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ANDREW JACKSON: PLANTER

By ARDA WALKER

Few Americans have had more written about them than the picturesque seventh president, Andrew Jackson. Professional and amateur historians, fiction writers, political writers and plain people have turned to pen and print to explain, praise, glorify, or condemn the man. In spite of all that has been written, certain phases of Andrew Jackson's thinking and certain activities in which he was greatly interested have not been completely presented.

Andrew Jackson was a planter, a statesman, a soldier, a lawyer, a businessman, and a politician, but first of all he was a planter. In all of his many-sided life, his interest as a planter was the only one to last throughout. This interest began with his arrival in Tennessee and continued until his death fifty-eight years later. His plantation life was varied but it centered at his beloved home, the Hermitage and the plantation surrounding it. His correspondence is replete with instructions, inquiries, comments and statements of his concern about his estate. Throughout his political life and his life as a soldier, he longed to return to the Hermitage. In 1827 he wrote that if he was out of public life, "it would take a writ of *habeas corpus*"¹ to draw him in again. Echoing the views of his predecessor, Thomas Jefferson, he proclaimed in his third presidential message, "Agriculture is the first and most important occupation of man."² His life as a lawyer, soldier, and governor of the Florida Territory was merely a means to an end, and that end was a professed ambition to be the leading planter and stock breeder in Tennessee. From the time he bought his first ten acres at Hunter's Hill until his death, his "greatest delight was to pilot some visitor around his plantation."³

The traditional picture of Jackson is not one of a man whose first interest was agriculture; nevertheless, being a planter was of the highest importance to Jackson. It does not mean that he made his greatest success in this field. As one of his biographers has ex-

¹Jackson to John Coffee, January 23, 1828, J. S. Bassett (ed.), *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, 1926-1936), III, 274. Hereinafter this work will be cited as *Correspondence*.

²J. D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (Washington, 1903), II, 545.

³A. C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1904), I, 126-27.

pressed it, "He did not make as brilliant a success in farming as some of his neighbors. He lived in too high a manner for that A more thrifty man would have made more money, but he would not have supported so high a place among his acquaintances."⁴ Jackson's necessary absence from home so much of his time led to waste on the part of overseers. His adopted son and wards were not always as thrifty as they might have been, and improvident cotton factors caused Jackson endless losses. Jackson was not always the man of quick and decisive action in his agricultural activities that he seems to have been in his military and political life. Sometimes he failed to follow his protests to overseers, son, wards, and neighbors with decisive "Jacksonian" action.

At one time or another, Jackson owned four plantations, if one is to include Hunter's Hill, which was more of a business adventure than it was an agricultural undertaking. The plantation at Hunter's Hill he was forced to sell in 1805 because of unfavorable business activity, but later during prosperous years he again purchased it and retained it until 1841.⁵ He purchased the Hermitage, which varied in acreage from time to time, in the spring of 1804, and this estate became his home for the remainder of his life.⁶

In 1819 he purchased a farm near the forks of the Cypress, ten miles north of Florence, Alabama. It was this estate that James G. Birney proposed to work jointly with Jackson in 1821.⁷ This estate proved to be a burden to Jackson. His Negroes ran away; he was unable to secure good overseers; and the land was unproductive. In 1822 he sold that part of the farm that had improvements and not long afterward sold the remainder of the land.⁸

In 1837 Jackson owned only the land on which he lived, the Hermitage, of 940 acres, and an 840 acre tract in the Western District.⁹ After 1840 Jackson found himself heavily burdened with debt, a debt that was in reality not Jackson's but Andrew Jackson Jr.'s which was incurred through the boy's purchase of Halcyon, a Mississippi plantation. The senior Jackson strongly advised against this transaction, but when his adopted son unwisely disregarded his advice the old man financed the purchase. This became Jackson's fourth plantation, since he was the real purchaser and owner.

⁴Bassett, *Correspondence*, I, vi.

⁵*Ibid.*, 101 n; Jackson to Andrew Donelson, February 9, 1840, *ibid.*, VI, 53.

⁶Jackson and Hutchings to Boggs and Davidson, July 31, 1804, *ibid.*, I, 101.

⁷James Jackson to Jackson, May 28, 1821, *ibid.*, III, 61.

⁸*Ibid.*, 166 n.

⁹Jackson to F. P. Blair, May 11, 1837, *ibid.*, V, 481. Buell states that at this time he owned 2,600 acres and 137 Negroes. A. C. Buell, *op. cit.*, II, 369.

