

treatment of Virginia slaves depended upon the character and the common sense of their masters. It cannot be denied that some slaves were treated badly, but most of them were treated with kindness. Public opinion in Virginia frowned upon harsh masters.

FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE RACES

A feeling of strong affection existed between masters and slaves in a majority of Virginia homes. Richard T. Barton of Winchester, whose father had freed his slaves and sent them to Liberia, wrote of the parting between his father's family and the families of the freed Negroes: "I was quite a small boy at the time, but I remember the incident perfectly. I recall the weeping family that parted with these servants, who were very dear to us."

Thomas Herndon was another Virginian who freed his slaves and sent them to Liberia. He went on shipboard to tell his servants a last good-by. When the master began to speak, he became so choked with feeling he could hardly talk. The tears in his eyes brought a warm response on the faces of his departing servants.

Said Mr. Herndon: "My heart is too full. I can hardly speak. You know how we have lived together. Servants, hear me. We have been brothers and sisters. We have grown up together . . . You are now on the point of starting for the land of your ancestors. Besides your freedom, we have spent \$2000 in procuring everything we could think of to make you comfortable—clothing, bedding, implements of husbandry, mechanics' tools, books for the children. Bibles, a family Bible for each family. All these have been provided, and when you have been there a few months, we will send you out another supply of provisions and will continue to do so . . ."

These are but two examples of the many records of affection which existed between masters and their servants. It should be noted that Virginians referred to the Negroes as servants and not as slaves.

CHAPTER 29

How the Negroes Lived under Slavery

SLAVE LAWS NOT STRICTLY ENFORCED

EARLY in Virginia's history the General Assembly made laws closely controlling the Negroes. However, the laws were not fully enforced. Many slave masters did not like to have the state government meddle in what they considered their private business. They managed their servants according to their own methods. They knew the best way to control their slaves was to win their confidence and affection.

Many Negroes were taught to read and write. Many of them were allowed to meet in groups for preaching, for funerals, and for singing and dancing. They went visiting at night and sometimes owned guns and other weapons. The

Even if the master were not a kind person, it was to his own interest to keep his slaves contented and in good health. If he treated them well, he could win their loyalty and co-operation. If he ill-treated them, his slaves might become sick or run away. The intelligent master found it profitable to discover and develop the talents and abilities of each slave. Negro youths were taught to be blacksmiths, carpenters, brickmasons, and other skilled workers. The more progressive planters tried to promote loyalty and love of work by gifts and awards. Many slaves were allowed to keep poultry and hogs and to cultivate vegetable gardens of their own, and they were allowed to sell what they raised. Thus, the industrious slave was able to live better than others.

THE HOUSE SERVANTS

Were the Virginia slaves overworked? This is a question which has been asked many times. To answer it, we must understand that there was a difference between the house servants and the field hands. The house servants fared better than the field hands. They were fewer in number and had better minds and manners. Often large plantation houses had more than enough servants; hence the tasks of each one were light. They were better fed and clothed than the field slaves, and they were more often in close contact with the master's family. In this way they learned much about the finer things of life. The house servants took a great deal of pride in their comfortable positions, and they looked down on the field hands.

THE FIELD HANDS

The field hands worked from sunup to sundown. But they were given a rest period at noon, usually from one to three hours. Those who were too old or too sick to work in the fields were not forced to do so. On some plantations every able-bodied slave was given a certain amount of work to do each day. This was known as the "task system." It prevented the

slaves from being careless or lazy, and gave them free hours after they finished their daily tasks.

THE OVERSEER

A planter who had as many as thirty slaves usually employed an overseer to supervise them. As a rule, the overseer was paid a low salary and a share of the crops. The planter often kept a close eye upon him to see that the slaves were not overworked or badly treated. Occasionally, a slave was given the position of overseer. He was rewarded in this way when he had given the planter unusually good service. Most of the Virginia slaves, however, lived on plantations where there were less than thirty slaves. Therefore, they did not labor under overseers, but under the direct supervision of their masters.

