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JEFFERSON DAVIS, THE NEGROES AND THE NEGRO PROBLEM

If the question were asked, What were the views of Jefferson Davis concerning the negroes? many people would now as in 1861 unhesitatingly answer that he, like the most extreme of the slave-holders, looked upon the negro as nothing but a form of property somewhat more valuable than horseflesh, and that he considered the race hopelessly inferior and incapable of progress and therefore doomed to the permanent status of slavery. Some of his speeches in Congress would seem to commit him to this view. Yet such an impression would be almost wholly incorrect. His dealings with the race and his private utterances show that he regarded the negro as quite capable of reaching a higher civilization, that he believed slavery to be a more or less temporary status and that he was a most considerate master. In his opinion, slavery was not only a temporary solution of the labor problem in the newly settled South, but it was also a partial solution of what we now call the race problem—the problem of how to make two distinct races live together without friction. That the negro race was fundamentally inferior to the white was his firm conviction. That there was any moral wrong in holding slaves, he, in company with most of the slave-holders, would never admit. By him, as by most men of his class, then as now, slavery was considered a benefit to the negro and a recognition of that law of nature which subjected the weaker to the stronger for the good of both. Slavery took idle, unmoral, barbarous blacks and gradually rooted out their savage traits, giving to them instead the white man's superior civilization—his religion, his language, his customs, his industry. The negro was a child race and slavery was its training school. These convictions shaped his attitude toward the individuals of the race. And never were there more intimate friendships between whites and blacks than between Davis and his servants, as he always called his slaves.

Davis was always popular with young people, dependents and inferiors. When serving in the army among the Indians of the

West he was so well liked that in one tribe he was adopted and known as "The Little Chief." As Mrs. Davis said, "he never had with soldiers, children or negroes any difficulty to impress himself upon their hearts."[1] In his intercourse with them he always assumed that they were reasonable beings, able and willing to follow a proper line of conduct, and capable of understanding mistakes when pointed out to them. Blind obedience was never exacted. To children and to negroes he carefully explained the reasons for doing or not doing a thing and was not satisfied until the understanding was complete. Like his oldest brother, Joseph, he was so careful to regard the rights of the weak that others found it difficult to keep order with his children and servants.[2] From him the black skin never hid the man or woman. He was as polite to a negro as to a white person. Of this trait of Davis's character Major R. W. Milsaps, founder of the Mississippi college that bears his name, recently related the following incident: "I got a lesson in the treatment of negroes when I was a young man returning South from Harvard. I stopped in Washington and called on Jefferson Davis, then United States Senator from Mississippi. We walked down Pennsylvania Avenue. Many negroes bowed to Mr. Davis and he returned the bow. He was a very polite man. I finally said to him that I thought he must have a good many friends among the negroes. He replied, 'I cannot allow any negro to outdo me in courtesy.' "[3]

In his youth Davis saw less of slavery than is supposed. He did not grow up on a typical Black Belt plantation; the Southwest of his youthful days was a new country in which institutions, social and economic, were only forming, and even here, up to the age of twenty-eight, he had lived less than eleven years. Perhaps the first negro who came into close relations with Mr. Davis was James Pemberton. Pemberton was given to him by his mother as a body-servant when he entered the army and remained with him during his entire service—from 1828 to 1835.

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[1] Memoirs, Vol. I, pp. 79, 80.

[2] Memoirs, Vol. I, pp. 538, 566.

[3] *American Magazine*, August, 1907, p. 394. Similar stories are related of Randolph, Calhoun, and Webster, and might be told of many of the gentlemen of the time.

Though stationed much of the time in free States or in free territory, Pemberton devoted himself with perfect faith to Davis. He carried the purse, took care of his master's arms, accompanied him on dangerous scouting expeditions, foraged and cooked for him and nursed him when sick. In 1831 Davis was ill of pneumonia for several months in the forests of Wisconsin and had no other nurse or physician than James Pemberton. During the illness that followed the death of Davis's wife in 1835 he was again devotedly nursed by Pemberton. After his master returned to Brierfield, James was made manager of the plantation, and held that position until his death in 1852. Davis and his negro manager in their constant intercourse treated one another as gentlemen. When Pemberton came to report he would not take a seat until asked, but Davis always asked him to do so and frequently brought a chair for him. At parting Davis always offered cigars, and Pemberton would accept with grave thanks. Mr. Davis never called him "Jim" but always James, and objected when anyone shortened the name. And so it was with the other negroes; no nicknames or fancy names were allowed, and the negroes had to be called, as they wished, by their full names; no classical names were forced upon them.[4]