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The Mississippi plantation, Halcyon, proved to be a "white elephant" as Jackson had feared. The Mississippi River flooded the plantation yearly, and the freshets destroyed all hope of profit. In 1844 his overseer, J. M. Parker, wrote that water covered the plantation from one to six feet and that he had been over the entire plantation in a canoe. Fences were all down. He had built a raft for the hogs, but it was loosed from its moorings, so all the hogs were lost. The horses and mules were at the point of death, while the cattle had escaped into the canebrakes where they too were dying. Floods of this kind were annual events. Finally, in 1845, over his adopted son's protests, he wrote W. B. Lewis that he was determined to sell the 2,900 acre plantation. He described it as having four hundred acres of cleared land under cultivation, one hundred acres in pasture, the rest in timber, and with one and a half miles of levees.¹⁰

This decision to sell the plantation did not save Jackson from financial embarrassment. He had already found it necessary in 1842 to mortgage 1,180 acres and thirty Negroes. This was the first mortgage that he ever gave.¹¹ Three years later by an additional mortgage to F. P. Blair and John C. Rives on 1,700 acres, his entire estate was given as security for the debt of his adopted son.¹² These figures give one an idea of the extent of his holdings at the latter part of his life. His greatest desire at this time seems to have been that of saving the Hermitage for his grandchildren, but despite his heroic efforts, the debts accumulated by Andrew Jackson Jr., necessitated the selling of the Hermitage under the hammer only ten years after the builder's death.

Economy, self-sufficiency, and freedom from debt were the keynotes of his agrarian philosophy—a philosophy which he was often unable to make practicable when confronted with plantation problems. Problems on the Jackson plantation during the first four decades of the nineteenth century were in reality problems which moved the nation toward the "irrepressible conflict." Jackson's plantation life gives a picture of large slave-holding estates of this period.

Away from home a great deal of the time, Jackson often sent instructions regarding the culture of his cotton crops: where they were to be planted, what replanting was to be done, and when to plow. From the fifteenth to the twenty-fifth of April was the cot-

¹⁰J. M. Parker to Jackson, August 2, 1844, *Correspondence*, 308-09; Jackson to W. B. Lewis, February 12, 1845, *ibid.*, 368.

¹¹Jackson to W. B. Lewis, February 28, 1842, *ibid.*, VI, 141; Jackson to W. B. Lewis, September 30, 1841, *ibid.*, 126.

¹²Jackson to W. B. Lewis, March 3, 1845, *ibid.*, 378.

ton-planting time.¹³ At the Hermitage anywhere from 120 to 200 acres of this staple were raised.¹⁴ Jackson insisted upon careful plowing, asking that it be deep and that the ground be harrowed afterwards, for he felt that if one plowed "better and cultivate[d] less," he would "produce more."¹⁵ The cotton was "hilled up," planted, and then thinned, if necessary.¹⁶ It received the primary attention of the plantation workers. If there was too much work to be done, Jackson ordered that the overseers should "pay attention to keeping the cotton cleared and let the corn go until afterwards."¹⁷ Jackson gave the cotton sometimes as many as eight plowings in a season. It began to bloom, depending upon the year, somewhere between the twentieth of June and the twentieth of July.¹⁸ Frequently late frosts, rains, and drouths meant considerable loss to the cotton crop. In 1834 a frost of April 28 destroyed almost all the cotton in Tennessee. At this time Jackson displayed ingenuity and resourcefulness when he instructed his overseer to run a coulter along side of the cotton and replant the whole. In this way he could keep all the first planting that escaped the frost and also have the second planting. Ten years later he lost about half of his crop in a late frost.¹⁹ The late frosts of Middle Tennessee were a great hazard to the growing of cotton. Jackson realized this and in 1836 advised his overseer to change his culture in part from cotton to hemp and tobacco and to turn his attention to stock, as he was convinced from the change in the seasons that "We must not depend upon the cotton crop entirely, for a support[er]."²⁰

Although greatly interested in the planting and growth of the crop, it was in its marketing that Jackson was chiefly concerned. This had to be done largely through factors, some of whom were careless and some of whom were dishonest. In 1808 Jackson himself had been a cotton inspector and therefore, presumably, knew now to differentiate between good and poor cotton,²¹ but poor overseers, a careless adopted son, and careless or dishonest factors often permitted improper handling of his crops. From 1803 to 1807 a firm named Meeker, Williamson, and Patton handled Jackson's cotton. In the latter year the firm did not give account of the

¹³Jackson to Mrs. Jackson, March 22, 1803, *ibid.*, I, 65.

¹⁴Jackson to John Coffee, December 22, 1827, *ibid.*, III, 385; Lewis to Jackson, April 21, 1833, *ibid.*, V, 42.

¹⁵Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., August 23, 1836, *ibid.*, V, 423.

¹⁶Jackson to John Coffee, June 7, 1825, *ibid.*, III, 286.

¹⁷Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., May 1, 1835, *ibid.*, V, 343.

¹⁸Jackson to John Coffee, July 9, 1825, *ibid.*, III, 288.

¹⁹Jackson to F. P. Blair, February 24, 1844, *ibid.*, VI, 266; Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., May 16, 1834, *ibid.*, V, 266.

²⁰Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., September 22, 1836, *ibid.*, V, 426-27.

²¹*Ibid.*, I, 190.

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amount of sales of the cotton and of the sales consigned to them the previous year, although Jackson had repeatedly asked for the same. He threatened to expose them to the public. Writing on one occasion, he said, "We have no wish to do any person an injury not even those whose conduct towards us has put it in our power, and who merit exposure, all we want is Justice, that we claim we will have . . ."²² He finally found a satisfactory cotton factor in Maunsel White, who handled his cotton until the General's death in 1845.

