

Interlude

Bullwhip Days

The slaves are put in stalls like the pens they use for cattle – a man and his wife with a child on each arm. And there's a curtain, sometimes just a sheet over the front of the stall, so the bidders can't see the "stock" too soon. The overseer's standin' just outside with a big blacksnake whip and a pepperbox pistol in his belt. Across the square a little piece, there's a big platform with steps leadin' to it.

Then, they pulls up the curtain, and the bidders is crowdin' around. Them in back can't see, so the overseer drives the slaves out to the platform, and he tells the ages of the slaves and what they can do. They have white gloves there, and one of the bidders takes a pair of gloves and rubs his fingers over a man's teeth, and he says to the overseer, "You call this buck twenty years old? Why there's cup worms in his teeth. He's forty years old, if he's a day." So they knock this buck down for a thousand dollars. They calls the men "bucks" and the women "wenches."

James Martin (p. 291)

... Den, one o' de strangers said, "Git yo' clothers, Mary. We has bought yo' from Mr. Shorter." I c'menced cryin' an' beggin' Mr. Shorter not to let 'em take me away. But he said, "Yes, Mary, I has sole yer, an' yer must go wid 'em."

Den, dose strange mens, whose names I ain't never knowed, tuk me an' put me in de buggy an' driv' off wid me, me hollerin' at de top o' my voice an' callin' my ma. Den, dem speculataws begin to sing loud, jes' to drown out my hollerin'.

Us passed de very fiel' whar Paw an' all my folks wuz wukkin', an' I calt out as loud as I could an' as long as I could see 'em, "Good-bye, Ma! Good-bye, Ma!" But she never heard me.

Mary Ferguson (p. 293)

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I had a brother, Jim, who wuz sold ter dress young Missus fer her weddin'. De tree am still standin' whar I set under an' watch 'em sell Jim. I set dar an' I cry an' cry, specially when dey puts de chains on him an' carries him off. An' I ain't neber felt so lone-some in my whole life. I ain't neber hyar from Jim since, an' I wonder now, sometimes, iffen he's still livin'.

Ben Johnson (p. 292)