The practical acquaintance of Jefferson Davis with the conditions of negro slavery was made during the '30's and '40's on the Mississippi plantation belonging to his brother and himself. In a bend of the Mississippi River known then as Palmyra Bend, twenty miles below Vicksburg, Joseph Davis, during the twenties, gradually acquired several thousand acres of fine cotton lands by entering government lands, by buying out small frontier farmers who held from 25 to 160 acres each, and who as the slave system grew desired to go farther west. This was the typical development of the plantation system. As an inducement to leave the army Jefferson Davis was offered by his brother Joseph the use of several hundred acres of land and the loan of money for the purchase of slaves. The offer was accepted by the younger brother, who with "his friend and servant James Pemberton" and fourteen negroes began to clear up the plantation which was known as "The Brierfield" on account of the thick growth of briers which covered the fertile land. Davis could not afford to employ an overseer, and except for the assistance given by Pemberton, he was in direct control of all the work. The first house at Brierfield, a log house chinked with clay, was built by the two — master and slave manager. For eight years Davis scarcely left the Bend, and frequently during his brother's annual absences during the hot season he was in charge of both plantations — Brierfield and Hurricane.

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[4] Memoirs, Vol. 1, pp. 81, 155, 165, 176.

One of the most interesting experiments ever made with negro slaves was that initiated by Joseph Davis and carried out by the two brothers on the Hurricane and Brierfield plantations in Warren County, Mississippi. In the management of his own slaves Jefferson Davis was influenced to a considerable extent by the opinions and example of his brother Joseph. It was the theory of the latter that the less the negroes were disciplined by force the better they would conduct themselves. So he tried to train them into habits of self-government. If one could make money for himself he was allowed to do so, paying to his master the wages of an unskilled laborer. Some of Joseph Davis's slaves set up in business for themselves. Notable among these was Ben T. Montgomery, who, with his sons, later purchased both the Davis plantations. Other planters and overseers laughingly spoke of "Joe Davis's free negroes," and when hoopskirts came in assumed that the Davis negroes were to get them and predicted that "Joe Davis will have to widen his cotton rows so that the negro women can work between them." From his brother Joseph, Jefferson Davis adopted the negro self-government plan. No negro was ever punished except after conviction by a jury of blacks. This jury was composed of "settled" men; an old negro presided as judge; there were black sheriffs or constables; witnesses were examined as in white courts, and the punishments were inflicted by negroes. The negroes took great delight in the workings of the court and showed no disposition to be too lenient with criminals. Davis retained the right to modify the sentence or to grant pardon. Mrs. Davis relates an incident which illustrates the workings of the system:

A fine hog had been killed and it was traced to the house of a negro who was a great glutton. Several of the witnesses swore to a number of accessories to the theft. At last the first man asked for a private interview with his master, and in a confidential tone said; "The fact of the matter is, master, they are all tellin' lies. I had nobody at all to hope me. I killed the shote myself and eat pretty near the whole of it, and dat's why I was so sick last week." . . . Davis pardoned the thief but the jury were much scandalized at master's breaking up "dat Cote, for fore God, we'd a cotch de whole tuckin' of 'em, if he had let we alone."

After the death of Pemberton in 1852 Davis employed white overseers, some of whom did not approve of his system of managing negroes. They were not allowed to inflict punishment—only to report offenses. One of them left because of his objection to the negro court. The Davis system which was practiced until 1862 had vitality enough to survive for a while after the Federals had occupied the plantations, and a year later a Northern officer who saw what remained of the self-governing community and knowing nothing of its origin took it for a new development, and an evidence of how one year of freedom would elevate the blacks.[5]

It is quite likely that Davis could not have understood the mental make-up of such a negro as Frederick Douglass, but he did understand the ins and outs of the average negro's nature. Instinctively the negroes knew this and since he used his understanding for their good his servants were devoted to him. When one was charged by a white person with misconduct Davis always insisted on hearing the negro's side of the story. To him the slaves would appeal from decisions of the overseer and the latter often found it difficult to exact any kind of obedience, so accustomed were the negroes to take all their disputes to their master. One negro girl refused to wait on the overseer's wife because, contrary to her master's rule, she had been called "out'en her name"—Rose instead of Rosina. A man who was disobedient and had threatened the overseer asked Mrs. Davis, "How does you speck us ter b'lieve in them poor white trash when we people has a master that fit and whipped everybody?"

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[5] See John Eaton, "Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen," p. 165.

The negroes were allowed the usual plantation privileges. Each family had its "patch" for vegetables and fruits, pigs and chickens, which were raised for their own use and for sale to the master's family. At the birth of a negro child an outfit was given, and at death the burial clothes and food for those who "set up." When a negro was ill the master was expected to furnish or to pay for delicacies, and for a wedding he provided the dinner and the finery. A dentist came regularly to Hurricane and Brierfield to keep the negroes' teeth in order. So careful was Davis of the comfort and health of his negroes that when he was absent in Washington his income from the plantation greatly decreased. The negroes would work well for him but not for his overseers who were not authorized to force them to work.

