁴

With the advent of the Royal African Company things began to look up for the English slave traders. The Company was now organized on a sound financial basis; the ending of the Third Dutch War in 1674 materially reduced foreign interference; and the Company now devoted a greater share of its attention to the trade in slaves. The great continuing problem of the Company was the protection of its monopoly rights. Private traders, or interlopers as they were called,

continued to engage in the African trade in defiance of the monopoly rights granted by the King's charter. These private traders at all times delivered more Negro slaves to Virginia than did the Royal African Company. This was especially so after 1698, when an act was passed by Parliament which legally opened the African trade to private traders from England, and from the English colonies in America.⁴⁵

Philip A. Bruce, in his Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, estimates that at the close of that century there were about 6,000 Negroes in the Colony.⁴⁶ This number is quite in accord with the expected increase in the rate of importation. The Royal African Company was reorganized the year following Berkeley's report of 2,000 Negroes in the Colony in 1671. From that year on we would look for a gradual increase in slave importations, with a sudden rise after 1698 when the private traders joined in legally.

If the figure of 6,000 Negroes in Virginia is correct for the year 1700, then the slave population more than doubled in a period of less than ten years. Elizabeth Donnan, in her monumental work of collecting documents concerning the slave trade to America, has given us definite figures for this period. From June 24, 1699 to October 12, 1708, there were a total of 6,607 slaves imported into Virginia. It is interesting to learn that of this total,

5,928 were brought in by separate traders, while only 679 were delivered by the Royal African Company. Another interesting fact is that 6,371 of these slaves came in thirty-six vessels directly from the coast of Africa, while only three vessels bearing 236 slaves came by way of the island of Barbados in the West Indies. For the eight-year period from December 10, 1710 to December 10, 1718, the number imported dropped somewhat, the total amounting to only 4,528. Relative to this decrease, Governor Spotswood wrote to the Board of Trade on 26 July, 1712, that there had been no Negroes imported from Africa since his arrival in Virginia, "nor like to be while the price of tobacco is so low, and the country so much in debt." On 11 February, 1713, he sent to the board a list showing only 113 slaves imported in the year 1712, again saying there was no reason to expect many more "while the price of tobacco continues so low, and the country by that means so poor." The reply of the board to this letter predicted a speedy increase in the price of tobacco once the French trade was opened up. That things did become more prosperous and flourishing is indicated by the figures on slave importations for the next period reported. From March 25, 1718 to March 25, 1727, 11,091 Negro slaves were brought into Virginia. It is true that these figures are for a nine-year period whereas the previous one covered only eight years; but, allowing for the extra year, the rate of importation had still more than

doubled over the earlier period. In addition to the tremendous increase, it is interesting to note that the Royal African Company sent only 427 slaves in two ships during this whole period, while separate traders sent seventy-six shiploads totalling 10,664. Another interesting fact is that of the total imports of over 11,000 during this time, 8,612 came into the York River District, 2,186 into the Rappahannock River District, and only 293 into the Upper and Lower James River Districts combined. These figures cover only the vessels bringing Negroes direct from the coast of Africa. There must have been some from the West Indies also.⁴⁷

Adding up the totals imported during these three periods we have a grand total of 22,226 slaves brought into Virginia between June, 1699 and March, 1727. With say 5,000 in the Colony at the time these records start, and allowing for a natural increase of about 2,000 during this period, there must have been nearly 30,000 Negroes in Virginia by the year 1728. That this is approximately correct is borne out by a letter from Governor Gooch to the Board of Trade reporting 30,000 Negroes in Virginia in a population of 114,000 for the year 1730.

In the short space of thirty years then we have the Negro population increasing fivefold. What sort of creatures were these that were flooding the small colony in ever-increasing numbers? Some would answer that they were Negroes from the continent of Africa. This is true, but it

is not the whole story. It should be remembered that Africa is peopled by many tribes, and that these tribes differ widely in many important respects. Some were from the hot, humid equatorial district, while others came from the more temperate zones both north and south of the equator. Let us examine the reported traits of some ten or more of these tribes whose members were brought into the American colonies. The Senegalese had a strong Arabic strain in their ancestry. They were the most intelligent of all, but not very robust. They were considered the best for domestic service, and were most easily trained in the handicrafts and for responsible positions on the plantations. The Mandingoes were especially gentle, but peculiarly prone to theft. The Core-mantees from the Gold Coast were hardy and stalwart of mind and body. They were haughty, ferocious, and stubborn, and often exhibited a spartan fortitude. Frequently they proved to be the instigators of slave insurrections and conspiracies. Yet their intense spirit of loyalty made them the most highly prized of servants by those masters who could evoke this loyalty. The Whydahs, Nagoes, and Fawpaws of the Slave Coast were generally most esteemed of all. They were lusty, industrious, cheerful, and submissive. With their strength, willingness, and cheerfulness they made excellent workers, and at the same time caused very little trouble. The Eboes or Moccoes are described as having a sickly yellow tinge in their complexion, jaundiced eyes, and prognathous

faces like baboons. The men were said to be lazy, despondent, and prone to suicide. The Gaboons from the equatorial district were the worst reputed of all. The debility of their constitutions was so great that they were apt to die on their passage over or shortly after arrival in America. The Congoes and Angolas were slender, with glossy black skin, mild in disposition, unusually honest, but exceptionally stupid. The Congoes, Angolas, and Eboes were especially prone to run away.⁴⁸

If we consider some of the traits enumerated above it becomes easy to understand why the Colony was plagued by a series of more or less serious slave uprisings, as well as innumerable cases of individual revolts and runaway slaves. You would expect the fierce, proud Coromantees to take the lead in any such schemes for gaining freedom. Yet others of this proud tribe, whose loyalty had been won by deserving masters, might counsel against such plots as being treasonable and unworthy. You might expect the lazy, despondent Eboes, the weak Gaboons, and the stupid Congoes and Angolas to follow wherever their more energetic leaders directed. It was from these latter-mentioned tribes that most of the runaways were supposed to come, while only the Eboe is mentioned as weakly attempting a solution of his problems by suicide.

In the principal importing colonies careful study was given to the comparative qualities of the several African

stocks. Of the Coromantees Christopher Codrington, Governor of the Leeward Islands, wrote in 1701 to the English Board of Trade:

They are not only the best and most faithful of our slaves, but are really all born heroes. There is a difference between them and all other negroes beyond what 'tis possible for your Lordships to conceive. There never was a raskal or coward of tht. nation, intrepid to the last degree, not a man of them but will stand to be cut to pieces without a sigh or groan, grateful and obedient to a kind master, but implacably revengeful when ill-treated. My Father, who had studied the genius and temper of all kinds of negroes 45 years with a very nice observation, would say, Noe man deserved a Corramante that would not treat him like a Friend rather than a Slave, and all my Corramantes preserve that love and veneration for him that they constantly visit his grave, make their libations upon it, hold up their hands to Heaven with violent lamentations, and promise when they have done working for his son they will come to him and be his faithful slaves in the other world.⁴⁹

Apparently the planters of Virginia did not pay too much attention to this variation in the qualities of the different tribes. Probably this was due largely to necessity. Virginia was never a large slave market as compared with the West Indies; and the Colony did not have the years of experience that had been gained in the Islands. Sometimes the advertisements offering slaves for sale mentioned that they came from the Gold Coast--meaning Coromantes--or were from Gambia--which meant mainly Mandingoes--but usually they specified only a certain number of Negroes from the African coast for sale. However the notices of runaways indicate that Negroes from various parts of Africa were brought to Virginia markets, and that some of the planters at any rate

distinguished clearly between the different tribes. The following are examples that appeared from time to time in the Virginia Gazette: "he is a young Angola Negro"; "a very Black Mundigo Negro Man"; "a Native of Madagascar"; "a Congo Negro slave"; "of the Suso country"; "New Negro Fellow . . . calls himself Bonna and says he came from a Place of that name in the Ibo Country, in Africa"; "marked in the face as the Gold Coast slaves generally are."⁵⁰

Virginia never had one port that became the great slave market for the Colony as did Charleston for South Carolina, or Newport for Rhode Island. After a duty was placed on slaves in 1699, they were brought into the five custom districts where they were entered and the duty paid. By far the largest number entered through the York River District. The other four districts were the Rappahannock, the Potomac, and the Upper and Lower James. Prior to the establishment of these ports of entry and the laying of a duty on slaves, the ships sailed from place to place on the rivers, peddling their slaves at various plantation docks. The prices obtained for slaves in good condition ranged from about £20 to £35 at the turn of the century. Young men and women brought more than did boys and girls or the older adults. Later on the prices were much higher. The diseased or otherwise unfit were sold for whatever price they would bring. It appears that a certain physician developed quite a "racket" in this connection. He would buy up these unfit

ones at a low price, restore a good percentage of them to health, and sell them at an enormous profit.⁵¹

These savages so recently arrived from Africa of course spoke no English. Furthermore the members of the separate tribes spoke in different dialects, so we can readily picture the confused clamor from newly-arrived Africans which Governor Spotswood labelled "that babel of languages."⁵²

There were a few cases of uprisings before the end of the seventeenth century, but Negro slaves were not involved in all of them. The first such case recorded was a conspiracy that occurred in Gloucester County in 1663, and there is no evidence that Negroes had any part in it at all.⁵³ This plot was disclosed by one John Berkenhead, a white servant. So grateful were the people for deliverance from what might have been the dire consequences that the Assembly granted Berkenhead his freedom and 5,000 pounds of tobacco, and passed a measure resolving that . . . "the 13th of September be annually kept holy, being the day those villains intended to put the plot in execution."⁵⁴

It was not until 1672 that we discover indications of open discontent among the Negroes of Virginia. An act of Assembly passed in that year reveals the fact that there were slaves in rebellion in different parts of the Colony at this time, and that it had been found so far impossible to subdue and capture them. There does not appear to have been

concerted movement among them resembling an organized insurrection; it was rather a number of cases in which a few, or perhaps only one or two, had taken refuge in the wilderness of forest. The act referred to above authorized whoever should seek to capture them, whether by legal warrant or by hue and cry, to kill them on the spot if they attempted to resist arrest. Any master losing a slave under these circumstances would be recompensed at the public charge to the extent of forty-five hundred pounds of tobacco. If the Negro was wounded during the process of his capture the master was reimbursed for the loss of his services during the time of his disability.⁵⁵

What appears to have been a large-scale plot was discovered in the Northern Neck in 1687. Apparently the Negroes planned to kill the whites of that region, and then carry out the same program throughout the whole Colony. It was decided that the plan must have been formed while Negroes were walking abroad on Saturday afternoons or Sundays or meeting in large numbers at Negro funerals. This led the Council to issue a proclamation . . . "requiring a Strickt observance of the Severall Laws of this Collony relateing to Negroes, and to require and Comand all Masters of families haveing any Negro Slaves, not to permitt them to hold or make any Solemnity or Funeralls for any dec[leas]ed Negroes."⁵⁶

There were cases occasionally of individual slaves, who had run away and become such notorious outlaws by the

outrages they committed, that they were referred to by name in special acts of the Assembly. Such a case was that of the Negro slave Billy who had absented himself unlawfully from his master's service for several years about the turn of the century. During this period he was supposedly lying out and lurking in obscure places throughout the three counties of James City, York, and New Kent. He was charged with destroying and devouring crops and stocks, robbing houses, and injuring or threatening injury to various people. A reward of one thousand pounds of tobacco was offered for the body of this outlaw whether produced dead or alive; and the law provided that if he were killed in pursuance of this act his master was to be paid four thousand pounds of tobacco by the public.⁵⁷

That the colonists were deeply concerned over these fugitive Negroes and the threat of real uprisings, is shown by the frequency and severity of certain laws passed during the latter part of the seventeenth century. One such law passed in 1680, and entitled "An act for preventing Negroes Insurrections," not only provided for the lawful killing of fugitives who resisted arrest, but forbade any Negro, slave or free, to arm himself with any weapon of defense or offense. As a slave could not be punished like a servant who had raised his hand against his master, by an extension of his term, his owner was permitted to inflict corporal punishment upon him. If he happened to die as a result of the

severity of this punishment, the master was not held guilty of felony, it being presumed by the law that the act was devoid of malice, since no man would voluntarily destroy his own property. A slave had to have a certificate signed by his master, mistress, or overseer before he could lawfully leave his master's ground. To make certain that the provisions of this law were known to all it was required that it be published twice a year at all county courts and parish churches. Feeling that the act had not had its intended effect "for want of due notice thereof being taken," the Assembly two years later put teeth in the clause requiring semi-annual publication, by providing a fine of six hundred pounds of tobacco against churchwardens, ministers, and readers, if the act was not read out in church one Sunday in March and one in September.