HOW THE SLAVES LIVED

The slaves lived in one-room cabins, with fireplaces at which the cooking was done. The slave quarters of a large plantation looked like a village, with rows of cabins on each side of wide lanes or streets. The overseer's house was at the end of the street. These quarters were often at some distance from the plantation house.

Each slave was given a weekly ration consisting of three or four pounds of pork and plenty of corn meal and molasses. To this food were added the vegetables, fruits, hogs, and chickens which the slaves were allowed to raise for themselves. They fished in the rivers and ponds, trapped rabbits, and caught 'possums in the woods at night. When a slave was sick, tempting food was often carried to him from the master's table. Christmas was the great holiday of the year. At this time extra rations and presents were given the slaves, and a Christmas drink was served.

Every slaveowner furnished clothing to his slaves. Male field hands received each year two summer suits, two winter suits, a straw hat, a wool hat, and two pairs of shoes. The



The slave quarters on a plantation, Upper Brandon

Negro children wore only one garment, which looked like a short nightgown. The Negro women were given bright calico or linsey-woolsey materials from which they made their clothes. Many women who were not strong enough to work in the fields wove homespun cloth from which the slaves' clothes were made. Often the members of the master's family would hand down to their favorite slaves clothing which they no longer needed. On holidays and Sundays these slaves made an attractive appearance. They loved finery, and they had skill in making old garments appear new.

Every effort was made to protect the health of the slaves. On many of the big plantations there were slave hospitals. It was the duty of all mistresses to give sick slaves the same care they gave their own children. The planters kept on hand a supply of castor oil, calomel, liniments, quinine, and ipecac. These were given for smallpox, chills, colds, dysentery, whooping cough, and measles, the chief diseases of the slaves. Doctors were called to care for slaves who were very sick.

The house servants became almost as much a part of the

planter's family circle as its white members. They had a share in almost every family event. The new-born baby was placed in the arms of a Negro nurse who tenderly cared for the young children. The Negroes were always present at family weddings. They were allowed to look on at dances and other entertainments. When members of the family were sick, it was the Negroes who sat all night by the bedside. The Negroes prepared the dead for burial. A strong tie existed between slave and master because each was dependent on the other. The master needed the work and loyalty of his slaves. The slave was dependent for all his needs on the master. The slave system demanded that the master care for the slave in childhood, in sickness, and in old age. The regard that master and slaves had for each other made plantation life happy and prosperous.

The children of both races could go everywhere on the plantation. The white and Negro boys played together and enjoyed each other's company. In spring and summer the boys went swimming together in the creeks and ponds. Together they rode plow horses to and from the fields. They chased the cows, the colts, and the mules.



The amusements of the adult slaves were very much like the amusements of the masters. The white people danced to the music of fiddles in ballrooms lighted by many candles. And the Negroes in the nearby slave quarters danced by the light of pine flares to the twang of the banjo. The masters galloped after the fox and hunted deer and birds. The Negroes trapped rabbits by day and 'possums by night.

RELIGION AND PLANTATION LIFE

Religion was an important part of the Virginia slave's life. But after Nat Turner's Rebellion, the law forbade slaves or free Negroes to be ministers. However, it was the custom of the master to have religious services in his home for his family and his slaves.

Everyone in the slave quarters was glad to see Sunday come. This was Church Day. Sometimes, in order to get to church, the Negroes had to walk four or five miles. They went dressed in their Sunday best. It was customary for the slaves to sit in the gallery of the church, but sometimes an extra service was held for them after the regular service. All of the religious worship of the Negroes, however, did not take place under the watchful eyes of the white men. Sometimes they would slip away at night into the woods, where they would hold meetings and worship God in their own way.

THE FREE NEGROES

There were many Negroes in Virginia who were not slaves. These were the free Negroes. Their number increased to 53,000 by 1860. The laws of Virginia which governed the free Negroes were strict. Free Negroes could not buy or sell whiskey, or own firearms. They were required to be at home after certain hours, and they could not be taught to read and write. The laws which controlled the free Negroes were, however, often not enforced.