Some of the negroes did not always appreciate their master's rather gentle methods. Especially did some of them chafe under his attempts to reason with them and thus to make them see their mistakes. Like a small white boy a negro sometimes perferred a thrashing or a round scolding to a serious temperate talk. One negro woman who pretended to cook for him after the death of his first wife was much troubled by the joking way in which he disposed of her failures. As she told the second Mrs. Davis, "Master did me mighty mean dat time; he orter cussed me, but it was mean to make fun of me." Davis, however, never was familiar with his servants in that way peculiar to many Southern masters — a sort of sublime condescending as to a very small child or to a pet animal. To him they were men and women and were treated accordingly.

Provision was made for the religious training of the slaves. Sometimes Davis and his brother paid the salary of a white Methodist preacher who was sent out by the Southern Methodist Church to work among the negroes. "Uncle Bob" was the resident black preacher at Brierfield. Davis said of him: "He was as free from guile and as truthful a man as I ever knew." He had long passed the age for active labor, but still kept up his spiritual supervision of the Brierfield flock. He had a comfortable house and a horse and buggy in which he drove every day to the plantation. It was Davis's conviction that in religious work for the negroes the South "has been a greater practical missionary than all the Society missionaries in the world."

In many ways the plantation negroes showed their appreciation of his mastership. When his first son was born the women and children came to see the newcomer, bringing gifts of chickens, eggs and fruit, and all of them brought boisterous good wishes. When the master would go through the quarters the little negroes would swarm out of the houses to greet him, shake hands with him and catch him around the legs. Upon his departure for a long stay all came to bid him good-bye and to say what they wanted him to bring back for them. When he came home again all duties were suspended until the servants could see and welcome him. In a letter written by his niece, is an account of a home-coming that she witnessed:

"On one occasion when I was a child he arrived at Hurricane, my grandfather's plantation, after a protracted absence, and took me with him to Brierfield, a distance of a mile and a half. It was at once known that he had arrived and . . . . [the slaves] came running to the house and without ceremony made their way to the room where we were and to my surprise threw themselves before him and embraced his knees at the risk of pulling him down. He must have been accustomed to such demonstrations for he very gently extricated himself and patiently answered their questions and asked kindly for their families."[6]

Whether Davis looked forward to early emancipation it is impossible to say. At times it would seem that he and his brother were training their negroes for freedom soon to come. After the war when in prison Davis spoke of the hopeful emancipation movement of the twenties and thirties which in his opinion was killed by the reaction following the growth of radical abolition sentiment in the North.[7] But before the civil war neither brother ever made a more definite declaration about negroes in the South than that the exceptional negroes would emerge from slavery. And it is well known that Davis believed slavery a better state for negroes than any sort of freedom offered them in the North or in the South. For the free negro there was then nowhere a place, and Davis believed that it would be difficult to make a place for him. In this conviction he was not so fixed as was Lincoln, for he had a higher opinion of the negro than his great rival had.

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[6] This account of life at Brierfield is based on the following authorities: Davis, Memoirs, Vol. I, pp. 163, 173, 174, 178, 193, 203, 284, 475, 479; Jones Memorial Volume, p. 667; Daniel, "Life and Reminiscences of Davis," p. 207; Bancroft, Davis, 156, 167; *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1889; *Times-Democrat*, Feb. 16, 1902; Craven, "Prison Life," p. 215, and correspondence with relatives.

While demanding the theoretical right to carry slaves to all territories Davis did not really expect slavery to extend into the far West and Northwest. In fact he thought that the slight expansion that would result would ultimately weaken slavery. In a speech in 1860 he said: "There is a relation belonging to this species of property, unlike that of the apprentice or the hired man, which awakens whatever there is of kindness or of nobility of soul in the heart of him who owns it; this can only be alienated, obscured, or destroyed, by collecting this species of property into such masses that the owner is not personally acquainted with the individuals who compose it. In the relation, however, which can exist in the northern territories, the mere domestic association of one, two, or at most half a dozen servants in a family, associating with the children as they grow up, attending upon age as it declines, there can be nothing against which either philanthrophy or humanity can make an appeal. Not even the emancipationist can raise his voice; for this is the high road and open gate to the condition in which the masters would, from interest, in a few years, desire the emancipation of every one who may thus be taken to the northwestern frontier." [8]

To rule negroes by laws made for whites was, Davis thought, barbarous. Once before the war he visited a reformatory in the North. Most of the inmates were whites but there was one negro boy who caught Davis by the coat, with the plea "Please buy me, sir, and take me home wid you." "I tried to procure the little fellow's liberty," said Mr. Davis, "and offered to take him and guarantee his freedom, but he was in a free State and I could not get him. It was bad enough to keep white children there, but it was inhuman to incarcerate that irresponsible negro child."[9]

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[7] Bancroft, Davis.