An act passed in 1691 reiterated earlier provisions for apprehending fugitive slaves and provided that masters should be reimbursed at the rate of four thousand pounds of tobacco for any slave who might be killed in pursuance of the act.

The intense feeling against mixture of the races is shown by provisions tacked on to this law providing severe penalties against inter-marriage or cohabitation between the English and people of color. This feature of the law says in part:

And for prevention of that abominable mixture and spurious issue which hereafter may encrease in this dominion, as well by negroes, mulattos, and Indians intermarrying with English or other white women, as by their unlawfull accompanying with one another, Be it enacted, . . . that for the time to come, whatsoever English or other white man or woman being free shall intermarry with a negroe, mulatto, or Indian man or woman bond or free shall within three months after such marriage be banished and removed from this dominion forever And be it further enacted . . . , That if any English woman being free shall have a bastard child by any negro or mulatto, she pay the sume of fifteen pounds sterling, within one moneth after such bastard child shall be born, to the Church wardens of the parish where she shall be delivered of such child, and in default of such payment she shall be taken into the possession of the said Church wardens and disposed of for five years,

In the following year the Assembly passed a law entitled "An act for the more speedy prosecution of slaves committing Capitall Crimes." It provided for the appointment of courts of oyer and terminer by the governor in the county where the slave was charged with the capital offense. These courts would arraign and indict the offender, hear the evidence, and award sentence without the judgment of a jury.⁵⁸

By the close of the seventeenth century the Negro slave had his freedom of action so circumscribed by special laws that he was bound to his master's land almost as firmly as the trees which grew upon it.

CHAPTER III

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

CHAPTER III

The early years of the eighteenth century saw a change take place in the economic system of the tobacco colonies. Throughout the seventeenth century the economy of Virginia and Maryland had rested upon the labor of the poor white man, either as servant or as small free farmer. The larger planters had always been in need of laborers, and had depended on the surplus population of the mother country to supply them. But, with the coming of the black man in substantial numbers, all this was changed. The Virginians were sure they had found the answer to all their labor problems in the shiploads of African slaves which now entered their rivers so frequently. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Negroes began to arrive in the Chesapeake in fairly large numbers toward the end of the seventeenth century; and, as the number of blacks grew yearly larger, the influx of whites from the mother country slowly dwindled and almost died out. It was not, however, until about the second decade of the new century that the Negro slaves actually accomplished the overthrow of the old system of labor, and laid the foundations of a new social structure.⁵⁹

There is little doubt that this change was desirable from an economic standpoint; and apparently this is the only one that received much consideration. The indentured servant could, at best, be held for only a few years, usually

leaving to set up for himself at about the time he achieved his greatest usefulness to his master. This created a recurring and vexing problem, especially to the planter attempting to cultivate a large acreage. Each year he must recruit possibly one third or one fourth of his labor crew from new and unseasoned emigrants to replace the trained and seasoned hands he was continually losing. The Negro slave, on the other hand, was his for life. Not only could he use the slaves he purchased for as long as they were able to work in the fields, but their children were also his property and could be worked as soon as they were old enough to be useful. A further advantage that the slave owner had over the master of white servants was that the newly arrived whites from Europe required a period of "seasoning" to fit them for work in the fields; the Negroes, on the other hand, could stand the work right from the start even on the hottest summer days.

Thus in the long run the Negro slave was a more satisfactory and far cheaper worker than the white servant. Even from the strict dollars and cents--or pounds and pence--viewpoint, this was so. In the early years of the eighteenth century a young lusty slave could be purchased at an average price of £25. Such a slave should serve his master for at least twenty-five years, and perhaps add offspring to later swell the labor force. Thus the slave would cost no more than one pound sterling per year. On the other

hand, a male servant at that time represented an average outlay of about three pounds sterling for each year of service.⁶⁰ Another factor which added to the cost of the indentured servant was his "freedom dues." By this was meant the articles of food and clothing given to the servant on the expiration of his term of service. According to Robert Beverley, who wrote about Virginia in 1705 and prepared a revised edition in 1722, "Each Servant at his Freedom, receives of his Master fifteen Bushels of Corn, (which is sufficient for a whole year) and two new Suits of Cloaths, both Linnen and Woollen; and then becomes as free in all respects, and as much entituled to the Liberties, and Priviledges of the Country, as any other of the Inhabitants or Natives are."⁶¹

It seems quite evident that neither the seller nor the buyer of these black savages was conscious of any feeling of wrongdoing. They regarded the Negro, fresh from the jungles of Africa, as hardly human; as just another beast of burden with, perhaps, slightly more intelligence than the oxen or horses that pulled the plough and hauled the loads. This opinion was certainly held by many of the people in the seventeenth century, and particularly of those Negroes recently arrived from Africa. The extreme attitude of some of the planters in the English Colonies towards the moral elevation of the Negro slave through baptism was revealed by Morgan Godwyn, the author of The Negro's and Indian's

Advocate, an eloquent plea for the souls of the slaves and the Indians written in 1680. He cites the case of a lady of Barbadoes when he sought permission to have one of her slaves baptized. The lady replied that he might as well baptize puppies as Negroes. On another occasion when he was successful in baptizing a young Negro man, the mistress of the slave sent Godwyn a message, "That Baptism . . . was to one of these no more beneficial, than to her black Bitch."⁶² While these are extreme examples of the attitude toward Negroes, it does appear that many of the early planters of Virginia as well as Barbadoes thought it an impropriety, or at best a waste of time and effort, to attempt to Christianize slaves. In the early days of slavery in Virginia many people had the idea that the act of baptizing a slave operated to free him from bondage, and this undoubtedly restrained many masters from encouraging conversion and baptism. This deterrent was removed by a law in 1667 which said that baptism of slaves did not exempt them from bondage, and by a law of 1682 which provided that prior baptism did not keep Negroes from being sold as slaves. Because of these laws or because there was a real change of feeling toward the Negro, it is certain that his lot improved somewhat with the coming of the new century. This was probably due in large part to the increasing numbers of Virginia-born Negroes. No longer were the majority of the blacks those who had but recently arrived from Africa with their savage

ways and their babel of foreign dialects. And, as the percentage of those born on these shores or long resident here became larger, the white populace came to regard them in a somewhat different light.

Efforts were made by members of the Church of England to spread the Gospel to the heathens in America. In 1701 the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was incorporated, and the Archbishop of Canterbury was appointed its first president by the King. This society was formed primarily for the purpose of improving the religious institutions and privileges among the Church of England members in the North American Colonies. Its secondary purpose was to extend the Gospel to the Indians and Negroes.⁶³ After twenty-six years of rather indifferent success by the missionaries of the Society in the North American Colonies, the Bishop of London, who was charged with religious affairs in the Colonies, attempted to speed up the good work of converting the Negroes. He wrote two letters on the subject in 1727. The first was addressed to the "Masters and Mistresses of Families in the English Plantations abroad; exhorting them to encourage and promote the Instruction of their Negroes in the Christian Faith." The second letter was addressed to the "Missionaries in the English Plantations: exhorting them to give their assistance towards the Instruction of the Negroes of their several Parishes in the Christian Faith."⁶⁴

Apparently there was no parallel attempt by the American colonists prior to the Revolution to bring the Negroes to Christianity. Charles C. Jones in his Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States has this to say in his summing up of the period 1620-1790: "The African . . . never received from the colonists themselves a solitary missionary exclusively devoted to their good; nor was there ever a single society established within the Colonies, that we know of, with the express design of promoting their religious instruction!" Lest the reader get a false impression from this, he hurries to add: "The conclusion, however, would be unwarrantable, that they were wholly neglected." He explains this by referring to the interest shown by societies in Europe; by the good work of some men of learning and piety; and by the earnest appeals written to promote their religious instruction. He tells of the attempts made to send over missionaries, and also to engage the services of the settled clergy in their behalf. He says the Church of England took the lead in this good work. Mr. Jones also added that efforts were made for the instruction of the Negroes, especially in the Southern Colonies, where their numbers were greater;

and that owners did to some small extent desire and attempt the instruction of their households; and that the settled as well as itinerant ministers did not wholly neglect them. Many Negroes were received into the churches from one end of the Colonies to the other, and the rest and privileges of the Lord's day were secured to them either by custom or law.⁶⁵

So, while it is probable that the majority of masters were more concerned with the physical than the spiritual welfare of their Negroes, it is true that many took an interest in their instruction and their conversion.

With the great influx of Negro slaves in the opening years of the eighteenth century, most of them coming directly from the west coast of Africa, there was a growing dread of Negro uprisings. The first conspiracy, serious enough to be recorded in official documents, took place early in the year 1709. It involved Indian and Negro slaves and covered a wide territory, being discovered simultaneously in the Counties of James City, Surry, and Isle of Wight. Special courts were appointed by Governor Jennings in Council to meet in two of the affected Counties. Following is the report, under date of March 24, 1709, submitted to the Governor by the court which met in Surry County:

Honorable Sir

Pursuant to an order of your Honour in Council, dated the 21st Instant, directing the Examination of Severall Negro and Indian slaves concerned in a Late Dangerous Conspiracy, formed and Carried on by great numbers of the said negroes and Indian slaves for making their Escape by force from the Service of their masters, and for the Destroying and cutting off Such of her Majesties Subjects as Should oppose their Design. We, the subscribers, have accordingly proceeded to the said Examination . . . and have punished and Discharged all except Mr. William Edward's Scipio, Mr. Joseph John Jackmans' Salvadore, and Tom Shaw, Belonging to Mr. Samuel Thompson, who, we are of opinion, are the Principal Contrivers and most remarkable in the aforesaid Conspiracy, who do still continue in the Goal of the County till further orders from your

Honour. As to the Probability of the Testimony, it appears to us very clearly from the Evidence that we have taken, that Scipio and Mr. Samuel Thompsons' Peter, who is now outlawed, were the first and Chief promoters of that wicked and pernicious designe. Their Behaviour, as well as that of Tom Shaw, having allways been, but more Especially for some little time past, very rude and Insolent. As to Salvadore, he has been a great promoter and Incourager in persuading of 'em to the probability of Effecting their designe and in promising of 'em his Assistance therein.

We are your Honour's
Most obedient humble Servants,

Thomas Holt,
Nathaniell Harrison,
William Edwards,
William Cocke,
Ethelred Taylor.