Unwise action and carelessness on the part of his adopted son, wards, and overseers often took the profit out of his cotton sales. Writing to Andrew Jackson Jr. in 1834, he said: "When you calculate the amount of rope and baleing used by you this year for about 38,000 lb. of cotton you will find, that when I was at home, I sent to market fifty thousand pounds of cotton at the same expence you have thirty-eight. This my son is bad oeconomy, and by your own attention hereafter you ought to correct it."²³ In the same year a letter to this boy indicated the carelessness with which Andrew Jr. handled accounts: "you ought to have entered on your cotton Book the nos. marks and weights on every Bale of cotton as you weighed and marked them . . . You write me that sixty three Bales were shipped. you had written me before that you had sixty four bales ready which would be shipped. . . ." ²⁴ Jackson then advised his son to commit every contract he made, large or small, to writing "*in futuro*."²⁵ In one letter he repeated this admonition seven times. Jackson himself preserved meticulously bundles of "receipts, orders, stubs of checks elaborately ticketed and filed."²⁶ Lists of purchases often contained such minutiae as screws, twine, cord, bunches of beads, papers of pins, and the like.

In 1804 the crop was shipped to Liverpool. This consignment of cotton "shipped in the brig Dean marked with our [Jackson's] mark, has sold at 15d. sterling," but it netted not more than twelve cents a pound. Jackson remarked, "[This] ought to deter a future shipment to that port—however it is done with 100 bales this spring . . ."²⁷ Almost forty years later his cotton was again shipped to England and sold for the same price it would have brought at New

²²Jackson and Hutchings to Williamson, Meeker and Patton, April 29, 1807, *ibid.*, 180.

²³Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., April 27, 1834, *ibid.*, 263.

²⁴Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., March 26, 1834, *ibid.*, V, 256.

²⁵Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., February 16, 1834, *ibid.*, 249; also Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., March 16, 1834, *ibid.*, 254.

²⁶F. J. Klingberg and Andrew Jackson IV, "Personal Traits of President Andrew Jackson," *Historical Outlook*, XIV (January, 1923), 136-37.

²⁷Jackson to John Coffee, June 21, 1804, *Correspondence*, I, 95-96.

Orleans, even though there were the additional costs of freight, insurance, commissions, and the loss of 3,000 pounds in weight.²⁸ Careless packing often meant loss. In 1826 Maunsel White sent some samples to Jackson to show him "the necessity of your Overseers being more particular in picking and Cleaning your cotton." The samples came from John Coffee's crop, and "the best" of Jackson's crop that year, according to White, "was no way equal to coffees and the only redeeming feature in your [Jackson's] was goodness of staple and Colour." It was carelessly packed and as a result had an incrustation of from one to two inches around many bales.²⁹ This carelessness occurred when Jackson was in Washington. Again, in 1830, White wrote that the cotton was not as good as usual and assigned as the reason, Jackson's absence from home.³⁰

Jackson's crop was not always so poorly handled, however. In 1831 the cotton arrived in "beautiful order." White cut seven bales indiscriminately and found it "without blemish and the quality pronounced good."³¹ The following year, 1832, his cotton was reported in New Orleans to have been the best that had ever reached the market there from Tennessee.³²

The complete reports of Jackson's crops are not extant, but the following table,³³ while by no means complete, will furnish some idea of the size of his crops and the prices they brought.

Year	No. of bales	Pounds	Price per lb.	Net income
1823	55			\$2208.70
1824	51		.13½	
	10*		.30	
1825	71		.15	
1826	62		.12	
	9		.10	\$3477.51
1827			.09	\$3062.55
1829	51	27,056	.08¾	\$2246.39
1830	59		.10	\$2267.04
1831			.11½	\$1097.09
1834	101	37,875	.11¼	\$4375.71
1836	90-100?		.15	
1837	74		.10½	
1839			.08-.09	
1840	32 (incomplete)		.08-.09	\$1172.17
1843	132			\$3268.88
1845		37,000	.04½	\$1312.00

*At this time Jackson changed houses, which may account in part for the great difference in prices.

²⁸Jackson to F. P. Blair, November 22, 1843, *ibid.*, VI, 243.

²⁹Maunsel White to Jackson, March 22, 1826, *ibid.*, III, 298.

³⁰Maunsel White to Jackson, January 29, 1831, *ibid.*, 228.

³¹*Niles' Register*, LXII (March 31, 1832), 83.

³²Maunsel White to Jackson, May 14, 1830, *ibid.*, IV, 137.

³³These figures were taken from *Correspondence*, Vols. III through VI, *passim*. They are as complete as the writer was able to make them.