[8] *Congressional Globe*, May 17, 1860; Davis, "Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government," Vol. II, pp. 7, 30.

During the Civil War the Confederate President saw nothing of his Brierfield servants. When summoned to Montgomery to lead the Confederates he went to Brierfield, assembled the negroes and made a farewell talk. They expressed devotion to him and he left them never to see them again as slaves and never to live again at Brierfield. He understood that slavery as an economic system had a precarious existence and it was his belief that no matter how the war might end slavery would be destroyed. Before leaving Brierfield he gave to the negroes all the supplies that he could command. To "Uncle Bob," who was rheumatic, he gave so many blankets and supplies that when the Federals came they confiscated them because they said that Davis could never have given him so much, that he must have stolen them or he must be trying to save them for his master. Mr. Davis said, "Nothing ever done to me made me so indignant as the treatment of this old colored man."[10]

After the fall of Vicksburg some of the Davis negroes were carried into the interior to keep them from falling into the hands of the Federals. When Sherman's army captured them the Federals were surprised to find that they would not follow the army. Finally the soldiers set fire to the houses occupied by them in order to make them leave. Some never left the plundered plantation at Davis Bend, others returned, and the self-government system was for a while continued. Grant planned "a negro paradise" on the Davis plantation and many other negroes were brought to the Bend and everything turned over to them. The land was "consecrated as a home for the emancipated . . . . a suitable place to furnish means and security for the unfortunate race which he [Davis] was so instrumental in oppressing,'' so that ''the nest in which the rebellion was hatched has become the Mecca of freedom.''[11] In the crowding that resulted many of the Davis negroes lost their homes, among them ''Uncle Bob.''

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[9] Winnie Davis, "Jefferson Davis in Private Life," in *New York Herald*, Aug. 11, 1895.

[10] Davis, Memoirs, Vol. I, p. 179, Vol. II, pp. 11, 12, 19; Bancroft, Davis, p. 196.

Toward the close of the Civil War, Davis and Robert E. Lee advocated the enlistment of negroes as Confederate soldiers, freedom to be the reward for military service. This plan met much opposition, though Davis used all his influence in favor of it. To members of Congress he declared that the negroes would, in his opinion, make good soldiers if well led, that he himself in Mississippi had led negroes against lawless white men. Finally becoming impatient at the bringing forward of technical objections by the opposition, Davis said: ''If the Confederacy falls there should be written on its tombstone, 'Died of a theory.' ''[12]

So far as known only two slaves went with Davis to Richmond. These were the son of James Pemberton, who soon ran away to the Federals, and Robert Brown, who remained faithful. The other servants were whites and free negroes. It was found difficult to keep the white servants; it was said that some of them took service with the Davis family for the purpose of acting as spies. One free black girl also went to the Federals. Two other free blacks were connected with the Davis establishment — James H. Jones and James Henry Brooks. The latter was a little negro boy rescued by Mrs. Davis from a drunken mother who was beating him. Mr. Davis went to the mayor of Richmond, had free papers made out for the boy and took him home as a playmate for the children who spoiled him completely. He took part in their games and fights also, and once got a broken head in a clash between the ''Hill Cats,'' or wealthy children, and the ''Butcher Cats,'' or working men's children. He was fighting as a ''Hill Cat.'' President Davis, seeing his injury went down the hill and endeavored to persuade the

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[11] Garner, "Reconstruction in Mississippi," p. 252, quoting from the order of General Dana; Bancroft, Davis, p. 152; *Times-Democrat*, Feb. 16, 1902; *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1879; Eaton, "Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen," p. 165.

[12] "Rise and Fall," Vol. I. pp. 516, 518.

"Butcher Cats" to make friends, but though they expressed respect for him they refused to make peace with the "Hill Cats." After the collapse of the Confederacy, the Brooks boy went with the Davis family in their flight toward the Southwest and was captured with them in Georgia. He saw the soldiers forcibly separate Mr. and Mrs. Davis, and long after he declared to some Northern teachers that when grown he intended to kill the officer who took hold of Mrs. Davis. One of the captors named Hudson, who Mrs. Davis thought was a bad character, threatened to adopt the boy. So, when on the way to prison at Fortress Monroe a stop was made at Port Royal, South Carolina, Mrs. Davis sent the boy to General Saxton, an old friend, who was stationed there. The boy fought furiously to keep from going. General Saxton turned him over to a New England school marm then teaching the Sea Island blacks. She reported that he was constantly fighting other negro children who made slighting references to Davis or sang "We'll hang Jeff Davis on a sour apple tree." He was later sent North to school where he had other fights. A few years before Mr. Davis's death some one sent him a Massachusetts paper containing an account of young Brooks in which it was stated that the man would bear to the grave the marks of beatings inflicted by the Davises." [13]