The court that met in Isle of Wight County on March 27th found that none of the Negroes held in custody there were principal agents in the conspiracy. They found that one Manuell, a Negro belonging to Mr. John George, was implicated in knowledge of the plan by the confession of Scipio, and by his own confession. He was ordered to receive "Forty Lashes upon his bare back, well layd on." James Booth, a free Negro, was found guilty of knowledge of the conspiracy, and of entertaining several of the conspirators at his house. It was ordered that he receive twenty-nine lashes "upon his bare Back, well layd on."⁶⁶

The gruesome fate of the two principal malefactors from Surry County can best be told in the official wording of the Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia. Under the date of April 27, 1710, the Governor and Council ordered as follows:

Whereas Salvadore an Indian and Scipio a Negro Slaves have been tryed this General Court and found guilty of high treason, and Sentence of death passed on them accordingly to the end therefore that their execution and exemplary punishment may have a due effect for deterring other Slaves from entering into such dangerous Conspiracys It is Ordered that Salvadore be executed (according to the Sentence passed on him) at the Court house of Surry County on the first Tuesday in May, and that his body be disposed of as follows viz. his head to be delivered to the Sherif of James City County and by him sett up at the City of Williamsburg. Two of his quarters likewise delivered to the s^d Sherif of James City one whereof he is to cause to be sett up at the great guns in James City and the other to deliver to the Sherif of New Kent County to be sett up in the most publick place of the said County, and the other two quarters to be disposed of an sett up as the Justices of the County of Surry shall think fitt to direct. And it is ordered that Scipio be executed at the Court house of Gloucester County at the next Court to be held for the said County in May and his body disposed of in manner following viz. his head and one of his quarters sett up where the Justices of the said County of Gloucester shall think fitt two of his quarters to be delivered to the Sherif of Middlesex one of which he is to cause to be put up in the most publick place of the s^d County of Middlesex and the other to cause to be delivered to the Sherif of the County of Lancaster to be sett up in the most publick place of the said County. And the Sherif of Gloucester is to cause the other quarter of the said Scipio to be delivered to the Sherif of King and Queen County to be sett up in the most publick place of the said County, And all the said Sherifs are hereby directed and required to cause the several Articles of this order to be duly performed and it is recommended to the Courts of the respective Countys to levy the charge thereof on their said Countys. 67

This terrible warning came too late to prevent a second conspiracy which occurred earlier in the same month of April, 1710. This conspiracy involved Negroes of Surry and James City Counties. Lieutenant-Governor Jenings' report to the Council of Trade and Plantations, written April 24, 1710, is the best available evidence we have on this occurrence:

There hath of late been very happily discovered an intended insurrection of the negroes, which was to have been put in execution in Surry and James City Countys on Easter Day; but the chief conspirators having been seasonably apprehended, their design is broke. There are two of them tryed this General Court, found guilty, and will be executed, and I hope their fate will strike such a terror in the other negroes as will keep them from forming such designs for the future, without being obliged to make an example of any more of them.⁶⁸

Alexander Spotswood succeeded Edmund Jenings as Lieutenant-Governor of Virginia in June, 1710. Right from the start Spotswood manifested his awareness of the serious danger which threatened the Colony from a possible uprising of the Indians or Negroes. In his first speech to the Assembly which met October 25, 1710, almost his opening words were devoted to citing the dangers from those held in slavery and urging a strengthening of the militia:

I Would Willingly Whisper to You the Strength of Your Country and the State of Your Militia; Which on the foot it Now Stands is so Imaginary A Defence, that we Cannot too Cautiously Conceal it from our Neighbours and our Slaves, nor too Earnestly Pray that Neither the Lust of Dominion, nor the Desire of freedom may stir those people to any Attempts the Latter Sort (I mean our Negro's) by Their Dayly Encrease Seem to be The Most Dangerous; And the Tryals of Last Aprill Court may shew that we are not to Depend on Either their Stupidity or that Babel of Languages among 'em; freedom Wears a Cap which Can Without a Tongue, Call Together all Those who Long to Shake of the fetters of Slavery and as Such an Insurrection would surely be attended with Most Dreadfull Consequences so I think we Cannot be too Early in providing Against it, both by putting our Selves in a better posture of Defence and by Making a Law to prevent the Consultations of Those Negroes.⁶⁹

Despite this eloquent plea, no law was passed by either session of the Assembly of 1710-1712 to strengthen the militia, or to better regulate the Negroes.⁷⁰ However the

1710 session did revive and continue a former law entitled "An act for security and defence of the country in times of danger." This act had been passed in 1705 but, due to a limitation clause, had expired at the end of June, 1708. By its terms the governor was authorized to call out the militia in case of invasion or insurrection; commanding officers of the militia were authorized to impress necessary provisions, land vehicles, boats, etc.; and a schedule of pay for the rank and file of the militia was authorized if they were employed for any period exceeding four days.⁷¹

This same session of the Assembly voted to free the Negro Will who had revealed the conspiracy in Surry County the previous April. In the same act they provided that forty pounds sterling be paid to Robert Ruffin, Will's master, for the loss of the slave's services.⁷²

The second session of this Assembly passed a law in 1711 which gave the governor the authority to appoint lieutenants of rangers, with each such lieutenant authorized to choose eleven men from his locality to serve with him in guarding the frontier. The rangers were organized for the purpose of guarding the frontiers against Indian atrocities, but they probably had some effect as a deterrent to conspiring Negroes also.

Both the defense and ranger acts were continued by the Assembly of 1712-1714, with the rangers being voted an increase in pay. The second session of this Assembly, meeting

in November, 1713, enjoyed excellent relations with Governor Spotswood and seemed willing to comply with his every wish. They continued the ranger act, with a proviso empowering the Governor to disband them, and to use the pay appropriated for them in any way he saw fit for the better security of the frontiers.⁷³ Although this good relationship did not continue between Spotswood and subsequent Assemblies, he managed to get some much needed reforms in the defenses of the Colony. Whether because of these measures, or because of the example set by the grim fate of the ringleaders in the conspiracies of 1709 and 1710, or perhaps partly because of each, there was no insurrection of the Negroes reported during the twelve years of Governor Spotswood's administration.

Hugh Drysdale took the oath as Lieutenant Governor of Virginia September 27, 1722. One of the first things requiring his attention was a plot discovered among the Negro slaves. At a meeting with the Council October 16, 1722, the following minutes were recorded:

The Governor representing to this Board that there are in the publick Goal divers Negroes, who had lately formed a design to rise and cutt off of his Maj^{ty}s Subjects of this Colony; But for as much as his Maj^{ty}s Attorney General, conceives the Evidence against them being only Negroes, and those not Christians are not such Evidence as is sufficient to convict the Criminals upon an Indictment to be exhibited against them for high Treason; and thereupon desiring the Opinion of this Board what method shall be taken for proceeding against the Offenders. The Council taking the same into Consideration are of Opinion, That Mr. Att^{ny} be directed to proceed against the Offenders by indictm^t for Misdemeanors, and that he procure all the Evidence that can be found against them.⁷⁴

In reporting this event to the Council of Trade and Plantations, Drysdale wrote on December 20, 1722, that the conspiracy had covered two or three counties. He said that several of the ringleaders had been taken and tried, and that others were in prison being held for the next General Court. He then added:

the design of these slaves was to cutt off their masters, and possess themselves of the country; but as this would have been as impracticable in the attempt as it was foolish in the contrivance, I can foresee no other consequence of this conspiracy than the stirring upp the next Assembly to make more severe laws for keeping their slaves in greater subjection etc.⁷⁵

There was good reason for the next Assembly, which met May 9, 1723, to be "stirred up." Shortly before the Burgesses assembled in Williamsburg another conspiracy among the slaves had been discovered in Middlesex and Gloucester Counties. In this case, as in the conspiracy of the previous fall, the only witnesses against the leaders of the plot were the other Negroes, so it was impossible to convict them for treason. These two conspiracies coming so close together, and the weakness of the existing laws to adequately punish the offenders, gave point to these remarks of Governor Drysdale in his opening address to the Assembly:

Your Laws seem very deficient in the due punishing any Intended Insurrection of your Slaves: You have had a late Experience of the Lameness of them, I am persuaded you are all too well acquainted with the Cruel dispositions of those Creatures when they have it in their power either to destroy or distress, to let slip this fair Oppertunity of makeing more proper laws against them⁷⁶

The Assembly took the Governor's message to heart, and proceeded promptly to enact legislation designed to plug the loopholes in their laws. Before they were prorogued the following month they had passed several measures aimed at preventing a recurrence of the recent conspiracies. One of these acts provided for transportation and sale of the seven Negro slaves suspected of being ringleaders in the late conspiracy. This law provided public funds for payment to the masters of these slaves, and for transportation of the seven Negroes to an island of the West Indies. The funds obtained from their sale there would go toward partial reimbursement of the public treasury. The Assembly revived the act for security and defense of the country in times of danger. They also passed an act instituting some much needed reforms of the militia. But the key act was one entitled "An Act directing the trial of Slaves committing capital crimes and for the more effectual punishing conspiracies and insurrections of them and for the better government of Negros, Mulattos, and Indians, bond or free."⁷⁷ The Assembly indicated their awareness of the inadequacy of existing laws by their preamble to this act:

Whereas the laws now in force, for the better ordering and governing of slaves, and for the speedy trial of such of them as commit capital crimes, are found insufficient to restrain their tumultuous and unlawful meetings, or to punish the secret plots and conspiracies carried on amongst them, and known only to such, as by the laws now established, are not accounted legal evidence; And it being found necessary, that some further provision be made, for detecting and punishing all such dangerous combinations for the future

This act made it a felony if any number of Negroes or other slaves exceeding five should conspire to rebel or make insurrection, or plot the murder of any person or persons, and, if convicted, they were to suffer death without benefit of clergy. The testimony of Negroes, Mulattoes, or Indians, bond or free, would be admitted against slaves accused of capital crimes. If such testimony was proven to be false the offender would have both ears nailed to the pillory, and cut off, and then receive thirty-nine lashes on his bare back. The law made any meeting of more than five slaves unlawful unless at their own plantation and licensed by their master. It now became unlawful for free Negroes and Indians to keep any arms, except those who were listed in the militia or were house keepers could keep one gun, powder, and shot; and those who lived at frontier plantations, whether bond or free, could keep arms if they were licensed by some justice of the peace. By the twenty-third clause of this comprehensive act the privilege of voting at the election of burgesses "or any other election whatsoever" was denied to free Negroes, Mulattos and Indians.