From this table it is seen that Jackson raised from fifty to one hundred and thirty-two bales per year and received anywhere from \$1,312 to \$4,375 net proceeds. Marketing expenses were very high. Freight was \$3 a bale from Nashville and \$1 a bale from the Halcyon to New Orleans. In 1840 drayage was 35¢ a bale. Fire and river insurance from Nashville was 60¢, the weighing fee, 10¢, and commissions, 2½%.³⁴

It must not be thought that Jackson was a one-crop planter. In his correspondence, nineteen different crops are named, many of them by their species. In addition, he raised at least seven kinds of livestock, had a mill on his farm, owned two cotton gins, made his own brick, and ran a sawmill. His great aim was to make his plantation self-sufficient. In keeping with this aim, when he learned that his overseer, Burnard W. Holtzclaw, had only eight-six "hoggs" to kill, he inquired, "What has become of them? there has been more corn fed to them than would buy more Pork than the 86 will make. . . ."³⁵ He later wrote, "Better sell the corn and buy the Pork than raise it for our neighbors negroes. . . ."³⁶ An overseer on his Mississippi plantation did not raise enough corn to feed his hogs. "I regret," Jackson wrote, "to see that your supply of corn is nearly out. . . . It is bad oeconomy not to raise corn enough. when you have no corn your hoggs will go wild, and to raise cotton to buy corn and pork with is bad economy."³⁷

In 1833 he was mortified on his return to the Hermitage to find no fowls or poultry for the use of the plantation. Old Hannah, who was in charge of the poultry, said that her chickens and turkeys had died very much with the gapes, and there were only twelve turkey hens and four gobblers left. To Jackson, who believed deeply in the self-sufficiency of the farm, this was little short of criminal negligence. In 1834, when he discovered that Andrew Jackson Jr. was without seed wheat, he wrote, "never be without seed raised on your own farm of every thing you cultivate, it is a wretched mode of farming that shews careless management wherever it happens."³⁸

Next to cotton, corn was probably his most important crop. In 1833 he had 300 acres of corn, as compared with only 200 in cotton.³⁹ He began planting his corn in March and raised it especially on his new ground.⁴⁰ He also planted approximately

³⁴*Ibid.*, V, 539, note.

³⁵Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., November 1, 1833, *ibid.*, V, 222.

³⁶Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., November 13, 1833, *ibid.*, 225.

³⁷Jackson to J. M. Parker, May 11, 1844, *ibid.*, VI, 289.

³⁸Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., October 30, 1834, *ibid.*, V, 303-04.

³⁹W. B. Lewis to Jackson, April 21, 1833, *ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁰Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., February 12, 1834, *ibid.*, V, 248.

twenty acres of wheat,⁴¹ and from fifty to a hundred and twenty acres of oats each year.

He used grasses for pasture, cover crops, and improvement of the soil. In 1832 six bushels of red clover seed were ordered from Pittsburgh to plant thirty-two acres. This was to be sown with the oats, to obtain a double crop and improve the land. Two years later he sent four different kinds of grasses to be planted at the Hermitage—Hires grass to be planted in the lot adjoining the woodland pasture, blue grass near and adjoining the "stud's stable," timothy in the lot formerly planted in timothy, and clover "on the land intended to be rested."⁴² He bought choice seed, which cost him \$82.75 plus the freight. In 1836 he wished the "old pasture south of the mill race sowed down in blue grass and herds grass and wheat this fall so that we may have pasture for colts—I mean as soon as the hemp comes off," and wanted timothy and red clover planted. At this time he protested because he discovered that "all the oats, hemp, and millet had been badly and slovenly sowed."⁴³

In 1822 his overseer on the Alabama plantation seeded a large turnip patch, "begging the seed from my acquaintances," he wrote Jackson. He wanted to seed eight or ten acres more if the seed could be procured.⁴⁴ Time after time Jackson asked that Irish and sweet potatoes be planted in abundance.⁴⁵ The General was also interested in fruit trees. Before he moved to the Hermitage, he planted 500 apple trees and 500 peach trees in the Hermitage orchard.⁴⁶

Naturally, such extensive production required much cultivation. In 1833 his overseer at the Hermitage was running seventeen plows and could run nineteen if necessary.⁴⁷ A memorandum of his farm products for 1830 reveals the extent of crops other than cotton raised on his plantation. He had 1,276 barrels of cribbed corn, sixty-four stacks of fodder, forty stacks of oats, eleven stacks of rye, 11,709 pounds of pork killed, and forty hogs to kill. His blooded horses numbered twelve; his common horses, mares, and colts amounted to twenty. Eighty-six head of cattle, 123 sheep, and 250 head of hogs, plus the cotton crop of fifty-one bales, completed his inventory for the year.⁴⁸

Jackson took great pride in his livestock, but was not always

⁴¹Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., October 30, 1834, *ibid.*, 304.

⁴²Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., October 21, 1834, *ibid.*, 301.

⁴³Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., August 23, 1836, *ibid.*, 423.

⁴⁴Egbert Harris to Jackson, July 27, 1822, *ibid.*, III, 172.

⁴⁵Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., November 15, 1834, *ibid.*, V, 308, *par ex.*

⁴⁶Jackson to Mrs. Jackson, March 22, 1803, *ibid.*, I, 65; *ibid.*, 104 n.

⁴⁷W. B. Lewis to Jackson, April 21, 1833, *ibid.*, IV, 63.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, IV, 120.