Two trusted servants were James H. Jones, a free negro, and Robert Brown. Jones was Davis's valet and coachman; Brown was Mrs. Davis's servant. Both gave faithful service during the war, and in 1865, just before the collapse of the Confederacy, they were sent South with Mrs. Davis. On May 10, 1865, Mr. Davis overtook his wife in the pine woods of Georgia and that night was captured. It was Jones who had the President's horse saddled and ready, and hearing the coming of the enemy waked Mr. Davis and threw over his shoulders the famous raincoat which Mr. Stanton's imagination and ingenuity magnified into a female costume. After accompanying the Davis family to Fortress Monroe, Jones went to live in Raleigh, North Carolina. Some years later when Mr. Davis was in North Carolina Jones called and his old master excused himself to a distinguished company in order to see "my friend, James Jones." Jones, now employed in the Stationery Room of the United States Senate, is full of reminiscences of his master and nothing makes him more indignant than to hear the story about Mr. Davis's disguise when captured. Among his treasures are letters and pictures from the Davis family and a stick that Mr. Davis once used. Jones claims that on the retreat through the Carolinas Mr. Davis gave him the Great Seal of the Confederacy to hide and that for a while he had charge of the coin of the Confederacy treasury. While it is certain that Davis gave him something to hide it is doubtful whether it was the seal. Jones says that his master was a fine "every day man" who "didn't take nobody into his bosom too soon."[14]

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[13] Davis, Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 199, 645; Botume, "First Days with the Contrabands," pp. 183.

Robert Brown spent his whole life in the service of the Davis family. He went with Mrs. Davis and her children from Fortress Monroe to their captivity in Savannah and was nurse and protector to the family. On the vessel that brought Mrs. Davis to Savannah, a sailor was very abusive of Davis and seemed anxious to teach Brown that he was now his master's equal. Brown asked "Am I your equal?" "Yes, certainly," the sailor replied; "Then take this from your equal," said Brown, and knocked him down. On several occasions Brown stood between the helpless family and insult or outrage. Mrs. Davis was not permitted to leave Savannah, so Brown took the children to relatives in Canada. When Mr. Davis was released from prison Brown went to him and as soon as possible reentered his service. After Davis's death in 1889 Brown went to Colorado to live with his master's daughter, Mrs. Hayes, and there he died.[15]

While in captivity Davis showed intense interest not only in the welfare of his own servants but in the prospects of the race. And he was not left without evidence that the negroes did not hate him as was supposed at the North. When his captors stopped for dinner at Macon, Georgia, a strange negro servant, of his own accord and at the risk of offending the rather relentless captors, secretly brought flowers to Davis and messages from Confederate friends in the city. A year later, Mrs. Davis was again in Macon and wrote to Mr. Davis of the friendly inquiries made by negroes. He replied: "The kind manifestations mentioned by you as made by the negro servants are not less touching than those of more cultivated people. I liked them and am gratified by their friendly remembrance. Whatever may be the result of the present experiment the former relation of the races was one which could incite to harshness only a very brutal nature!" [16]

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[14] *New York Tribune*, June 4, 1907; *Times-Democrat*, March 3, 1907; Davis, Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 638; Statement of Jones; Correspondence of M. H. Clark.

[15] Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 719, 716; Bancroft, Davis, p. 196; Craven, "Prison Life of Jefferson Davis," pp. 215, 344.

As soon as he was allowed to write and receive letters and to read, Davis's first inquiries were for the Brierfield negroes, and in his letters he expresses apprehension lest the crowding of strange negroes on the place by the Freedmen's Bureau might cause the home negroes to suffer. Later he was much angered when he learned that "Uncle Bob" had been robbed and turned out of his home, and frequently asked about him "with painful anxiety." [17] The imprisoned Confederate ex-President did not endorse the methods adopted by the "Johnson" State governments, which endeavored to fix the place of the negro in the social order. He believed that complete civil rights should be given to the blacks. In one of his letters, dated October 11, 1865, occurs the following passage which illustrates his views:

'I hope the negroes' fidelity will be duly rewarded, and regret that we are not in a position to aid and protect them. There is, I observe, a controversy, which I regret, as to allowing negroes to testify in court. From brother Joe, many years ago, I derived the opinion that they should then [as slaves] be made competent witnesses, the jury judging of their credibility; out of my opinion on that point arose my difficulty with Mr. C—— [an overseer who left the employ of Davis because slaves were allowed to testify in the plantation courts], and any doubt which might have existed in my mind was removed at that time. The change of relation diminishing protection must increase the necessity. Truth alone is inconsistent, and they must be acute and well trained who can so combine as to make falsehood appear like truth when closely examined.''[18]

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[16] Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 643, 751.

[17] Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 703, 741; Bancroft, Davis, p. 153.