Numerous free Negroes were skilled laborers. They were blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, bakers, and can-



When the day's work was over, the plantation Negroes enjoyed themselves.

dlemakers, and some of them were barbers. A large number of the free Negroes were so poor that they lived no better than the slaves. However, some were prosperous.

Before the Nat Turner Rebellion the highest calling among the free Negroes was the ministry. There were many earnest and intelligent preachers among them. Some were so highly regarded that at times they preached to white congregations.

One important Negro minister was John Chavis, who for a number of years was connected with the Presbyteries of Lexington and Hanover. He studied at Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) and at Princeton University in New Jersey. His ability as a preacher and his dig-

nity of manner attracted much attention. Later, John Chavis moved to North Carolina, where he established a classical school in which he prepared the sons of prominent citizens for college.

HOW THE SLAVES FELT

Life among the Negroes of Virginia in slavery times was generally happy. The Negroes went about in a cheerful manner making a living for themselves and for those for whom they worked. They were not so unhappy as some Northerners thought they were, nor were they so happy as some Southerners claimed. The Negroes had their problems and their troubles. But they were not worried by the furious arguments going on between Northerners and Southerners over what should be done with them. In fact, they paid little attention to these arguments.



A northern Abolitionist speaks against slavery.

CHAPTER 30

The Problems of Slavery

MANY VIRGINIANS DISAPPROVE OF SLAVERY

IN 1790 there were more than 290,000 slaves in Virginia. This number was larger than that of any other state. Many Virginians regretted this fact. They spoke against slavery, and some slaveholders tried to work out plans through which the slave system could be abolished. Among them were George Mason, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, George Washington, and John Randolph of Roanoke.

Mason declared that slavery caused slaveholders to lose sight of "the Dignity of Man which the Hand of Nature has planted in us for great and useful purposes." Jefferson spoke

of the evils of slavery: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; and that his justice cannot sleep forever." And when John Randolph of Roanoke was asked who was the greatest orator he had ever heard, he replied: "A slave, Sir. She was a mother and her rostrum was the auction block." Randolph was referring to the worst feature of the practice of slavery, the selling of Negroes away from their families.

SOME VIRGINIANS FREE THEIR SLAVES

The Virginians who felt so strongly against slavery did something about it. They persuaded the General Assembly, in 1782, to make it easy for masters who wanted to free their slaves to do so. In his will, George Washington freed his slaves, and Robert Carter, of "Nomini Hall" in Northumberland County, freed more than five hundred of his slaves over a period of twenty years. William Ludwell Lee, who lived at "Green Spring," Sir William Berkeley's old home near Williamsburg, freed his slaves and left lands for their use rent-free for ten years. Richard Randolph, of "Bizarre" in Cumberland County, freed his slaves and set them up as small land-owners on "Israel Hill" in Prince Edward County.

The result of these and similar acts was that the free Negro population increased rapidly. In 1790 there were 12,866 free Negroes in Virginia. In 1820 this number had increased to 36,883.

THE PROBLEM OF FREEING THE NEGROES

There were more slaves in 1830 than in 1790, even though the number of free Negroes had increased rapidly. More slaves were not freed because nobody could think of a plan that would answer the problems of a large, free Negro population. It was believed that Negroes without the supervision of white masters would fall into crime and poverty. Free Negroes were suspected of having an evil influence on the slaves. This suspicion was unjust, but most Virginia leaders

A
newspaper
advertisement for
the return of a
runaway slave

HARRIS,
Came to Baltimore two weeks ago;
he is a dark Mulatto, about 25 or 30 years old, 5 feet 4 or 5
inches high, full and round-faced, with a small chin, and full
fuit of long wool; he is broad over the shoulders, and has re-
markable stout limbs. He is a very plausible fellow, can drive
a carriage well, and has been able to horse, and waiting at
table. He speaks correctly, and in a full voice. He has pulled
in Deane's County for a freeman, and called himself TOM
SANTON, or SAMSON, and will probably take another
name. He had on a country linen shirt and trousers, and white
linsey jacket, and has had the little finger of his left hand
broken. I will give **FOUR DOLLARS** reward, and reason-
able charges, if he is located in the State, and **TEN DOL-
LARS** if out of it. **ROBERT BROWNE.**
Queen-Ann's County, June 6, 1789.

who asked for freedom for the slaves wanted it on one con-
dition: that freed Negroes be taken out of the state.