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the ideal stock-breeder. For example, he often was ignorant as to when colts were to arrive. In 1828 he inquired of Reverend Hardy M. Cryer when his mares were bred. He knew all were in foal but didn't know when any "Coalts" were to arrive.⁴⁹ The old general always loved horses and spent a great deal of his energy in securing fine breeding horses. In 1828, however, after a streak of bad luck in which he lost during eighteen months \$3,000 worth of horses, he abandoned the breeding of horses and turned his attention to mules.⁵⁰ Besides horses and mules, he raised hogs, chickens, turkeys, cattle, oxen and sheep.

Jackson did not hesitate to experiment with new machines and methods. Four years after Whitney invented the cotton gin, Jackson purchased the first gin to be used in the Cumberland Valley. His letters show that he practiced crop rotation.⁵¹ "Anyone who had superior fruit trees, farm implements, or breed of horses found a ready customer in Jackson."⁵² He was a subscriber to the *American Farmer*, a leading agricultural magazine of the time.⁵³ In 1837 he made an experiment with wheat from "Egipt, but either from the unusual dry and cold spring, or that the climate is unfavorable" the production was not good, that season. He made known his intention of trying again by sowing it in the fall; one attempt did not discourage him.⁵⁴ He planted from sixty to a hundred acres of oats to turn the hogs into, for he felt that oats straw made the finest manure, "rooted as it always is and burried in the earth" by the hogs.⁵⁵ Today good farmers might question this method.

Since his time was an age of superstition in so far as the farmer was concerned, one might be interested to know whether Jackson was superstitious. The only intimation that one finds is in a letter in which he gives an account of the slaughtering of his hogs. He had already slaughtered half and intended to kill the balance on "the change of the moon." This statement may have been merely a way of reckoning time, however.⁵⁶

In his relationship with his neighbors, the General was not always congenial. He was particular about infringement upon his property rights. One of the most bitter recriminations in his correspondence is found in a letter to a Major Gilman in which he

⁴⁹Jackson to H. M. Cryer, March 22, 1828, *ibid.*, III, 396.

⁵⁰Jackson to H. M. Cryer, March 6, 1828, *ibid.*, 395; Jackson to H. M. Cryer, May 11, 1828, *ibid.*, 402.

⁵¹Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., October 21, 1834, *ibid.*, V, 301.

⁵²Buell, *op.cit.*, I, 127.

⁵³*Correspondence*, III, 168, 284.

⁵⁴Jackson to Van Buren, August 7, 1838, *ibid.*, V, 504.

⁵⁵Jackson to A. J. Donelson, March 16, 1834, *ibid.*, 256.

⁵⁶Jackson to John Coffee, December 1, 1825, *ibid.*, III, 298.

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V, 308, *par ex.*
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protested trespasses on his inclosures. He complained that fences had been thrown down, stock let out and "others let in." His scaley bark hickory trees had been cut down in order to secure the nuts.⁵⁷ On another occasion, he wrote John Coffee, who was at his Alabama plantation, instructing him not to let a certain Mr. Bell draw a drop of water from the well nor to come within his inclosures.⁵⁸ He opposed the cutting of roads indiscriminately across his farm. In 1835 he instructed his son to petition a resurvey of a road, for he wanted only one road crossing his land. "I am now determined to have all roads made permanent," he wrote, "regardless of where they run, for the impositions on us are not only unjust, but intolerable."⁵⁹ His letters contain bitter protests "with his neighbors over the placing of gates and injuries given and received by his Negroes."⁶⁰ On one occasion, in 1790, he horse-whipped a certain Grayson who molested a slave of his. Always trying to guard against undersirable neighbors, he wrote in 1823, "Mr. F. Sanders having proposed to sell and I [being] fearfull of a bad neighbor I have bought and paid him for his plantation. . . . I am now out of danger of being interrupted by a bad neighbor. . . ."⁶¹ That was one way to insure himself against an undesirable man next door.

Perhaps the most important part of a planter's life in the days of Jackson, even if it was routine, was that of getting along with his overseers and slaves. Possibly the most changeable thing about Jackson was his overseers. As for all plantation owners, it was difficult to find a good one, and at times Jackson needed three. When he employed an overseer, he minutely outlined his duties and payments. He exacted elaborate inventories of his own possessions from the overseers. An inventory of 1823 may be taken as an example. A list of his tools and livestock in that year included:

1 Dagon Plough, 5 Singel Ploughs, 2 Double Ploughs, 1 Coulter Plough, 3 pare of Streacher, 1 half inch augur, 1 two inch augur, 1 five quarter augur, 1 Chissel, 1 Crosscut Saw, 3 Scythe and Cr[a]dle, 1 Stone augur, 1 augur and wheel, 1 reamer, 3 Clevises, 1 two rule, 1 foot adds, 7 Single trees, 6 pare of Haymes, 10 axes, 2 mattux, 9 hoes, 1 Ploughhoe, 5 Pare of trases, 1 hansaw, 1 Crowbar, 1 sledge hamer, 1 hand hamer, 1 Pare of wegges, 1 mortisin axe, 1 drawing knife, 2 pare of lockchains, horned cattle 39 head grown, and four oxen, 23 calves, 63 head grown sheep, 115 head of hoggs.⁶²

Where even clevises, wedges, augurs and chisels were listed with their specifications in an inventory, there was in all probability a

⁵⁷Jackson to Major Gilman, October 23, 1841, *ibid.*, VI, 126.