In December, 1735, more than a dozen years after the free Negroes were deprived of the vote, the Lords Commissioners of Trade decided to inquire the reasons for this clause of the law of 1723. Governor Gooch's reply, in a letter dated May 18, 1736, and addressed to Alured Popple, Secretary of the Board of Trade, throws much light on the

feelings of the Virginians toward the free Negroes and Mulattoes. Governor Gooch explained that the Assembly of 1723 met just after another conspiracy among the slaves had been discovered:

wherein the Free-Negros & Mulattos were much Suspected to have been Concerned, (which will for ever be the Case) and tho' there could be no legal Proof, so as to Convict them, yet such was the Insolence of the Free-Negros at that time, that the next Assembly thought it necessary, not only to make the Meetings of Slaves very Penal, but to fix a Perputual (sic) Brand upon Free-Negros & Mullatos by excluding them from that great Priviledge of a Freeman, well knowing they always did, and ever will favour the Slaves. And 'tis likewise said to have been done with design, which I must think a good one, to make the free Negroes sensible that a distinction ought to be made between their Offspring and the Descendants of an Englishman, with whom they never were to be Accounted Equal. This, I confess, may seem to carry an Air of Severity to Such as are unacquainted with the Nature of Negroes and the Pride of a manumitted Slave, who looks on himself imediately on his Acquiring his freedom to be as good a Man as the best of his Neighbours, but especially if he is descended of a white Father or Mother, lett them be of what mean Condition scever; and as most of them are the Bastards of some of the worst of our imported Servants and Convicts, it seems no ways Impolitick, as well for discouraging that kind of Copulation, as to preserve a decent Distinction between them and their Betters, to leave this Mark on them, until time and Education has changed the Indication of their spurious Extraction, and made some Alterations in their morals.⁷⁸

This letter leaves little doubt that the Virginians of that day felt that a distinction should be made between the whites and the blacks of whatever shade. And it was not only in the matter of voting that prejudice against the Negro was shown. A law of 1668 reads in part, "It is declared . . . that negro women, though permitted to enjoy their Freedome yet ought not in all respects to be admitted

to a full fruition of the exemptions and impunities of the English, and are still lyable to payment of taxes."⁷⁹ For over a hundred years free women of color were accounted tithable while their white sisters went free of this burden. But in 1769 the Assembly passed an act exempting free Negro, Mulatto and Indian women, and all wives, other than slaves, from payment of taxes. The execution of the act was suspended until assent of the King was obtained. Royal assent was proclaimed April 3, 1771, so at long last this inequity was removed.⁸⁰ Even in the matter of payment by the government to widows who lost their husbands in foreign expeditions was the woman of color discriminated against. In the year 1742 three widows, one a white woman, the other two mulattoes, petitioned the General Assembly for relief because of the death of their husbands in the recent expedition against the Spaniards. The action of the House of Burgesses in the three claims is enlightening: "Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims to allow Elizabeth Moss, Widow, the Sum of Fifty Pounds Current Money: Also, Rebecca Jones and Elizabeth Kee, Widows, being Mulattos, the Sum of Five Pounds each."⁸¹ It would seem that Elizabeth Moss' husband meant ten times as much to her, as did their husbands to the Mulatto women! In later claims this disparity in allowances was reduced, the majority being settled with an award of ten pounds to white widows and five pounds to the colored ones. Many of the laws

directed against the slaves and the free Negroes were deemed necessary as safety measures, but those regarding voting, taxing of colored women, and unequal payment of claims, could hardly be so justified. In fact the lawmakers were quite honest in admitting that these things were done because they did not believe the colored man was as good as the white man.

Despite Governor Gooch's determination to keep the militia strong and ready, and his firm attitude toward the blacks, there were some Negro troubles in the earlier years of his long administration (1727-1749). On June 29, 1729, he reported such an incident in a letter to the Council of Trade and Plantations. He said that some time after his last letter to the Council, about fifteen Negroes from a new plantation at the head of the James River formed a design to withdraw from their master and settle in the fastnesses of the neighboring mountains. They had gotten possession of some arms and ammunition, and had taken with them some provisions, their "cloaths," bedding, and working tools. They were pursued by their master and a party of men, their hideout discovered, and, after exchanging a shot or two wounding one Negro, the slaves surrendered and returned home.

Governor Gooch said such events should awaken the inhabitants to the danger from the slaves; that a very small number of Negroes, once settled in the mountains, would soon be increased by other runaways, and prove dangerous neighbors

to the frontier inhabitants. He reported that he was training and exercising the militia in the several counties in the best means to deter the slaves from endeavoring to escape, and to suppress them if they should.⁸²

Another thing which caused unrest among the Negroes from time to time was their great propensity for circulating rumors of freedom for the slaves. One such rumor, that spread with amazing rapidity among the Negroes in 1730, was that Colonel Spotswood, recently returned from a visit to England, had come empowered by the King to free all slaves that had been baptized. Governor Gooch, in reporting this to the Board of Trade on September 14, 1730, spoke of many "meetings and Consultations of the Negros in several Parts of the Country to obtain their Freedom" But he went on to say that no discovery was made of any formed design for an uprising, just "loose discourses" that his Majesty had sent orders for them to be set free as soon as they were Christians, and that these orders were suppressed. Governor Gooch was unable to learn who had started the rumor, and contented himself with sending parties of the militia to take up those slaves found off their masters' plantations;

and as a great many have been made Prisoners and under severe Chastisement by whipping for rambling abroad, I am in hopes by keeping the Militia to their Duty, to deter them from any such unlawful Meetings, and to Convince them that their best way is to rest contented with their Condition.⁸³

Apparently the slaves did not long "rest contented with their Condition," because about six weeks later a large

number of Negroes in the Counties of Norfolk and Princess Anne assembled on Sunday while the people were in church, to choose officers from among their number to lead them in an insurrection in the near future. Governor Gooch in his letter to the Board of Trade on February 12, 1731, added:

But this Meeting being happily discovered and many of them taken up and examined, the whole Plot was detected, for which the major Part of them were severely Punished, and four of the Ringleaders, on full Evidence convicted, have been executed.⁸⁴

With so many disturbances among the Negroes coming in rapid succession, the Governor in Council issued a proclamation on the subject. By this proclamation he ordered a more strict observance of the laws against the unlawful assembly of Negroes; he required the chief officers of the militia in each county to order out parties to patrol at such times and places as they saw fit; and proclaimed that worshippers thereafter would carry arms with them to church.⁸⁵ The various security measures adopted in 1723 and afterwards must have finally borne fruit because, except for some unrest among the Negroes in 1755 and 1756 during the French and Indian War,⁸⁶ there were no further serious conspiracies reported during the Colonial Period.

It was not only in groups that slaves caused trouble for their masters and the minions of the law. There were innumerable cases of runaway slaves all through this period. Sometimes two or more joined together in an attempted break for freedom; more often, however, individual slaves would

run off to the woods in order to escape punishment, or to get a few days' rest from work; some would resolutely attempt escape from bondage altogether.

All sorts of laws were passed aimed at discouraging them from running away, and providing for their punishment and return to their masters. Sheriffs apprehending a runaway at a distance were to whip the slave and turn him over to the sheriff of the next county nearer his master's home. Each sheriff would repeat this process until the slave was returned. If it was not known to whom the fugitive belonged he was confined in the county jail, and a notice of his capture posted on the court-house door. At the end of two months--if he was not yet claimed by his owner--he was sent to the public jail at Williamsburg, and kept in custody there by the sheriff until his master was found. After the advent of the Virginia Gazette in 1736, notices were published of such runaways, giving minute descriptions of their persons and their clothing. Almost every issue of the Gazette contained one or more, and sometimes many, such notices. Here is a typical one for the year 1738:

April 23, 1738

Run away from the Subscriber in Lancaster County, the 17th Instant, a dark, Mullatto Fellow, named Will: He is a lusty, well set fellow, aged about 42 Years; he is pretty much Pock-fretten, and has a Lump on the hind Part of one on his Legs, near his Heel. He wore a man's Cloth Jacket, a Pair of brown Cotton Breeches, and an Ozenbrig Shirt; he carried with him, a white Fustian Jacket, a lopping Ax and a Fiddle: He is a Carpenter, Sawyer, Shoemaker, and Cooper. Whoever

will apprehend the said slave, or give intelligence so that he may be had again, shall be sufficiently rewarded, besides what the Law, allows, paid by

James Ball⁸⁷

Almost, if not all, the masters of slaves resorted to whippings or other so-called "corrections" of slaves. Even the kindest and most even-tempered owners resorted to such means when slaves ran away or neglected their work. William Byrd of Westover makes many references in his diary to such forms of correction. He was a large slave-owner, and undoubtedly one of the highest type of masters; his diary is sprinkled with entries showing his concern for the welfare of his slaves and servants; at one period he made daily entries as to the condition of his Negro "boy" who was quite sick, and seemed genuinely happy to report his recovery. Yet his diary contains many entries of whippings and other corrections meted out to his slaves and servants. The ones who seemed to particularly arouse his ire were two or three of his house servants. Although inevitably referred to as "servants," they were undoubtedly Negro slaves. Following are some typical entries from his diary: "Vented my passion against Moll for doing everything wrong." "Anaka was whipped yesterday for stealing the rum and filling the bottle up with water." "Moll was whipped for a hundred faults." "Eugene was whipped for running away and had the [bit] put on him." "Jenny was whipped for abundance of faults." "Eugene was whipped for doing nothing yesterday."

"I chastised Moll and Eugene for not doing their business on pretence of sickness."⁸⁸ William Byrd, like most of the substantial and respectable planters, had a paternalistic attitude towards his servants and slaves. He tried to teach them their respective duties, and see that they were reasonably faithful in the performance thereof. He doctored them when they were sick, and rejoiced when they recovered. And when they ran away or otherwise failed to do their work he sometimes whipped them or had them whipped.

But not all masters were just, sober, and self-controlled. The following notice in the Virginia Gazette shows what could happen to a slave with the wrong kind of master:

April 21, 1775

On Saturday, Monday, and Tuesday last, the following criminals were tried at the General Court, viz.

William Pitman, from King George for the murder of his negro boy: Guilty

The evidencies against William Pitman were his own son and daughter, by whom it appeared that their father, in the heat of passion, and when in liquor, had, for some trifling offense, tied his poor negro boy by the neck and heels, beat him most cruelly with a large grape vine, and then stamped him to death. This man has justly incurred the penalties of the law, and we hear will certainly suffer; which ought to be a warning to others to treat their slaves with moderation, and not give way to unruly passions, that may bring them to an ignominious death, and involve their families in their unhappy fate.⁸⁹

Occasionally slaves revolted and turned on their masters, mistresses, or overseers. This one was not

successful in his attempt as-reported in the Gazette in 1752.

Sometime last Month a Negro Fellow belonging to Mr. Tunstall Hacke, of Northumberland County, while his Master was asleep, went into his Chamber in the Night, and with an intent to murder him. He carried with him a broad ax and struck him a Blow with it on the Left Shoulder and Arm, by which he is very much wounded, but his life is in no Danger. He immediately made his Escape, and has not yet been heard of. His Honour, the Governor has issued a Hue and Cry against him directed to the Sheriffs of the several Counties; and 'tis hoped their Endeavours will not be wanting to bring the Villain to Justice.⁹⁰

An earlier attempt by a female slave was completely successful against the life of her mistress, but her punishment was swift and terrible. The weapon she chose was also the broad-axe, apparently a favorite weapon among the Negroes. These two notices, published only three weeks apart, tell the grim story in very few words:

Two Commissions for Courts of Oyer and Terminer, have been issued this Week, for the Tryal of Negroes. One for Trying a Negro Woman, for the barbarous Murder of her Mistress (Wife of Mr. Prudden in Nansemond County) with a Broad-Axe.⁹¹

And the sequel:

The Negro Woman who lately killed her Mistress, in Nansemond, upon her Tryal confessed the Fact, received Sentence of Death, and is burnt.⁹²

If the punishments meted out to the Negroes seem extremely severe to us, we must bear in mind that the period under consideration was one noted for the harsh and sometimes brutal penalties of the law. The criminal law of England, after which that of Virginia was patterned, still provided for hanging, drawing, and quartering in the case of treason.

Women who killed their husbands, and servants who killed their masters or mistresses were still sentenced to burning. Although Virginia had some special laws dealing with slaves and Negroes, these were inspired by the fear of Negro uprisings more than by any desire to inflict harsher punishments on the blacks.