In 1866 Mrs. Davis was allowed to go to Fortress Monroe and live near her husband. Frederick Maginnis, a former free servant, then came and insisted upon re-entering the service of the family. He stoutly resented all unfriendly conduct toward or criticism of Mr. Davis and saved him from much annoyance by sightseers and others. In spite of the fact that General Burton, who succeeded General Miles, was liked by the Davises, Frederick refused to invite the General to his wedding when he married Mrs. Davis's maid. No one, he explained, who held his master in prison should come to his wedding. Of his kindly devotion Mrs. Davis wrote: ``What this judicious, capable, delicate-minded man did for us could not be computed in money or told in words; he and his gentle wife took the sting out of many indignities offered to us in our hours of misfortune. They were both objects of affection and esteem to Mr. Davis as long as he lived.''[18]

During this period of enforced seclusion Mr. Davis talked and wrote more about the negro problem than about any other topic. The disturbed condition of the race excited his pity; he did not believe that a million had perished during and just after the war, as some asserted, but thought that the negroes who had left the plantations had suffered greatly; for as slaves they had been cared for, now no one looked after them and they were not yet competent to care for themselves. Most of the immorality exhibited was due, he said, to the removal of the restraints of slavery; the state of freedom was more than the negro could comprehend and he was aimlessly drifting. Of amalgamation of races, that bugbear of many whites, he said that nature had erected barriers against it; no normal white or black desired it; the few cases of intermarriage in the North had no significance; ``there could be no problem of the negro at the North for they were too few to be of consequence." The disturbed condition of the race was, in his opinion, due less to the mere fact of freedom than to the evil teachings of the Bureau officers and such people who had excited the ex-slaves with talk of lands, houses, equal rights, etc. He believed that the Southern States should be left to deal with the negroes. They could do it better than the Bureau. Were its officers soldiers it might be different, but camp followers were a most unsafe class to entrust with the care of a helpless race. He compared them to the Indian agent of the West who so mistreated the red wards of the nation. In this connection he told the following ancedote to Doctor Craven, his physician:

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[18] Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 722.

[19] Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 774, 777.

Driving to church one Sunday, a pious but avaricious old gentleman of Mississippi saw a sheep foundered in a quagmire on the side of the road and called John, his coachman, to halt and extricate the animal. John endeavored to pull out the sheep but found that fright and exposure had so sickened the poor brute that its wool came out in fist-fulls whenever pulled. With this news John returned to the carriage.

"Indeed, John, is it good wool?"

"First-class. Right smart good, Massa. Couldn't be better."

"It's a pity to lose the wool, John. You'd better go see if it is loose everywhere? Perhaps his sickness only makes it loose in parts." John pulled out all the wool and carried it to the carriage.

"It be's all done gone off, Massa. Every hair on him was just fallin' when I picked 'em up."

"Well, throw it in here, John, and now drive to church as fast as you can; I am afraid we shall be late."

"But the poor sheep, Massa! Shan't dis chile go fotch him?"

"Oh, never mind him," returned the philanthropist, measuring the wool with his eye, "even if you dragged him out he could never recover and his flesh would be good for nothing to the butchers."

So the sheep, stripped of his only covering, was left to die in the swamp, concluded Mr. Davis; and such will be the fate of the poor negroes entrusted to the philanthropic but avaricious Pharisees who now propose to hold them in special care.

The views of Mr. Davis on the economic situation are also interesting. "There is no question," he said, "but that the whites are better off for the abolition of slavery; it is an equally potent fact that the colored people are not." The planter would no longer be obliged to purchase his labor at high prices, nor care for laborers and their families in sickness and when idle. If a free negro died his master would lose nothing; when a slave died he lost $1,000 or more. True, all the wealth invested in slaves was swept away, but the labor itself remained, and it was possible that the negro race might develop into an efficient tenantry that would make the South again prosperous. For the immediate future the operation of the laws of supply and demand would, he thought, serve to adjust economic relations between whites and blacks, but if theorists continued to interfere the result would be bad.

Davis had the usual mistaken Black Belt belief that only blacks could be efficient laborers in producing the staple crops of the lower South; that Germans, Irish and other immigrants might produce tobacco, and might, for a few years, do something with the other Southern staples, rice, cotton and sugar; but that, in the end, the climate would overcome them, for only negroes could successfully cultivate, year after year, those crops. How mistaken he was, forty years of opportunity for the whites have shown — the whites now make nearly all the rice, half the cotton and are beginning to go into the sugar industry. It is now known that a white man can work anywhere in the United States that a negro can and can usually do better work.

Davis foresaw, however, the development of other industries in the South. He believed that the industrial revolution would come early, for he did not foresee the destruction of Reconstruction. The high price of cotton would attract immigrants from the North and from Europe, the great water power of the South would be utilized, factories would spring up and "the happy agricultural state of the South will become a tradition, and with New England wealth, New England grasping avarice and evil passions will be brought along."