⁵⁸Jackson to John Coffee, August 22, 1823, *ibid.*, III, 294.

⁵⁹Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., April 21, 1835, *ibid.*, V, 337.

⁶⁰Klingberg and Jackson, "Personal Traits of President Jackson," *loc. cit.*, 13.

⁶¹Jackson to John Coffee, October 24, 1823, *Correspondence*, III, 214.

⁶²*Ibid.*, III, 182.

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considerable effort to include everything of value.

Indeed, there was reason for Jackson to be so meticulous, for there is evidence that many things disappeared from the Hermitage plantation. In the year of 1832 some table linen was missing. Of this Jackson wrote, "there were abundant supply of table linnen etc. etc., when we left the Hermitage, but I suppose it must have gone the same way as the sheets."⁶³ The reader is not enlightened as to where the sheets went, but he must conclude that some dishonesty prevailed.

In 1813 Jackson employed John Fields for a year, beginning December 25, 1813. Fields was to take charge of the lands and make a "Croop" as Jackson directed and attend to stock and tools, having firewood carried in and fires made as Mrs. Jackson directed. Jackson paid him \$200, all in trade but \$30, which was paid in cash. He let Fields have a horse worth \$100 to use, and if Jackson wished, he could pay \$100 and redeem the horse at the end of the year. Jackson was also to see to Fields' eating, lodging, and laundry.⁶⁴ Fields drank too much. He abused the horse that was given him and he was a poor manager of the workmen, whom he could not induce to tread out thirty bushels of oats in three days. He was not good at directing the Negro women, so Jackson let him go after a short while, as he did the majority of his overseers.⁶⁵

In 1822 he let an overseer go for lying to him. This overseer had said that he had found the Negroes naked and barefooted, but Jackson claimed this statement was false and was made to form an excuse to raise an account for new shoes. The overseer, moreover, still had his steed at the plantation, contrary to Jackson's orders, and it took a man to care for the horse.⁶⁶ Another overseer, "a scoundrel," brought suit against Jackson and lost.⁶⁷ Another, a Mr. Phillips, made a debt against the plantation, claiming that he had an account against the estate for axes and other things. Jackson denied this, stating that he never had an account with an overseer. So Phillips was ejected.⁶⁸ Another neglected the livestock, a thing which made Jackson determine to deduct from his wages the losses incurred by the death of horses and oxen.⁶⁹ This man was also called to account because the "beacon [sic] was nearly gone, this to me was unaccountable," he wrote his overseer, "because I

⁶³Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., May 24, 1832, *ibid.*, IV, 443.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, I, 431-32.

⁶⁵Col. Robert Hays to Jackson, December 20, 1814, *ibid.*, II, 121.

⁶⁶Jackson to John Coffee, March 14, 1822, *ibid.*, III, 155.

⁶⁷Jackson to John Coffee, April 3, 1827, *ibid.*, 352-53.

⁶⁸Jackson to John Coffee, December 5, 1827, *ibid.*, 384.

⁶⁹Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., September 21, 1829, *ibid.*, IV, 76.

stood by and saw a large Supply as usual for my White and Black family salted in my smoke house. In your Statement I have asked you to forward, I shall expect you to furnish me with an explanation how this has happened.⁷⁰

Other overseers employed the servants in their own domestic concerns. Many instances like these might be enumerated. Poor overseers may account, in part, for Jackson's loss at his plantation, but the situation in which overseers took advantage of their employer was made almost inevitable by Jackson's public life.

From 1788, when Jackson was twenty-one years old and when he purchased his first slave, Jackson was a slaveowner. The bill of sale of a Negro woman to Andrew Jackson by Micajah Crews is extant in the Tennessee archives. This purchase was made a few months after Jackson's coming to Tennessee. Thus the statement often made that Jackson arrived in Tennessee totally without funds is somewhat questionable.⁷¹ A list of his Negroes two years later (1790) included: "Daniel about twenty-eight years old," valued at £ 250; "one wench Kate," thirty-two, valued at £ 150; "one Boy Joe," age eleven, valued at £ 150; "one Boy, Bob," nine, valued at £ 100; "one Boy Pompey," between one and two years old, valued at £ 60, making five slaves in all.⁷² In 1812 the number of his slaves had increased to twenty.⁷³ In 1820, at one time, James Hanna purchased five Negroes for Jackson valued at \$2,290.⁷⁴ Five years later Jackson's Negro poll amounted to eighty slaves.⁷⁵ The highest number of Jackson's slaves approximated two hundred, but by 1842 the number had dwindled to something over one hundred and fifty, which he mortgaged to pay off the debt of his adopted son.⁷⁶ Some idea of Jackson's relative position as a Tennessee slaveholder may be gleaned by an examination of the census of 1850. At that time only twenty-four slaveholders in Tennessee held more than one hundred slaves.⁷⁷ Since Jackson had owned as many as 200 and shortly before his death still owned 150, he was among the slaveholding aristocracy of the state.