If the Negroes were to be freed, a place would have to
be found where they could settle. One plan was to secure
lands for them in the unoccupied areas in the West. The Gen-
eral Assembly thought this was a good idea and asked Con-
gress to set aside a part of the Louisiana Purchase for the
settlement of free Negroes. A group of free Negroes in Rich-
mond asked to be allowed to settle in the Missouri Valley.
John Randolph of Roanoke provided in his will for the pur-
chase of 3200 acres in Mercer County, Ohio. This land was
to be used for the settlement of his four hundred slaves. John
Thom of Culpeper County purchased lands in Pennsylvania
for his slaves. John Warwick of Amherst County left his en-
tire estate to settle his slaves in Indiana. Unfortunately, the
white people of the North and West did not want Negroes
among them whether they were free or slave. Sometimes
bands of armed westerners drove Negroes away, and several
states of the Northwest passed laws preventing Negroes from
settling within their borders.

THE FOUNDING OF LIBERIA

As early as 1779, Thomas Jefferson asked the General
Assembly to free the slaves and settle them in Africa. Nothing
came of this plan at that time. It was brought up again when

the American Colonization Society was organized in 1816. Bushrod Washington, a nephew of George Washington, and John Marshall were leading members. The General Assembly showed its approval by giving money to send free Negroes to Africa.

In 1822 Liberia, the Land of Freedom, was founded on the west coast of Africa as a home for free Negroes. Its capital was named Monrovia in honor of President James Monroe. A few thousand American Negroes went to Liberia. Of this number, three thousand were Virginians. The progress of Liberia was due largely to Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a free Negro of Petersburg. He was the first president of the country.

Liberia did not solve the problem of what to do with the Negroes of Virginia and the other Southern States. So great was the Negro birth rate that the number who went to Liberia was but a small part of the entire Negro population. Actually, Virginia Negroes did not want to go to Liberia. They were no longer Africans in their customs and habits, and they liked Virginia food, Virginia climate, and Virginia ways of living. Those Negroes who went to Liberia sent back accounts of wild African tribes who did not welcome American Negroes. They told of death from strange diseases, of snakes big enough to swallow a man, of houses of bamboo, and of farms without horses or mules. The Negroes were homesick. Many longed to get back to the plantations and the people of Virginia.

HARD TIMES IN VIRGINIA

At the time the Negroes were being sent to Liberia, Virginia planters were having financial difficulties. The price of farm products was falling. Tobacco lands were worn out from overuse. Planters were in debt. Many of them had to sell their slaves to help pay these debts. Other slaves were sold because their masters could not support them. Most Virginians did not have the money to buy slaves who had to be sold. So Virginia slaves were often sold to planters in other sections

of the South. In those sections the planters were not having such serious money problems. In fact, the planters of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas were prosperous. Europe was anxious to buy all the cotton these states could produce. To raise more cotton, more slaves were needed. Where were the slaves to come from? Virginia was partly the answer to this question.

Many Virginians thought it was wrong to sell their slaves far away from home, and they refused to do it. Others wrote in their wills that their slaves might be sold if members of families were not separated. But this was not always possible. Many planters were forced by their debts to sell their slaves even if it meant separation of families. Although some of the Negroes were discontented with their lot, it must be remembered that Virginia was a home as much beloved by most of its Negroes as by its white people. Negroes did not wish to leave their old masters and their old friends.