But of the ultimate independence, economic and social, of the negro race he was doubtful. Wherever the races were thrown into political and economic competition, there the negro would finally suffer. Doctor Craven has reported his views on this point, and time has shown the correctness of many of them:

"The papers bore evidence from all sections of increasing hostility between the races, and this was but part of the penalty the poor negro had to pay for freedom. The more political equality was given or approached, the greater must be the social antagonism of the races. In the South, under slavery, there was no such feeling because there could be no such rivalry. Children of the white master were often suckled by negroes, and spoiled during infancy with black playmates . . . . it was under black huntsmen the young whites took their first lesson in field sports. They fished, shot and hunted together, eating the same bread, drinking from the same cup, sleeping under the same tree with their negro guide. In public conveyances there was no exclusion of the blacks, nor any dislike engendered by competition between white and negro labor. In the bed-chamber of the planter's daughter it was common for a negro girl to sleep, as half attendant, half companion; and while there might be, as in all countries and amongst all races, individual instances of cruel treatment, he was well satisfied that between no master and laboring classes on earth had so kindly and regardful a feeling subsisted. To suppose otherwise required a violation of the known laws of human nature. Early associations of service, affection and support were powerful. To these self-interest joined . . . .

"The attainment of political equality by the negro will revolutionize all this. It will be as if our horses were given the right of intruding into our parlors, or brought directly into competition with human labor, no longer aiding it but as rivals. Put large gangs of white laborers belonging to different nationalities at working beside each other and feuds will probably break out. . . . Emancipation does this upon a gigantic scale, and in the most aggravated form. It throws the whole black race into direct and aggressive competition with the laboring classes of the whites, and the ignorance of the blacks, presuming on their freedom, will embitter every difference. The principle of compensation prevails everywhere through nature, and the negroes will have to pay, in harsher social restrictions and treatment for the attempt to invest them with political equality." [20]

In 1865 the Davis negroes drifted back to Hurricane and Brierfield which were soon restored to Joseph E. Davis, and there they tried to begin the new life. Both plantations were sold in 1866 by Jospeh E. Davis to three of his former slaves, Ben Montgomery and his two sons, Thornton and Isaiah, for $300,000. Jefferson Davis was then in prison and Joseph E. Davis was too old to manage the plantations. He believed that his former slaves could, under the Montgomery supervision, gradually attain self-control and economic independence. [21] Jefferson Davis was not so sanguine as was his older brother; he believed that white supervision of the blacks was still necessary. The plan failed mainly because of the general business depression in the South during the seventies.[22] The Montgomery negroes later achieved success as farmers in Kansas, North Dakota and Canada and more recently as the founders of Mound Bayou, a negro town in Mississippi. Isaiah was the only negro member of the Mississippi Convention of 1890; he supported the movement to restrict the suffrage.

For several years after regaining his freedom Mr. Davis had little direct connection with the ex-slaves; but he never lost interest in their welfare nor did they lose their regard for him. In 1867, after being released from Fortress Monroe, he went to Mississippi on a short visit. Many of the negroes came up to see him at Vicksburg and others went to New Orleans, while to see the remaining ones he made a trip to Brierfield and Hurricane.[23]

In spite of Mr. Davis's Confederate pro-slavery record no instance is known of his having been insulted by an ex-slave, though the negroes at times during Reconstruction became exceedingly impudent to the whites. But as the carpet-bag scalawag régime wore on, the white leaders of the blacks began to consolidate their negro following by arguing that if the white party should come into power the Confederacy would be reorganized, Jefferson Davis would come to Montgomery and slavery would again be established. Thousands upon thousands of negroes over the South came to believe that Jefferson Davis represented all that was hostile to their freedom, and even after the downfall of the reconstruction governments some negroes were afraid of Davis. When in the late seventies and eighties he began to travel about the South many a negro was frightened by his visits and the accompanying demonstrations of the whites. The negroes often avoided the railway stations when his train would stop for him to speak. Before he died most of the blacks lost their fear of him. Proof of this changed feeling was shown by the behavior of the colored school children, who, when Davis visited Atlanta in 1886, attracted general attention by their extravagant welcome.[24]

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[20] There is no reason to doubt the essential accuracy of Doctor Craven's accounts of what he saw and heard, though some portions of his book were considerably revised by General Charles Halpine who prepared Craven's notes for the press. Craven, Prison Life, pp. 97-102, 211-213, 215-216, 235-242, 279-283, 284-285; Bancroft, Davis, pp. 152-154, 156-127; Davis Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 12, 748.

[21] See article by Booker T. Washington on Mound Bayou, in *World's Work*, July, 1907.