A little known fact is that a considerable number of these early slaves used suicide as a means of ending their earthly troubles. In the Order Book of Albemarle County under the date of June 9, 1748, appears the following:

Joel Walker's Deposition.--Joel Walker, the Younger Son of Joel Walker, was this day sworn and Examined in Court in Relation to the Death of William Walker, his Brother, who Deposed he saw Roger, a Slave belonging to his Father, strike the said William Walker several Blows on the Head with a Grubing Hoe, which Blows he believes to be the Occasion of his death; that the Negro there upon ran away from his Father's, and that he sometimes afterwards saw the said Negro Roger Hanging and Dead; and further the Deponent saith not, etc. Ordered this Deposition be Certified to the Gener. Assembly.⁹³

The following three cases are the only ones that could be found in the files of the Virginia Gazette up to the year 1775. One of these was unsuccessful in his attempt, and another occurred in Pennsylvania rather than Virginia, appearing under a Philadelphia dateline.

Williamsburg, July 10, 1752

A few Days ago, a fine Negro Man Slave, imported in one of the late Ships from Africa, belonging to a Wheelwright, near this City, taking Notice of his Masters giving another Correction for a Misdemeanor, went to a Grindstone and making a Knife sharp cut his own Throat, and died on the spot.⁹⁴

Philadelphia

On Wednesday last a negro man, belonging to Mr. Adam Baker, in Cheltenham township, was found hanging on a tree by some women who were passing along the road. He hung himself it is supposed thinking he would go back to his own country, having given that as a reason for a former attempt, when, the rope breaking, prevented his intention.⁹⁵

Williamsburg, September 14, 1775

One day this week a negro man belonging to Mr. Boseman, being detected in stealing of hogs, and committed to gaol; cut his Throat in a terrible manner; but by the assistance of an eminent surgeon, he is now in a fair way of recovery.⁹⁶

From the paucity of such accounts in the press it might be assumed that such occurrences were rare during the period 1736-1775. However such was not the case. During this period there were thirty-one cases of certain suicide among the Negro slaves of Virginia set forth in the Journals of the House of Burgesses. These appear in the Journals as the result of petitions by the owners to be reimbursed for the value of the slaves so lost. These thirty-one petitions, with the disposition made in each case will be found in the Appendix. Not one of these suicides is mentioned in the Virginia Gazette. The reason for this is not hard to find. The death of a Negro slave just wasn't newsworthy. Except to the master, who suffered a pecuniary and perhaps a sentimental loss, such a death, even by suicide, was of little interest to the reading public. This is brought out even more strikingly by the fact that the same printers who published the Gazette during this period were retained to

prepare copies of the proceedings of the House of Burgesses. During this period the paper published one hundred and thirty articles on suicides in Virginia and elsewhere; but, as we have seen above, only three among the many Negro suicides found their way to the press. So apparently it was the Negro, and not death by suicide, that failed to qualify as news.

The General Assembly passed acts in 1705 and 1723 dealing with the prosecution of slaves committing capital crimes, and for punishing those connected with any conspiracy or insurrection. The first law provided for the appointment of courts of oyer and terminer by the governor to meet in the county where the offense occurred. These courts, without a jury, were authorized to arraign, try, and pass sentence on this type of offender. In cases where execution of a slave was awarded, the law required the trial justices to set a money value on the condemned slave, and certify this value to the next Assembly. This would enable the Assembly to make a suitable allowance to the owner for the loss of his slave. The law of 1723, in addition to the above, provided reimbursement for slaves killed: (1) during the dispersing of any unlawful assembly, (2) during the pursuit of rebels or conspirators, or (3) in the seizing of arms and ammunition prohibited by the act. Upon application of the owner the county court must place a valuation on slaves so killed, and certify such valuation to the next Assembly.

It was on the strength of this later law that owners began to petition the House of Burgesses for reimbursement in some cases of slaves who killed themselves. Most such suicides were by Negro slaves who had committed some crime and escaped. Upon being pursued, many took their own lives, rather than submit to capture and the swift justice of the law. There is no record prior to 1736 of a master being reimbursed under the law for a slave who killed himself. Evidently it gradually became apparent to the Burgesses that owners who lost outlawed slaves through suicide were just as much entitled to reimbursement as owners who had slaves lawfully executed. Apparently there were three conditions which must be fulfilled before the owner was granted payment in the case of a slave committing suicide. First, the slave must have committed some felony punishable by execution; second, the owner must have publicly outlawed the slave prior to the suicide; and third, the Burgesses must be convinced of the truth of the allegations set forth. Where all three conditions were met the owner was invariably reimbursed. In a few cases the Burgesses granted allowances when the need of the petitioner was great, even though all conditions were not strictly fulfilled. In other cases, where all the conditions seem to have been met, the petition was denied; apparently because the Burgesses were not convinced of the truthfulness of the petitioner.

The cases in the Appendix represent petitions for reimbursement, introduced in the House of Burgesses between

the years 1736 and 1774. Only those cases which were plainly suicides have been included. During this period there were many other cases listed in the Journals of the House of Burgesses which might have been suicides. Typical are petitions where the owner asks reimbursement for slaves outlawed, and later found dead in the woods; or where outlawed slaves, fearing apprehension, cast themselves in the water and were drowned. It is quite probable that many of these deaths were suicides, but none of this doubtful nature were listed.

It is regrettable that the early Virginia historians included so little material on the Negro in their writings. Later writers have been forced to depend almost entirely on surviving public documents in their efforts to piece together the true story. For example, until the twentieth century, historians left their readers with the mistaken idea that the early Virginia Negroes were all slaves; in fact that Negro slavery was introduced into Virginia with the arrival of the twenty Negroes in 1619. Not until 1902, with the appearance of James Curtis Ballagh's History of Slavery in Virginia, was the fact established that the status of the early Negroes was one of servants; and that they were so identified and treated until the 1660's. In 1913 John Henderson Russell further expanded this theme in his Free Negro in Virginia

1619-1865. In 1940 Susie M. Ames tried to dispute the fact in her Studies of the Virginia Eastern Shore in the Seventeenth Century. Her argument, which rests on scattered references to "slaves" in the records, has now been thoroughly refuted in an excellent article by Oscar and Mary F. Handlin. This article "Origins of the Southern Labor System" appeared in the April, 1950, number of the William and Mary Quarterly.

More and more early public document material is becoming available in libraries of the United States due to the work of historians who have obtained such material from the files of the Public Record Office in London. These seem to be the only reliable sources of information on the early Negro revolts. The secondary works examined by the writer proved to be quite incomplete or inaccurate.

In considering the suicides among the early Negroes, there seems to be practically nothing available on the subject outside the pages of the Journals of the House of Burgesses. And since these represent only a special class of suicides, it is impossible to even approximate any statistics on the total number.

Due to the entire absence of writings by the early slaves, and meagerness of observations on the subject by contemporary writers, much of the story of the Negro in Colonial Virginia can never be told.

NOTES TO CHAPTERS

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. P. A. Bruce, Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century (2 vols.; New York, 1907), I, 512-515.
2. John Smith, The Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, ed. Edward Arber (2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1910), II, 535.
3. Ibid., 615.
4. Bruce, Economic History of Virginia . . . , I, 585, 586.
5. Ibid., 573.
6. For a fuller discussion of conditions prevailing in seventeenth century England see Ibid., 576-583.
7. "Instructions to Governor Yeardley, 1618," printed in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, II, 157.
8. The first Assembly passed a law requiring that all contracts of servants must be recorded by January, 1620, giving the terms and condition of servitude. At the same time they required all new arrivals to record the same information within one month after their arrival in the Colony. (Colonial Records of Virginia, 1619-1680, State Senate Document Extra 1874, 26.)
9. J. C. Ballagh, White Servitude in the Colony of Virginia (Johns Hopkins University Studies, Series 13, No. 6-7, Baltimore, 1895), 34.
10. John Smith, The Travels and Works . . . , II, 541.
11. J. C. Ballagh, A History of Slavery in Virginia (Johns Hopkins University Studies, Extra Vol. XXIV, Baltimore, 1902), 31, 32.
12. Colonial Records of Virginia, 1619-1680, 37.
13. J. C. Hotten, Original List of Emigrants, 1600-1700 (New York, 1931), 258.
14. Ibid., 218-258.
15. Thomas Jefferson, Reports of Cases Determined in the General Court of Virginia from 1730 to 1740 and from 1768 to 1772 (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1829), note on page 119.

16. Examples of this can be seen in Virginia Colonial Abstracts, volumes XVIII and XXXII, which are abstracts of court records of Accomac County for the years 1632-1637, and 1637-1640 respectively.

17. "Virginia Council and General Court Records, 1640-1641" as printed in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XI, 281.

18. "Decisions of the Virginia General Court" as printed in Ibid., V, 236.

19. Ibid., 236, 237.

20. Journal of the House of Burgesses, October, 1666, as printed in Ibid., XVII, 232.

21. "Notes from the Council and General Court Records 1641-1672" printed in Ibid., VIII, 237.

22. "Notes from the Council and General Court Records 1641-1664" printed in Ibid., 163.

23. W. W. Hening, Statutes at Large of Virginia (13 vols., 1619-1792; Richmond and Philadelphia 1819-1823), II, 170.

24. Ibid., II, 283.

25. Ibid., II, 260. See Oscar and Mary Handlin, "Origins of the Southern Labor System," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, VII (1950), 213 and note.

26. H. R. McIlwaine (ed.), Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia 1622-1632, 1670-1676, Richmond, 1924, 354.

27. Hening's Statutes, II, 490, 491.

28. Ibid., III, 87.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 453.

31. Ibid., VIII, 134, 135.

32. Ibid., III, 87, 88.

33. Abstracts of Essex County Records, 1713, printed in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XVIII, 329.

34. Hening's Statutes, IV, 132. This act said in part "That no negro, mullatto, or indian slaves, shall be set free, upon any pretence whatsoever, except for some meritorious services to be adjudged and allowed by the governor and council, for the time being, and a licence thereupon first had and obtained."

35. Ibid., II, 515.

36. John H. Russell, The Free Negro in Virginia 1619-1865, (Johns Hopkins University Studies Ser. 31, No. 3, Baltimore, 1913), 11 and note.

37. Ibid.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

38. J. C. Ballagh, A History of Slavery in Virginia, 9. See also the "Virginia Census, 1624-25," as tabulated by Mr. A. C. Quisenberry in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, VII, 364-368.

39. Peter Force, Tracts and Other Papers, "A Perfect Description of Virginia, 1649," II, Chap. VIII, 3.

40. Hening's Statutes, II, 515.

41. Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America (4 vols., Washington, D. C., 1930-1933), I, 180, 187. (For the whole charter see pages 177-192 of this volume).

42. Ibid., 78-80.

43. Ibid., 82, 83.

44. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1661-1668, 266.

45. For the text of this act see Elizabeth Donnan, Documents . . . , I, 421-429. The independent traders, whether from England or from English colonies in America, were required to pay a ten per cent ad valorem duty on the trading goods carried to Africa. This duty was to be paid to the Royal African Company to help maintain the "Forts and Castles" on the African coast.

46. P. A. Bruce, Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, II, 108.

47. All the above data on slave importations into Virginia were obtained from Elizabeth Donnan's Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, IV, 172-187.

48. U. B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery (New York, 1933), 42-44. See also Bryan Edwards, History of the British Colonies in the West Indies, 1793-94, II, Book IV, Chap. 3.

49. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series . . ., 1701, 721.

50. Virginia Gazette, Nov. 5, 1736; April 21, 1738; August 17, 1739; Dec. 8, 1768; Jan. 15, 1767; Aug. 13, and Dec. 31, 1772.

51. U. B. Phillips, American Negro Slavery, 41.

52. Journal of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1702-1712, H. R. McIlwaine, ed. (Richmond, Virginia, 1912), 240.