VIRGINIANS MOVE SOUTH AND WEST

Not all the slaves who moved south were sold away from their masters. In 1850 there were thousands of Virginians living in the slave states to the south and west of Virginia. Many of these people were masters who had moved with their slaves. Virginia planters would send their sons or their neighbors to look for new lands. On their return they would report on fertile sites for new plantations. There was a tendency for Virginians to move in groups into the Southern States. Sometimes it was a group of neighbors, sometimes a church congregation. Most often it was just one family and its relatives.

One of the best examples of a planter who moved farther south was Colonel Thomas Dabney of "Elmington" in Gloucester County. He had been one of the most successful tobacco and wheat farmers in Tidewater Virginia. But he had a growing family and owned two hundred slaves. He needed richer lands than those available to him in Virginia. After he got these lands, his family and slaves could live in plenty and

comfort. So Dabney visited Mississippi. Here he bought a tract of 4000 acres in Hinds County. When he returned home, he called his servants together and announced his plans to move to Mississippi. If his slaves wanted to stay in Virginia, he would, he said, sell them in such a way as to prevent the breaking up of families. All his slaves decided to go with him.

Dabney's preparations for the long journey to Mississippi were carefully made. Neither his family nor his slaves suffered discomfort along the way. Thomas Dabney always sought the welfare and happiness of his slaves, and so he received their full cooperation in their new home. His Mississippi plantation was a model in the cotton kingdom.

THE ABOLITIONISTS

On January 1, 1831, a newspaper called *The Liberator* was started in Massachusetts. Its editor was William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison and his followers were called Abolitionists. They wanted to abolish slavery; that is, they wanted to do



away with it. They demanded the freeing of all slaves at once and without payment to their masters or regard for the laws protecting slavery. They said that slaveholders were robbers, murderers, and thieves. They accused the masters of working their slaves to death. The Abolitionists also said that the slaves were not given enough clothes and that the masters beat them with heavy lashes. They said the slaves were chewed by bloodhounds, and that red pepper and turpentine were poured into their wounds. They used the United States mails to send their abusive literature into the South.

Virginians were angry about the false charges of the Abolitionists. They were not guilty of such crimes, but they feared that the acts of the Abolitionists would lead the slaves to commit bloody deeds. They knew that the Abolitionists had organized the Underground Railroad.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Underground Railroad was an organization of Abolitionists that helped runaway slaves escape from the slave states. Its members hid the runaways in barns and closets and moved them by night over definite routes and stations until they reached Canada. Since Canada belonged to Great Britain and not to the United States, the slaves would be free there. Runaway slaves looked upon Canada as the Promised Land.

NAT TURNER'S REBELLION

Eight months after the appearance of *The Liberator*, Virginia experienced a great tragedy which shocked the people of the whole South. It was the rebellion led by Nat Turner, a slave on a plantation in Southampton County. Nat's mother, Nancy, had been born in Africa. His father had run away when Nat was a child. Nat was quick to learn, and his master's son taught him to read the Bible. He became extremely religious and was convinced he had orders from God to free the slaves of his neighborhood and to go to Jerusalem. The only

Jerusalem Nat knew was the Southampton County seat. This was called Jerusalem before it was given its present name of Courtland.

Nat Turner had strange visions. Every time he looked at the sky, he saw signs which told him he must perform a bloody deed to free the slaves. In the quiet of the night he heard voices urging him on. An eclipse of the sun in 1831 made him feel this was God's sign that the time for action was near. He whispered his plans to other slaves and got their help.

On August 13 they thought they saw new signs in the heavens which told them August 21 was the fatal day. On that day Nat and his friends armed themselves with corn knives, axes, and scythes. Late in the night they turned upon the family of Nat's master, Joseph Travis, and murdered all its members. Horses, firearms, strong drink, and the aid of other slaves were secured. A horrible butchery took place on the plantations along the road from Boykins to Jerusalem. Between fifty and sixty white men, women, and children were killed.