[22] *Chicago Tribune*, May 7, 1879; *Times-Democrat*, Feb. 16, 1902; Correspondence of relatives.

[23] Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 804.

Among the negroes who knew him Davis was always popular. When he was living at Memphis as the president of an insurance company he was often surrounded by the negroes at the steamboat landing or on the streets and made the object of ovations that surprised strangers.[25] After he again took charge of Brierfield he was, on account of his lenient ways with the tenants, unable to secure as much income from the estate as the Montgomery brothers had paid him in rent. In this connection a relative wrote: "His managers complained that it was impossible to maintain discipline on the plantation, for his former slaves were continually appealing to him and he would write reproving them [the managers] for being too exacting with the old servants."

After the death of Mr. Davis a Florida newspaper published some letters written to an old negro, Milo Cooper, who then lived in Orlando, but who is now in the Miami, Florida, poor house. Cooper had formerly belonged to some member of the Davis family. He frequently sent little gifts of fruit to Mr. Davis who always returned a courteous acknowledgment. The last letters to Milo were written less than a year before Davis's death.[25]

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[24] House Report, No. 262, 43 Cong., 2 Sess., p. 181; Fleming, "Documentary History of Reconstruction," Vol. II, p. 86; Conversations with whites and negroes; John C. Reed, "Brother's War," p. 325.

[25] Somers, "Southern States," p. 264.

The following extracts from letters written in 1885 will illustrate his appreciation of the friendship of this humble man:

> My Good Friend Milo: The plants did not arrive until the day before your letter came. They have been planted and are much valued by me, and Mrs. Davis unites with me in thanking you for them. . . . Mrs. and Miss Davis unite in kindest regards to you and with best wishes, I am, with thanks,
>
> Yours sincerely,
> JEFFERSON DAVIS.

> . . . We are indebted to you for kind attentions. . . . I shall always be glad to hear of your welfare. . . .

> Both Mr. and Mrs. Davis are thankful to their friend, Milo Cooper, for the lemons and for his congratulations. Mr. Davis passed his eightieth birthday in good health and spirits for one of his age, and is cheered by the kind spirit evinced by so many friends.
>
> Your Friends,
> JEFFERSON and V. H. DAVIS.

> The cane arrived safely. Please receive my thanks and the assurance that it is a valued testimonial which I shall keep. The peaches were very fine and I have ordered the seed planted in the orchard and hope to raise some from them of better quality than those I have. . . .
>
> Always remembering you with friendly interest, my family and self have thankfully to acknowledge your kind attention in sending to us the choice fruits of the season. With renewed assurance of our cordial good wishes, I am,
>
> Very truly yours,
> JEFFERSON DAVIS.

At the funeral of the great Southern leader his humble friends were there to pay the last tribute of love and respect. Among them was Robert Brown, now an aged man, who had spent his life in Mr. Davis's service, and from Mississippi came his former slaves and their children. "He was a good, kind master," they said "everybody that he ever owned loved him." An old negro of eighty, who could not walk alone, came because he "wanted to see him once more." One division of the funeral procession was made up of New Orleans negroes. From North Carolina came a telegram from James Jones who had learned of the death too late to reach New Orleans in time for the funeral. From South Florida, Milo Cooper came. He had heard that Mr. Davis was very ill and had started at once to New Orleans hoping to see him in life once more. Old and unused to travelling Cooper was often delayed and reached New Orleans after the death of his master. His distress upon learning this was pitiable. Mrs. Davis received letters from Thornton Montgomery then living in North Dakota, and the negroes at Brierfield united in sending the following:

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[25] Jacksonville *Times-Union*, Jan. 9, 1890; Jones, Memorial Volume, p. 493; Bancroft, Davis, p. 100.

> We, the old servants and tenants of our beloved master, Honorable Jefferson Davis, have cause to mingle our tears over his death, who was always so kind and thoughtful of our peace and happiness. We extend to you our humble sympathy.
>
> Respectfully,
> Your Old Tenants and Servants.

Since all who served Mr. Davis loved him it will not be out of place here to quote what Betty, a white maid in the employ of the Davis family, said to a New Orleans reporter:

> "You are writing a good deal about Mr. Davis but he deserved it all. He was good to me and the best friend I ever had. After my mother died and I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Davis at Beauvoir, he treated me like one of his own family. He would not allow any one to say anything to wound the feelings of a servant."

His servants always said of him that he was "a very fine gentleman."[26]

WALTER L. FLEMING.

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[26] Davis, Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 923, 933, 934; Daniel, "Life and Reminiscences of Davis," p. 76; Jones Memorial Volume, pp. 467, 468, 493, 500, 501; Jacksonville *Times-Union*, Jan. 9, 1890; New Orleans newspapers, Dec., 1889; Obsequies of Jefferson Davis, pp. 27, 113; Bancroft, Davis, pp. 100, 196.