53. Apparently this plot involved only hard-up Cromwellian soldiers and disgruntled white servants. The account which Robert Beverley gives of this conspiracy is as follows: "The rigorous circumstances of their trade (i. e. of the Virginians), the persecutions of the Sectaries and the little demand for tobacco, had liked to have had fatal consequences; for the poor coming thereby very uneasy, their murmurings were watched and fed by several mutinous and rebellious Oliverian soldiers that were sent thither as servants. These, depending upon the discontented people of all sorts, formed a villainous plot to set up for themselves." History of Virginia, 55.

54. Hening's Statutes, II, 204.

55. Ibid., 299, 300.

56. Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia (5 vols.; Richmond, 1925-1945), I, 86, 87.

57. Hening's Statutes, III, 210.

58. For the text of these Acts of Assembly see: Hening's Statutes, II, 481, 482; 492; III, 86, 87; 102.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

59. T. J. Wertenbaker, The Planters of Colonial Virginia (Princeton, N. J. and London, 1922), 126.

60. Ibid., 127; see also Bruce's Economic History of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, II, 51, 52.

61. Robert Beverley, The History and Present State of Virginia, ed. Louis B. Wright (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1947), 274.

62. Morgan Godwyn, The Negro's and Indian's Advocate (London, 1680), 38.

63. Charles C. Jones, The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States (Savannah, Ga., 1842), 8.

64. Ibid., 16, 25. For the text of these two letters, see pages 16-27 of this work.

65. Ibid., 45, 46.

66. Calendar of Virginia State Papers, 1652-1781, W. P. Palmer ed. (Richmond, Va., 1875), 129, 130.

67. Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia, III (May 1, 1705-October 23, 1721), H. R. McIlwaine ed. (Richmond, Va., 1928), 242, 243. It should be noted that this barbarous punishment was not peculiar to Virginia. At this time the criminal law of England still provided for hanging, drawing, and quartering of men convicted of treason. See Sir James F. Stephens, A History of the Criminal Law of England (3 vols.; London, 1883), I, 476.

68. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies 1710-1711, Cecil Headlam, ed. (London, 1924), 83. William Byrd notes in his diary for April 19, 1710, that he went to court "where the negroes were arraigned for treason." The Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover 1709-1712, Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling eds. (Richmond, Va., 1941), 168. The Negro slave Peter belonging to Mr. Samuel Thompson, who was one of the ringleaders in the 1709 conspiracy but escaped, was also wanted for complicity in this plot. The Council, on April 18, 1710, ordered that a proclamation be issued offering a reward of ten pounds sterling to anyone bringing Peter in alive, and five pounds to anyone killing him. Executive Journals of the Council, III, 236.

240. 69. Journals of the House of Burgesses 1702-1712,

70. Ibid., xxx, 281. A committee was appointed to draw up a bill to better regulate the Negroes. This committee did draw up such a bill entitled "An Act for The better preventing The Insurrections and Conspiracies of Negroes and other Slaves." However, on its third reading, it was rejected.

71. Hening's Statutes, III, 362-367.

72. Ibid., 537, 538.

73. Ibid., IV, 30, 37.

74. Executive Journals of the Council, IV, 20.

75. Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1722-1723, 192.

360. 76. Journals of the House of Burgesses 1712-1726,

77. Hening's Statutes, IV, 118-135.

78. This letter is from the second volume of the Gooch Papers in the three-volume typewritten transcript collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. Further reference to this source will be shown as Gooch Papers.

79. Hening's Statutes, II, 267. Ever since 1658 all Negroes brought into the Colony, both male and female, were considered tithable if they were sixteen years of age or older. Hening's Statutes, I, 454. Beverly has this to say on the subject: "Sufficient Distinction is also made between the Female Servants, and Slaves; for a White Woman is rarely or never put to work in the Ground, if she be good for any thing else: And to Discourage all Planters from using any Women so, their Law imposes the heaviest Taxes upon Female-Servants working in the Ground, while it suffers all other white Women to be absolutely exempted: Whereas on the other hand, it is a common thing to work a Woman Slave out of Doors; nor does the Law make any Distinction in her Taxes, whether her work be Abroad, or at Home. History and Present State, 271, 272.

80. Hening's Statutes, VIII, 393.

21, 37. 81. Journals of the House of Burgesses 1742-1749, 20,

82. Gooch Papers, I, 118. This letter may also be found in Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series 1728-1729, 414, 415. His previous letter to the Council in this volume is dated March 26, 1729, so that this incident probably occurred in April, 1729.

83. Gooch Papers, I, 204.

84. Ibid., 212. An account of these last two disturbances may also be found in a letter which Governor Gooch wrote to the Bishop of London on May 28, 1731. This letter is printed in the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXXII, 321-325.

85. Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia (October 25, 1721-October 28, 1739), 228.

86. In a letter to Robert Carter of July 18, 1755, Governor Dinwiddie expressed his fears of the Negroes joining in combinations while their masters were engaged with the French. Five days later, writing to Lord Halifax of steps he would take following the disaster to the force under General Braddock, he said he must leave a proper number of the militia in each county "to protect it from the Combinations of the Negro Slaves, who have been very audacious on the Defeat on the Ohio. These poor Creatures imagine the French will give them their Freedom. We have too many here, but I hope we shall be able to defeat the Designs of our Enemies and Keep these Slaves in proper Subjection." A little more than a year later in a letter to Lord Loudon, Dinwiddie placed the number of Negroes in Virginia at 120,156 out of a total population of 293,472. He said this number of Negroes alarmed the people, and they were afraid of bad consequences if the militia were ordered any great distance away. The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie (2 vols. printed from the manuscript in the collections of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va., 1934), II, 102, 113, 474.

87. Virginia Gazette, April 28-May 5, 1738, p. 4. This advertisement also appeared in the following week's Gazette. A slave who was a carpenter, sawyer, shoemaker, and cooper was indeed a valuable investment, and worth trying to recover.

88. The Secret Diary of William Byrd . . ., 5, 22, 38, 46, 84, 119, 295. The editors included a note about the entry of "Eugene having the bit put on him." They said the shorthand symbol used by Byrd could stand for "bit" or "boot," and decided it was an indication of occasional harsh punishment meted out to slaves.

89. Virginia Gazette, April 21, 1775, p. 2.

90. Ibid., August 21, 1752, p. 4.

91. Ibid., February 4, 1737, p. 3.

92. Ibid., February 25, 1737, p. 4. Burning continued to be the penalty for petty treason. (The murder by a wife of her husband, or of a master or a mistress by a servant) until 1790 in English law. In practice, women were strangled before they were burnt. Stephen's, History of the Criminal Law of England, I, 477. It was probably this particular bit of English criminal law that caused the sentence in this case.

93. Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, VII, 444. See also case no. 15 in the Appendix.

94. Virginia Gazette, July 10, 1752, p. 3.

95. Ibid., March 17, 1775, p. 3.

96. Ibid., September 14, 1775, p. 3.

97. Case number fifteen, the petition of Joel Walker, appears to be one of such doubtful nature. However in Walker's deposition as recorded in the Order Book of Albemarle County, we have seen above that the deponent testified that he later "saw the Negro Roger Hanging and Dead."

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APPENDIX

NEGRO SLAVE SUICIDES IN VIRGINIA

1736-1774

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia
1727-1734, 1736-1740.

ASSEMBLY OF 1736-1740

1. August 12, 1736.

Page 254

A petition of William Cox, was presented to the House, and read; setting forth, That his Negro Woman Slave had broke open his House, stolen several of his Goods, desperately wounded his Son, burnt his Tobacco-house, murdered three other of his Slaves, her Children, and drowned herself; whereby he is reduced to Poverty: And praying the Consideration of the House therein, and such Relief as to the House shall seem mete:

Ordered, That the said Petition be referred to the Consideration of the Committee for Public Claims: That they do examine the Matter thereof; and report the same, as it shall appear to them, with their Opinion thereupon, to the House.

August 13, 1736

Page 254

Mr. Blair, from the Committee for Public Claims, reported, That the Committee had had under their Consideration, the Petition of William Cox, to them referred; and had examined the Matter thereof, so far as relates to the Loss

of the Four Slaves therein mentioned, which they found to be true; and were of Opinion, that the Sum of Sixty Pounds, will be a reasonable Allowance for the Losses he has sustained.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the said Committee, to make the said Allowance to the said William Cox, in the Book of Claims.

2. August 20, 1736

Page 262

A Petition of William Morris, of the County of New-Kent; setting forth, That his Negro Man Slave having murdered another of his Slaves, afterwards murdered himself; and praying the Consideration of the House:

3. And also, a Petition of Joseph Peace, of the County of Hanover, setting forth, That one of his Slaves who had murdered another of them, afterwards hang'd himself; and praying the Consideration of the House.

Note: These two petitions were referred to the Committee for Public Claims, but there is no record of the disposition of them.

4. August 20, 1736

Page 263

Mr. Eaton mov'd for Leave to present a Petition of Benjamin Morris, of James-City County, praying to be paid for a Slave, That hang'd himself, in the Public Levy.

And the Question being put, That the said Petition be brought up to the Table.

It passed in the Negative.

5. November 6, 1738

Page 326

A Petition of Robert Cobbs, was presented to the House, and read; representing his Poverty and Misfortune, in the Loss of his only Negro Man, who hanged himself: And praying the Relief of the House.

Ordered, That the said Petition be referred to the Consideration of the Committee for Public Claims: That they do examine the Matter thereof; and report the same, as it shall appear to them, with their Opinion thereupon to the House.

November 15, 1738

Page 341

Mr. Blair, from the Committee of Public Claims, reported, That the Committee had had under their Consideration, several Petitions to them referred: And were come to several Resolutions thereupon; which he read in his Place; and afterwards delivered in at the Table; where the Resolutions were again read, and with an Amendment to one of them, agreed to, by the House, as follows: . . .

Resolved, That the Petition of Robert Cobbs, to be allowed for the Loss of his only Negro Man, who hanged himself, be rejected.

6. November 8, 1738

Page 329

A Petition of Thomas Lankford, in Behalf of himself, and Rebecca Collier, was presented to the House, and read; praying an Allowance for a Slave, given by the Will of John

Collier, to the said Rebecca, for her Life, and after her Decease, to the Wife of the Petitioner; who, being outlaw'd, to prevent being taken, leaped from on board a ship into the River, and drowned himself.

Ordered, That the said Petition be referred to the Consideration of the Committee for Public Claims

November 10, 1738.

Page 336

Mr. Blair from the Committee for Public Claims, reported, That the Committee had had under their Consideration, the several Petitions of Thomas Lankford:

Resolved, That the Sum of Thirty Pounds Current Money be allowed to Thomas Lankford, for a Slave; who being outlawed, and discovered on board a Ship, leaped over-board and was drowned.

7. June 6, 1740

Pages 420-421

A Petition of Elizabeth Monday, of Essex County, Widow, was presented to the House, and read; praying, to be allowed for a Negro Man Slave, named Sharper, who having ran away, and being outlawed by John Monday, her late Husband; upon Advice thereof, and to prevent his being taken, hanged himself.

Ordered, That the said Petition be referred to the Committee of Public Claims:

June 11, 1740

Page 425

Resolved, That the Sum of Twenty Five Pounds be allowed Elizabeth Monday, for a Slave, who hanged himself after he was Out-lawed.

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1742-1747, 1748-1749

ASSEMBLY OF 1742-1747.

8. May 12, 1742

Page 14

A Petition of Zachary Lewis, was presented to the House, and read; praying an Allowance for Sacco, a Negro Slave, belonging to him, who having murdered his Overseer, and fled to avoid Punishment, was found to have hanged himself.