The black wings of fear hovered over Virginia as news of the crime spread from plantation to plantation. The white men armed themselves and began to hunt down the mad killer and his sixty or seventy followers. With the appearance of this armed group, the rebellion collapsed. But Nat Turner slipped away from his pursuers and hid near the Travis plantation. He was not found for six weeks. After his capture he was tried, found guilty, and hanged at Jerusalem. Of his followers who were captured, sixteen were tried and put to death. Twelve were sent to the West Indies, where they remained in slavery.

For weeks after the Nat Turner Rebellion, there was widespread fear in Virginia. The white people in other slave states also became alarmed. Wild tales were told about the hundreds of white people who were said to have been murdered in Southampton County. So numerous were the rumors of Negro uprisings that many white families remained awake night after night.

We now know that Nat Turner had no connections with slaves outside his home county. But at the time many people thought he was at the head of a plot which bound the slaves together to murder white persons. The white people believed this plot included not only the slaves of Virginia but also those of the whole South.

A DEBATE IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

By the end of 1831 thoughtful Virginians realized something had to be done about the problem of slavery. When the General Assembly met in December, a few months after the Nat Turner Rebellion, its members were much concerned over the problem. Some of the lawmakers asked that all Virginia Negroes be freed. The feeling against slavery was strongest in Southwest Virginia and that part of the state which later became West Virginia. Most of the legislators who wished to continue slavery lived in the Piedmont and the Tidewater where most of the slave population was found. Those who did not wish to free the Negroes said slavery was the only practical way of keeping order among the large Negro population of the state.

Members of the General Assembly debate the future of slavery, 1831.