Jackson generally took quite a humane concern for his slaves although, as will be seen, upon occasion he sanctioned and even

⁷⁰Jackson to G. W. Steele, November 7, 1829, *ibid.*, IV, 85-86.

⁷¹John Allison, *Dropped Stitches in Tennessee History* (Nashville, 1897), 8.

⁷²*Correspondence*, I, 9.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 212.

⁷⁴James J. Hanna to Jackson, January 30, 1829, *ibid.*, III, 12.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 271.

⁷⁶Jackson to F. P. Blair, February 3, 1842, *ibid.*, VI, 138.

⁷⁷J. D. B. Debow, *A Compendium of the Seventh Census of the United States* (Washington, 1854), 95. The 1840 census was incomplete and figures for individual slaveholders are not given; hence, the 1850 census is used here.

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recommended chains and corporal punishment for delinquents. In 1819 he displayed a deep feeling of humanity when he attempted to purchase two Negroes, a son and daughter of Peter, whom he owned. These Negroes were in the possession of James Houston of Maryville, a brother of the non-slaveholding and non-property holding Sam Houston. The only reason given for desiring these slaves was to bring the family together for humanity's sake.⁷⁸ In 1829 he again showed himself solicitous for the welfare of his slaves when he requested his son to look into the death of a slave named Jim, to ascertain whether or not his overseer, G. W. Steele, was responsible. If it should prove that he was implicated, Jackson ordered that he should be dismissed. "My negroes shall be treated humanely," he wrote, "When I employed Mr. Steel, I charged him upon this subject and had expressed in our agreement that he was to treat them with great humanity, feed and cloth them well, and work them in moderation. . . ."⁷⁹ Steele proved himself innocent of any responsibility in the incident.

Three years later Jackson was forced to reprimand his reprobate ward, Andrew Jackson Hutchings, for mistreating the Negroes. Writing to Coffee, he said that he was sorry that Hutchings had disagreed with his overseer, Steele, and that "he [Hutchings] must not attempt to misuse or whip the negroes—if they misbehave to him, I have directed him to inform Steel, and he will chastise them . . ."⁸⁰ A few years later in the same manner he wrote, "I could not bear the idea of inhumanity to my poor Negroes."⁸¹

When the Negroes were ill, he showed particular concern about their ailments. In 1840 two of his Negroes were incapacitated by sickness. One of these was cured upon Jackson's having taken him to a physician; the other, whose eyesight was impaired, was a matter of great concern for the ex-President. He wrote, "As John was so valuable and humanity required that everything might be done for him, I thought it best that the experiment might be made. . . ."⁸² The boy's eyesight was restored. In 1840 as many as "12 [Negroes were] down at once," with sickness.⁸³ Of course, the economic loss was considerable when so many Negroes became ill.

The punishment of the slaves for misdemeanors was by no means lenient. Here one is reminded of the General's strict dis-

⁷⁸James Houston to Jackson, September 24, 1819, *Correspondence*, II, 430.

⁷⁹Jackson to Andrew Jackson Jr., July 4, 1829, *ibid.*, IV, 49.

⁸⁰Jackson to John Coffee, May 26, 1831, *ibid.*, 285.

⁸¹Jackson to A. J. Hutchings, June 2, 1833, *ibid.*, V, 105.

⁸²Jackson to A. J. Hutchings, August 3, 1840, *ibid.*, VI, 69.

⁸³Jackson to A. J. Hutchings, September 11, 1840, *ibid.*, 77.

cipline of his troops in the army and his merciless courtmartial and execution of the eighteen year old John Woods during the Creek War.⁸⁴ The same obduracy persisted in other cases. In 1821, when he heard that Betty, Mrs. Jackson's maid, was impertinent, he wrote, "I have directed that the first impertinence she uses, or the first disobedience of orders, that she will be publicly whipped." He directed his overseer, Blair, to give her fifty lashes and in the event that he failed to do so, he was to be dismissed and a corporal ordered to do the task.⁸⁵

The runaway slave was always a problem of the planter and it was a problem which Jackson had to confront. In 1805 he asked John Hutchings to make strict inquiry for George "should he be gone to sea," but Hutchings was unable to secure any knowledge of his whereabouts.⁸⁶ In 1812 a slave named Jessee ran away from the river boat *Natchez* while *en route* to be sold.⁸⁷ In 1821 Ned, another slave, ran away while he was in the process of being sold.⁸⁸ In 1822, upon having recovered four of his Negroes that had fled, he had two of them put in chains. Concerning this punishment he wrote, "although I hate chains, [I] was compelled to place two of them in irons, for safekeeping."⁸⁹ In the same year he told another of his numerous overseers "as far as lenity can be extended to these unfortunate creatures, I wish you to do so."⁹⁰

Jackson's slaves frequently got into difficulty with neighbors. The occasion on which Jackson horse-whipped Grayson for molesting Ephraim has been mentioned. On another occasion, Asen was hired to saw at Severn Donelson's. On his way home, a white man attempted to take him, but Asen cut the man with a knife, whereupon the man shot him with small shot.⁹¹ In 1839 four of Jackson's Negroes were held on trial for killing the slave of Stockley Donelson in a riot. Jackson did all in his power to clear them of this charge. It was rumored that he spent \$1,500 in saving the lives of the four slaves.⁹² The report was probably true, for to his ward, he wrote, "the expence that my worthy nephews [William and Stockley Donelson] put me to, by selecting four of my Negroes out from forty to one hundred drunken Negroes all in a

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, III, 46.