Ordered . . . referred to the Committee of Public Claims:

May 18, 1742

Page 27

Upon Consideration of the Petition of Zachary Lewis, praying an Allowance for his Negro Man Sacco, who murdered his Overseer; and afterwards, to avoid the Punishment of the Law, hanged himself;

Resolved, That the Allegations of the said Petition are true: And that the said Zachary Lewis ought to be allowed, for the said Negro, Forty Pounds Current Money, by the Public.

Ordered . . . to allow the said Claim, in the Book of Claims.

9. .May 29, 1742

Page 43

A Petition of M^r Anthony Walke, a Member of this House, was presented to the House, and read; praying an Allowance for a Negro Man, who, to avoid Punishment for breaking open his Store, fled and drowned himself.

Ordered, That the said Petition be referred to . . . the Committee of Claims.

June 5, 1742

Page 51

On Consideration of the Petition of Anthony Walke, Gent. the Committee having reported, That it does not appear to them, that the Negro Man, Amos, therein named, was confederate with the other Negro Devonshire, therein also named, in the Felony for which the said Devonshire was convicted and executed: And that the Petitioner only endeavoured to apprehend, whip, and examine him, about Two Pair of Virginia Shoes; telling the said Amos, if he could prove he had been Confederate with the said Devonshire, he would prosecute him for it: Upon which the said Amos broke away from his Overseer, and drowned himself:

Resolved, That the said Petition be Rejected.

10. May 31, 1742

Page 44

And also a Petition of Charles Brown, setting forth, That a Negro Man Slave, belonging to Two of the Petitioner's

Children, ran away, and burnt his Kitchen; and being outlawed, hanged himself; and praying the Consideration of the House therein

Ordered . . . referred to . . . the Committee of Claims.

June 5, 1742

Page 51

Mr. Beverley, from the Committee of Public Claims, reported, That the Committee had had under their Consideration, several Petitions to them referred; And had come to several Resolutions thereupon; which he read in his Place, and afterwards delivered in at the Table: Where the same were again read, and agreed to, by the House, with an Amendment, as follows:

Resolved, That the Allegations of the Petition of Charles Brown, in Behalf of Two of the Petitioner's Children, John and Mary Brown, for a Negro Man, of the said Children's, who burnt the Petitioner's Kitchen; and to avoid the Punishment of the Law, ran away, and was outlawed, and then hanged himself; are true: And that the said John and Mary ought to be allowed 30 Pounds for the said Slave, by the Public: And that the Money be applied towards the Purchasing of another Slave, for the same Uses.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims, to make the several Allowances agreed to, by the House, in the Book of Claims.

11. September 12, 1744

Page 86

A Petition of Henry Wythe was presented to the House and read, setting forth, That a Slave belonging to him, being about to be apprehended, on Suspicion of having poisoned his Overseer, ran away, and being out-lawed drowned himself, in order to prevent his being taken; and praying this House to make him some Allowance for the said Slave.

Ordered . . . referred to . . . the Committee of Claims:

September 17, 1744

Page 94

Also a Petition of Henry Wythe, setting forth, That a Slave belonging to him, being about to be apprehended, on Suspicion of his having poisoned his Overseer, ran away, and being out-lawed, drowned himself, to prevent his being taken;

Resolved, That the Allegations of the Petition are true; and that he ought to be allowed Thirty Pounds.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims, to make the several Allowances, pursuant to the said Resolutions.

12. September 24, 1744

Page 104

A Petition of Moor Fantleroy, setting forth, That Harry, a Slave of his, having Killed his Wife, also a Slave of his, ran away; and being out-lawed, some small Time after, drowned himself.

Ordered, . . . referred to . . . the Committee of
Claims.

September 28, 1744

Page 109

M^r Beverley, from the Committee of Claims, reported,
That the Committee had had under their Consideration, divers
Petitions to them referred; and had come to several Reso-
lutions thereupon:

On Consideration of the Petition of Moor Fantleroy,
of Richmond,

Resolved, That the Allegations of the said Petition
are true; and that he ought to be paid Twenty Five Pounds.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee
of Claims, to make the several Allowances

13. February 22, 1745

Page 158

A Petition of Mary Griffin, setting forth, That she
was possessed of two Negroes, who having robb'd Capt.
Garnet's Store, as she supposed, through Fear of being
brought to Justice, ran away, and being out-lawed, drowned
themselves; and praying the Consideration of the House
therein, was presented to the House, and read.

Ordered, . . . referred to the Committee of Claims

. . . .

March 14, 1745

Page 187

Mr. Beverley, from the Committee of Claims, reported

. . . .

On Consideration of the Petition of Mary Griffin, setting forth, That she was possessed of Two Negroe Slaves; that hearing Capt. Garnet's store was broke open and robb'd, in order to clear them, she searched their Cabbins, and found some Linen and other Goods which were stole, on which they ran away; and that in Order to bring them to Justice, she out-lawed them, but never heard of them afterwards, until they were found drowned, which she believes they did to avoid the Punishment of the Law; and praying such Relief as this House shall think reasonable;

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, That the Allegations of the said Petition are true; and that she ought to be allowed Sixty Pounds Current Money.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims, to make the several Allowances

ASSEMBLY OF 1748-1749

14. November 3, 1748

Page 268

A Petition of John Evans, setting forth, That a Negro Woman of his ran away, and continued lurking and doing Mischief for two Months, that she was Out-lawed, and being apprehended and tied to be brought home to him, she made her Escape and drowned herself, and praying such a Compensation to be made him for the said Slave as this House shall think fit; was presented to the House and read; And the Question being put, that the said Petition be referred to a Committee.

It passed in the Negative.

15. November 7, 1748

Page 273

A Petition of Joel Walker, was presented to the House and read; setting forth, That a Negro of his murdered one of his Sons, and ran away; and that being out-lawed, he was afterwards found dead; and praying the Consideration of the House therein.

Ordered, . . . referred to the Committee of Claims

. . . .

November 22, 1748

Page 297

On Consideration of the Petition of Joel Walker Resolved, That the Allegations of the said Petition are true; and that the said Joel Walker ought to be allowed the Sum of Forty Five Pounds for the Slave in the said Petition mentioned.

Ordered That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims to make the several Allowances

16. November 9, 1748

Page 280

A Petition of Robert Daniel was presented to the House, and read; setting forth, that a Negro of his attacked him and his Brother, and having much wounded his Brother, to avoid Punishment he absconded: That he procured him to be out-lawed, some time after which, he hanged himself, and praying such Relief as this House shall think fit.

And the Question being put, That the said Petition be referred to a Committee?

It passed in the Negative.

From Journals of the House of Bupassed in thêrginia
1752-1755, 1756-1758.

ASSEMBLY OF 1752-1755.

17. March 10, 1752

Page 27

A Petition of Robert Adams was offered to the House, praying to be allowed for a Negroe, who being runaway and outlawed, hanged himself, and the Question being put, that the said Petition be received.

Resolved in the Negative.

18. March 10, 1752

Page 27

A Petition of William Broadnax was presented to the House, and read, setting forth, That a Runaway Negroe belonging to him, having committed many Robberies, was outlawed, and being pursued, to prevent being taken, threw himself into a Mill-Pond, and was drowned, and praying Relief in the Premisses.

Ordered, . . . referred to the Committee of Claims

. . . .

March 24, 1752

Page 55

Mr. Fry, from the Committee of Claims, reported

On Consideration of the Petition of William Broadnax;

Resolved, That the Allegations of the said Petition are true, and that he ought to be allowed the sum of Fifty

Pounds, for the Slave therein mentioned.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims, to make the several Allowances pursuant to the said Resolutions.

19. March 19, 1752

Page 43

A Petition of Benjamin Branch, of the County of Southampton, was offered to the House, setting forth, That a Runaway Negroe belonging to the Petitioner, having long continued to be guilty of many Robberies and Misdemeanors, without suffering himself to be taken, the Petitioner, in August last, outlawed him; but before the Proclamation could be duly published, the said Negroe, from a Sense of his Crimes, as the Petitioner conceives, and fearing to be brought to Justice, shot himself, that on the Application of the Petitioner to the said County Court, the said Court valued him at £50 and praying the same be allowed to him.

And the Question being put, that the Petition be received,

Resolved in the Negative.

20. November 7, 1753

Page 111

A Petition of Joseph Hale, praying to be allowed for a Negroe who hanged himself, having first committed a Murder on another Negroe was presented to the House and read.

Ordered, That the said Petition do lie on the Table.

November 27, 1753

Page 138

On Consideration of the Petition of Joseph Haile,
praying to be allowed for a Negroe who hanged himself,
having first committed Murder on another Negroe.

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee,
That the said Petition be rejected, the Allegations thereof,
not being sufficiently proved.

This Resolution being read a second Time, and the
Question put, That the House do agree thereto.

Resolved in the Affirmative.

21. November 16, 1753

Page 125

A Petition of Miles Cary, was presented to the House
and read, setting forth, That a Negroe of his some Time in
the Month of May last, broke open a Store-House belonging to
the Petitioner, and committed several other Crimes; and to
avoid Punishment he absconded; that he procured him to be
outlawed, some Time after which he drowned himself, and
praying such Relief as this House shall think fit.

Ordered, . . . referred to the Committee of Claims

. . . .

November 27, 1753

Page 138

On Consideration of the Petition of Miles Cary,
setting forth, That a Negroe of his some Time in May last,
broke open a Store-House of his, and committed other Crimes,
and to avoid Punishment absconded, that he procured him to

be outlawed, some Time after which he drowned himself, and praying to be allowed for him.

Resolved, That it appears to this Committee, that the said Slave ran away, and whilst he lay out doing Mischief, was outlawed according to Law; that the Petitioner employed some Indians to go in search of the said Slave, who afterwards drowned himself; and that he ought to be allowed the Sum of 50£ for the said Slave, to be paid by the Public.

This Resolution being read a second Time, and the Question put, That the House do agree thereto.

Resolved in the Negative.

22. May 5, 1755

Page 239

A Petition of William Southall, was presented to the House and read, setting forth, That a Negroe Slave of his set Fire to his Barn, and with it consumed all his Tobacco, Corn, Wheat, and Oats, and other Goods, and then hanged himself; by Means whereof the Petitioner with a large Family of small Children were utterly ruined and praying Relief of this House, and the Question being thereupon put,

It passed in the Negative.

Resolved, That the said Petition be rejected.

23. May 5, 1755

Page 239

A Petition of George Mason, was presented to the House and read, setting forth That his Negro Slave Dick, having run away and committed many Felonies, was in due Form

of Law outlawed, and being taken up by some of Captain Mackay's Company, was by them delivered to one Daniel James, in perfect Health: That as the said James was carrying the said Slave to the Constable, he pulled him off his Horse, and in struggling to make his Escape received some Hurt, and refusing to go any further the said James tied him with a Rope to his Horse Tail, and in that Manner dragged him to the next House, where he in a few Minutes expired, and praying such Allowance for his said Slave, as this House shall think fit.

Ordered . . . referred to the Committee of Claims

. . . .

May 16, 1755

Pages 258-260

Mr. Ruffin, from the Committee of public Claims, reported, that the Committee had had under their Consideration several Matters to them referred, and had come to several Resolutions thereupon, which he read in his Place, and then delivered in at the Table, where the same were again read, and are as follow,

On Consideration of the Petition of George Mason; setting forth, That his Negroe Slave Dick, having ran away committed many Felonies, was in due Form of Law outlawed, and being taken up by some of Captain Mackay's Company, was by them delivered to one Daniel James in perfect Health; That as the said James was carrying the said Slave to the Constable, he pulled him off his Horse, and in struggling to make his Escape, received some Hurt, and refusing to go

any further, the said James tied him with a Rope to his Horse's Tail, and in that Manner dragged him to the next House, where he, in a few Minutes expired, and praying such Allowance for his said Slave, as this House should think fit.