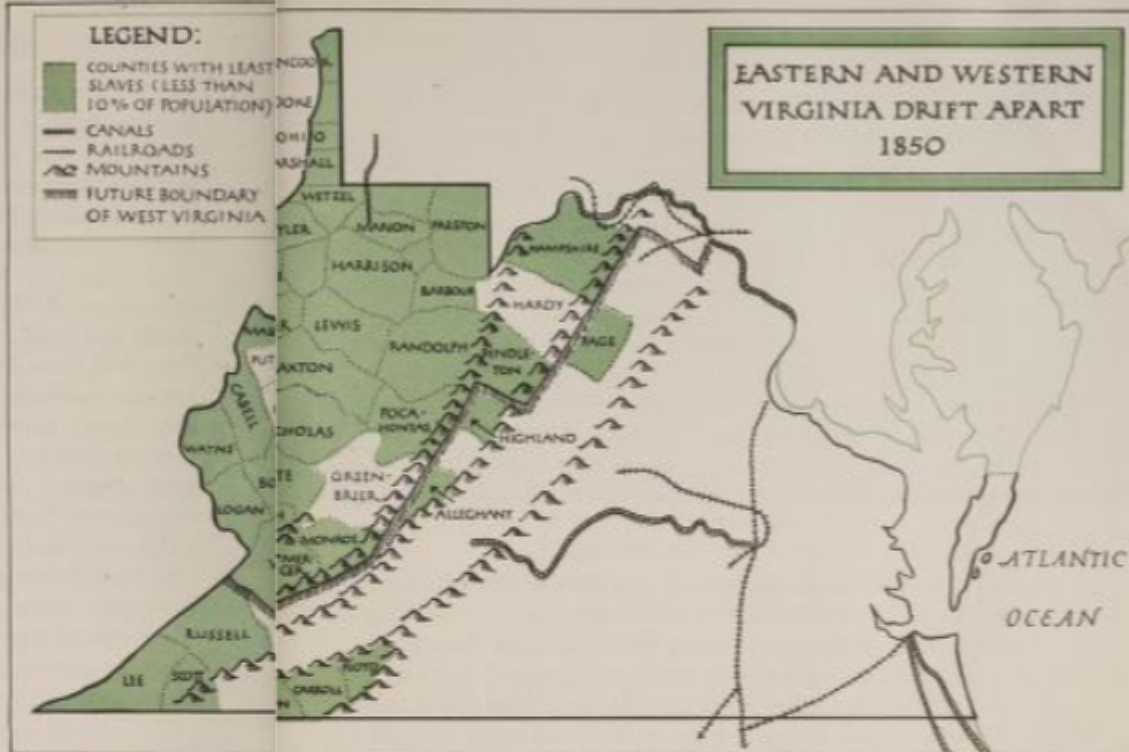


A great debate took place in the General Assembly. The members most active in the debate against slavery were Thomas Jefferson Randolph, the grandson of Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Marshall, the son of the great Chief Justice. Randolph and Marshall were aided in their stand against slavery by Dr. John Floyd of Montgomery County, who was governor of the Commonwealth at that time, and by three young members from western Virginia. They were Charles J. Faulkner, James McDowell, and George W. Summers. These opponents of slavery were not Abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison. They wanted the masters to be paid for the loss of their slaves, and they wanted the slaves to be freed gradually and then removed from the state.

Those who wished to free the slaves lost by the close vote of sixty to sixty-seven. They might have won if money could have been found to pay the owners for the loss of their slaves. But there was not enough money in the state treasury to pay such a vast sum. Also, no satisfactory way could be found to remove the Negroes from the state after they were freed. The people of Virginia believed that a huge free Negro population would create great hardships for both races. The freed Negroes would have no money, no land, and no homes of their own. Many of them would have no jobs.

SLAVE LAWS MADE STRONGER

Virginia followed up the failure to abolish slavery with the placing of stricter controls on the Negroes. It became un-



lawful to teach Negroes to read or write because of the fear that they would get dangerous ideas from the books and newspapers of the Abolitionists. Slaves were not allowed to leave the plantations without written passes from their masters. They could not meet in social or religious groups unless white men were present. They were not allowed to own firearms. Groups of white men, called patrollers, were organized to keep the slaves in bounds.

THE PROSLAVERY ARGUMENT

Virginia's inability to get rid of slavery led Thomas Rodrick Dew to answer the false statements made by the Aboli-

tionists. Dew said that slavery was good. He was supported in his reply by such respected Virginians as the famous farmer, Edmund Ruffin; the editor, George Fitzhugh; and the Reverend William A. Smith, president of Randolph-Macon College. These men agreed that slavery was not only necessary, but was good for both master and slave. They insisted that life under slavery was calm and peaceful. They reminded the Abolitionists that the Southern States had the constitutional right to have slavery. If this had not been true, these states would not have ratified the Constitution of the United States. They further pointed out to the Abolitionists that in the South there was little poverty of the kind found in the North. Dew said that if slavery were abolished, the Negroes would fall into idleness, and the white people would fall into poverty.

SLAVERY AND POLITICS

The question of slavery not only divided the North and the South; it also divided the people and the sections of Virginia. Some of Virginia's leaders were convinced that slavery was morally wrong, and they attempted gradually and peacefully to abolish it. After the gradual abolition plan failed, most Virginians came to resent the outside interference by northern Abolitionists and to fear the possibility of slave uprisings. Some Virginians began to argue that slavery was a positive good.

The people of western Virginia continued to oppose slavery. They also opposed the leaders of eastern Virginia on such other public issues as representation in the General Assembly and internal improvements. The people of eastern and western Virginia grew so far apart in their ideas and aims that eventually the separate state of West Virginia was established beyond the Allegheny Mountains.



"Shirley," the house of the Carters on the James River

CHAPTER 31

Progress and Leadership from 1830 to 1850

NEED OF A NEW STATE CONSTITUTION

THE western counties of Virginia had asked for a new state constitution at the Staunton Convention of 1816. This demand went unheeded. The constitution of 1776 became more and more unsuited to the changing needs of the people of a growing state. Many Virginians believed their state should follow the example of several other states by giving more people a share in the government. They resented the restriction of voting to property holders. They objected to the counties being ruled by the justices of the county courts who were not elected by the people, but appointed by the governor.