⁸⁵Jackson to A. J. Donelson, July 3, 1821, *ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁶Jackson to John Hutchings, April 7, 1805, *ibid.*, I, 112; John Hutchings to Jackson, April 24, 1806, *ibid.*, 142.

⁸⁷Jackson to Mrs. Mary Caffery, February 8, 1812, *ibid.*, 214.

⁸⁸James J. Hanna to Jackson, March 1, 1821, *ibid.*, III, 42.

⁸⁹Jackson to A. J. Donelson, July 28, 1822, *ibid.*, 166.

⁹⁰Jackson to Egbert Harris, April 13, 1822, *ibid.*, 158.

⁹¹Col. Robert Hays to Jackson, December 20, 1814, *ibid.*, II, 121-22.

⁹²Jackson to John A. Shute, January 3, 1839, *ibid.*, VI, 1, 2.

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fight and my bad crops etc. etc. etc. makes it necessary that I should sacrifice some property to clear me of this unexpected expence."⁹³ Jackson felt that the prosecution of his Negroes was initiated against him by his political opponents,⁹⁴ since the Donelsons were supporters of the John Bell and Hugh L. White faction in the political world.

Jackson's slaves were loyal to him and regarded him as a kind master. This indicates much concerning the treatment that they received. One slave reported that the Negroes measured their ages by the events in the General's life.⁴⁵ Old Hannah, telling of Jackson's death, related that the doctor ordered the servants out but "we wouldn't go out. Old Hannah [another] his first cook went on so she had to be carried out. She was nearly 80." Then, she continued, Jackson looked around an hour before he died and said, "Here's poor George and Hannah. I have [arranged] it that you shall be well taken care of." Then he counselled them on their spiritual welfare, expressing the conviction that he would see them all in heaven. Old Hannah concluded, "Our master, or father is gone. The darkies would not be driven out. They looked on him as if they had as much right to him as Massa Andrew."⁹⁶ Negroes are emotional but that they looked to Jackson as a "father" is indicative of the treatment they received.

Today, the Hermitage garden near Nashville is a source of delight for many visitors to the Hermitage. It also delighted its owner a hundred years ago. While Mrs. Jackson was alive and he was away from home, Jackson would send her large quantities of garden seeds to plant.⁹⁷ In 1819 he employed William Frosh, an English gardener in Philadelphia to design his flower garden.⁹⁸

Visitors to the Hermitage then as now were impressed by the orderliness of the General's farm. Willie Blount wrote:

I was really surprised to find his farm in such excellent order, and so very productive. . . . His farming land is as you know, very fertile, very beautiful, and eligibly situated for comfort. It is largely improved, handsomely arranged with gratifying appearance to the visitors at his most hospitable house, open to all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance, and who travel through his neighborhood, none of whom pass that way without calling on him for social intercourse, viewing him to be the polite gentleman at home and abroad, and the friend of man everywhere.⁹⁹

⁹³Jackson to A. J. Hutchings, March 18, 1839, *ibid.*, 7.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 1 n.

⁹⁵A. C. Buell, *op. cit.*, II, 409.

⁹⁶"Old Hannah's Narrative of the last days of Jackson" as told by William Terrill, *Correspondence*, VI, 415.

⁹⁷Jackson to Mrs. Jackson, March 22, 1803, *ibid.*, I, 64.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, II, 408 n.

⁹⁹Quoted in *ibid.*, III, 226, 227.

Blount continued to say that the plantation was in excellent order, the domestics and hirelings well cared for and contented, so that even their daily work was a "pleasure" to them. Blount was a visitor at the Hermitage and not noted for understatement, but his picture was substantiated in the main by other reports.

M. Lavasseur, the secretary to Lafayette, wrote, "General Jackson showed us his garden and farm which appeared to be well cultivated. We everywhere remarked the greatest order and the most perfect neatness."¹⁰⁰ Thomas H. Benton said, "He was a careful farmer, overlooking everything himself, seeing that the fields and fences were in good order, the stock well attended, and the slaves comfortably provided for."¹⁰¹

Andrew Jackson was a planter, a statesman, a soldier, a lawyer, a businessman, and a politician, but he was first of all, as he wanted to be, a planter.

¹⁰⁰Quoted in James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1861), II, 659.

¹⁰¹T. H. Benton, *Thirty Years View* (New York, 1854), I, 736.

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