Resolved, That it appears to this Committee, That the said Negro ran away and committed some Crime, for which he was tried and one of his Ears cut off, by Order of the Court of the County of Fairfax, That about ten Days afterwards, he ran away again, and thereupon, to wit, on the 27th of April 1754, was outlawed in the common Form, and on the 24th of May following, was taken up by the Officers of Captain Mackay's Company, on their March to the Ohio, and delivered by them to Daniel James, who gave a Receipt for him, in which he promised to deliver the said Slave to the Petitioner or his Order, or otherwise into the Hands of some lawful Constable. That it appears to this Committee, That one Samuel Jenkins, who was a Witness to a Coroner's Inquest that was taken on the Body of the said Slave, after his Death; that the said James told the Deponent Jenkins, that soon after he was out of Sight of the Officers and Company that delivered him the said Slave, he the said Slave pulled the said James off his Horse, and attempted to make his Escape, and refused to go any further, saying he was outlawed, and if he was carried to Prison he should certainly be hanged, the said James was obliged to use some Violence

and strike him two or three Blows; That soon after the said Deponent met the said James, the Negroe fell down in the Road, and either would not, or could not go any further; that there was a great Gust rising at the Time, and the said James being afraid the said Negroe might escape, tied him with a Rope to his Horse's Tail, and in that Manner dragged him to the said Jenkins's House, where he expired in a few Minutes afterwards: That the Jury upon examining the Body could not find any Wounds or Bruises that they thought sufficient to kill him; That Daniel James told the Jury he believed the Negroe had poisoned himself, for he saw him take something out of his Pocket and swallow it, that he was soon after taken with a Vomitting, but as no other Person was by at the Time James said he suspected the Negro took Poison, the Jury did not take much Notice of what he said, and further that this appears by the Deposition of one of the Coroner's Inquest, who proves Jenkin's Testimony before the Coroner's Inquest, as before recited.

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, That the said Petition is reasonable, and that the said George Mason, ought to be paid the Sum of Forty Pounds, for the said Slave, by the Public.

The second Resolution being read a second Time, and the Question put, that the House agree thereto,

It passed in the Negative.

Resolved, That the Petition of the said George Mason, be rejected.

24. May 9, 1755

Page 248

A Petition of William Lightfoot, Esquire, setting forth, That in the Beginning of the Year 1754, a Mulattoe Slave named Jasper, belonging to the Petitioner, run away and being outlawed, stole a Horse and escaped into North Carolina, where he was taken and delivered to one Amos Newsom; but on his Return, in order to avoid Hanging, which he often said he expected if he was brought back into this Colony, he dashed his Brains out against a Rock, and praying to be allowed for the said Slave, was presented the House and read, and the Question being put that the said Petition be referred to a Committee.

It passed in the Negative.

Resolved, That the said Petition be rejected.

25. May 16, 1755

Pages 260, 261

A Petition of Stephen Watkins, setting forth, That some Time last year, he having walked out from Home, in his Absence lost one of his Children, and a Negroe Man Slave, who were murdered by another Negro Slave, belonging to the Petitioner: That the Petitioner being informed thereof, immediately procured several Persons to go armed in pursuit of the Murderer, who had run off, in order to bring him to Justice; but before they could come up with him, he had

hanged himself, to avoid as the Petitioner supposes, the Punishment of the Law. That the Petitioner is an infirm old Man, and had no other Assistance to get his Living, than the two above mentioned Slaves; and praying, that he may be allowed the Value of the said Slave, who committed the Murder, was presented to the House and read.

Ordered . . . referred to the Committee of Claims

. . . .

May 26, 1755

Page 271, 272

On Consideration of the Petition of Stephen Watkins, setting forth, That some Time in the Month of January 1754, being walked out from Home, in his Absence, he had the Misfortune to have one of his Children, and a Negroe Man Slave murdered by another Negroe Man Slave belonging to the Petitioner, That immediately on being informed thereof, and that the Murderer was run off, he procured several Persons to go armed in Pursuit of him, in Order to take and bring him to Justice, but before they could come up with him, he hanged himself, as the Petitioner believes to escape the Punishment of the Law, and praying to be allowed for the said Slave, who did the Murder aforesaid.

Resolved, That the Allegations of the said Petition are true, and that the said Stephen Watkins ought to be paid the Sum of 40£ for his said Slave by the Public.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims, to make the several Allowances

26. May 21, 1755

Page 262

A Petition of Kenneth MacKenzie, setting forth, That a Negroe Slave, belonging to him, named Harry, having quarreled with his Wife, stabbed her in several Places, and imagining that she would die thereof, ran away, whereupon the Petitioner obtained an Outlawry against him, but before it could be published, the said Slave hanged himself, and praying such Allowance as this House should think fit, was presented to the House and read, and the Question being put, that the said Petition be referred to a Committee,

It passed in the Negative.

Resolved, That the said Petition be rejected.

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia
1758-1761.

27. March 10, 1761

Page 203

Also a Petition of Elizabeth King, praying to be allowed for a Slave who, after murdering her late Husband, destroyed himself, were severally presented to the House, and read.

Ordered, . . . referred to the Consideration of the Committee of Claims

March 12, 1761

Page 210

Mr. Bland, from the Committee of Claims, reported that the Committee had had under their Consideration several Petitions to them referred, and had come to several

Resolutions thereon

Resolved, That the Petition of Elizabeth King is reasonable, and that she ought to be paid by the Publick, the Sum of £70 for the Slave in her Petition mentioned.

Ordered, That it be an Instruction to the Committee of Claims to make the several Allowances in the Book of Claims pursuant to the said Resolutions.

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia
1761-1765.

28. November 5, 1764

Page 237

A Petition of Richard Bland, and William Fleming, surviving Executors of James Deans, deceased, setting forth that a Negro Woman Slave named Abbe, belonging to the said Dean's Estate, being committed to the Gaol of Prince George County on Suspicion of poisoning Doctor James Tyrie, since deceased, before the Time appointed for the Trial, she being conscious of her Guilt, hanged herself in the said Gaol; and praying to be paid the Value of the said Slave by the Publick, was presented to the House and read.

Ordered . . . referred to the Consideration of the Committee of Claims

Note: There is no record of the disposition made in the above case.

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia
1766-1769.

29. November 18, 1769

Page 270

A Petition of John Burke was presented to the House, and read; setting forth, that in the latter End of the Year 1764, the Petitioner's Negro Man Slave, named Sam, having run away and committed Felony, and having been regularly outlawed, in order to avoid Punishment, hanged himself; and therefore praying that the Value of the said Slave may be paid to the Petitioner by the Public.

Ordered, That the said Petition be referred to the Committee of Public Claims

November 20, 1769

Page 274

Mr. Archibald Cary reported from the Committee of Public Claims

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that the Petition of John Burke, to be allowed for the Slave therein mentioned be rejected.

The said Resolutions being severally read a second Time, were, upon the Question severally put thereupon, agreed to by the House.

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia
1770-1772

30. February 25, 1772

Page 189

A Petition of Daniel Hamlin was presented to the House, and read; setting forth, that his Negro Man Slave

Parriot, having attempted to Murder his Mistress, and dangerously wounded her, ran away, and was outlawed; and afterwards killed himself; and praying the House to make him a reasonable Satisfaction for the said Slave.

Ordered . . . referred to the Consideration of the Committee of Public Claims;

February 27, 1772

Page 196

Mr. Cary reported from the Committee of Public Claims

It appears to your Committee, by the Depositions of Miller Woodson, and Daniel Hamlin, Jun. that they, the said Deponents, were, about the 6th of October, 1770, at the House of Daniel Hamlin, the Petitioner, and saw the Wife of the said Petitioner lying on a Bed, who appeared to be in great Distress, her Head and Arm being much bruised, and very bloody, who informed them that it was occasioned by a Negro, known by the Name of Parriot, the Property of her Husband; that, from the appearance of the Wound, together with the Description she gave of the Weapon with which it was made, they, the said Deponents, suspected the said Negro had attempted to murder her; that about the 20th of February following, they, the said Deponents, being again at the House of the Petitioner, were conducted, by one of the Family, to a Place in the Woods, a small Distance from the House, where, it was supposed, the said Negro Parriot had

hanged himself; that they there saw a human Scull, with several other Members of the Body, which they supposed were the Remains of the said Negro Parriot; that at the place where the Bones were found the said Deponent Daniel saw some Wearing Apparel, which he well knew belonged to the said Negro Parriot; and further, that he discovered the said Negro not till after he was duly outlawed, and believed the said Outlawry was made before he was known by his Master's Family to be dead.

It further appears to your Committee, by the Depositions of Henry Hamlin, and Thomas Roberts, that about the 6th of October, 1770, they, the said Deponents, being sent for, came to the House of the Petitioner, and saw his Wife much wounded on her Head, and one of her Arms broke; that they were informed by the Petitioner, that he saw his Negro Parriot wound his said Wife, and immediately run away; and that he has not since been heard of but from the Supposition of his having hanged himself.

It further appears to your Committee, by the Depositions of John Rowlett, and Stephen Neal, that they, the said Deponents, were, in the Month of February last, sent for by the Petitioner to see a Negro of his who had hanged himself; that at the Place where it was supposed he was hanged, they saw the Bones and Cloathing of a Person whom,

from the said Cloathing they believed to be the Slave that they heard outlawed, at Church, as a Runaway, belonging to the Petitioner.

Whereupon the Committee came to the following Resolution:

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that the said petition be rejected.

The said Resolution, being read a second Time, was, upon the Question put thereupon, agreed to by the House.

From Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia 1773-1776.

31. May 12, 1774

Page 92

A Petition of Thomas Patterson, of the County of Buckingham, was presented to the House, and read, setting forth that a Negro Man Slave, named Tom, belonging to Petitioner, who had committed Murder and run away, was duly outlawed in May, 1773, and was afterwards found dead, having shot himself as it is supposed with a Gun he had stolen, to prevent his being apprehended and tried for the said Offence, and therefore praying to be allowed the value of the said Slave.

Ordered, that the said Petition be referred to the Consideration of the Committee of public Claims; and that they do examine the matter thereof, and report the same with their Opinion thereupon, to the House.

May 13, 1774

Page 98

Mr. Gary, reported from the Committee of public Claims, to whom the Petition of Thomas Patterson was referred, that the Committee had examined the matter of the said Petition, and had directed him to report the same, as it appeared to them, together with the Resolution of the Committee thereupon, to the House, and he read the report in his place, and afterwards delivered it in at the Clerk's Table; where the same was read, and is as followeth, viz.

It appears to your Committee, that the Slave Tom, in the Petition mentioned, committed a Murder on a white Woman, and immediately ran away, taking with him two of his Masters Guns; that he was duly outlawed, and being sought for by the Sheriff of the County, in Company with several other Persons, was found Dead, and one of the Guns lying by him, with which it was supposed he had shot himself; and that the said Slave was, by the Court of the County of Buckingham, valued at Eighty five Pounds: whereupon the Committee came to the following Resolution:

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that the Petitioner ought to be allowed the sum of Eighty five Pounds for the said Slave.

The said Resolution being read a second time, was, upon the Question put thereupon, agreed to by the House.

Note: From the amounts awarded to owners we learn that the value of an adult Negro slave in good condition increased from about twenty-five pounds in the period 1735-1740 to about eighty-five pounds in the period 1770-1775. This was due mainly to the increased demand for Negro slaves, but partly also to duties laid on imported slaves from time to time. This duty increased the value of slaves already in the Colony as well as those coming in.