

# A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN THE COTTON KINGDOM: FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED AND THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

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## ABSTRACT

This paper takes as its subject Frederick Law Olmsted's experiences as a northern journalist traveling in the South before the Civil War. Olmsted (1822-1903), produced numerous newspaper articles and published three books and a one-volume edition of the three titled The Cotton Kingdom. Much of the quoted material in this paper is taken from this abridgement.

The focus of this paper is Olmsted's experiences as a traveler. His thoughts on southern transportation via stagecoach, steamboat and train will be dealt with at some length, as will his estimate of the southern road system. Also, his stays in hotels and private homes, since they make up much of his experience with the southern people and therefore figure in much of his writing, form another section of this paper. Because meals are important to all travelers, this subject will not be neglected. Also, service at the hotels and inns at which Olmsted stayed will be treated. Finally, his thoughts on the character and manners of northerners and southerners will be surveyed.

Another theme of this paper is sectionalism. The North and the South, from the earliest times, had been culturally distinct. The Civil War was not so much a war of brother against brother as it was a war between two cultures. It will be necessary to provide a brief background sketch of America in the 1850's so that the reader will have a better understanding of the forces at work driving the two sections apart. Slavery was, of course, the most divisive issue between the North and the South, but other differences existed that, though they did not cause as much emotion as slavery, were also important in bringing on the war.

Olmsted's The Cotton Kingdom is a valuable document about American culture at perhaps the most important period in American history. A study of it is important to an understanding of the factors that shaped America at this time. Because Olmsted was an educated northern gentleman traveling in the South, his writings form a unique window on a now largely vanished culture as well as contributing to our understanding of how the North and the South differed.

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## 1.1 Introduction

Most people today remember Frederick Law Olmsted as the designer, along with Calvert Vaux, of Central Park in New York City, the first landscaped public park in the United States (Rosensweig and Blackmar 1992). The Park, begun in 1856, was only the first of scores of projects in Olmsted's career in the then new field of landscape architecture (ibid.). His work on other projects, among them Stanford University, the grounds surrounding the Capitol in Washington, D. C., Yosemite Park, and the Niagara Falls Park Project alone will cause him to be remembered, if only among those interested in landscape architecture, for generations to come.

He is less well-known for the trips he made throughout the South in the years 1852-54; two trips that occupied fourteen months on the road and covered fourteen states (Olmsted 1984). Henry J. Raymond of the New York Daily Times (now the New York Times), commissioned Olmsted to write a series of articles on southern life and industry, which was the occasion for his first trip. The articles took the form of letters and were so well received that Raymond sent him on a second trip in 1853. Olmsted's writings on the South have been highly praised because he was able to capture, perhaps better than any other writer, what the South was really like in the 1850's. The famous newspaper editor Horace Greely "had sent correspondents down South" (Beveridge 1977, 1; 18) but they were not able to convey their experiences with the authority and clarity that characterized Olmsted's accounts of his travels. Besides newspapermen, "...many others, from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Charles Dickens, wrote descriptive articles and books, (but) Olmsted's writings received special praise from readers such as Charles Darwin for being particularly informative" (McLaughlin 1977, 1;16).

Olmsted reworked his newspaper pieces and wrote additional material which he put into book form over the next few years and eventually published three individual volumes: A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy (1856); A Journey Through Texas: or, a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier (1857); and A Journey in the Back Country (1860). From the first letters published in The N. Y. Times, to his later books, his published views on the South enjoyed great popularity. The reaction to A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States was such that "tens of thousands of readers hung entranced over its scenes, sometimes amused, sometimes sad, more often indignant" (Nevins 1950,1;428).

Olmsted's London publisher, in order to take advantage of increasing British and American interest in the South just before the war, asked him to prepare an edition of his trilogy in abridged form. Olmsted explained to the publishers that his duties on Central Park were too pressing to allow him to do the volume alone. They permitted him to get Daniel R. Goodloe, editor of the abolitionist National Era in Washington, D. C., to help him prepare the book, to be called The Cotton Kingdom" (McLaughlin 1977, 1;23-4), subtitled A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States.

\* The title for this paper was inspired by Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court."

Hereinafter, this will be referred to simply as The Cotton Kingdom. Goodloe cut the length of the three books almost by half with most of the deleted material being culled from the second book, A Journey Through Texas. The Cotton Kingdom was sent to his London publisher in June of 1861.

## 1.2 Aim of This Paper

This paper will explore some of the attitudes towards and ideas about the South expressed by Olmsted in The Cotton Kingdom, though passages from his other works will also be cited. Because his writings typify much of northern thought on the South at this time, a study of his ideas will contribute to a better understanding of the South and the North in this period.

Olmsted traveled through the South on public transportation, as was his aim, so this paper will deal with his experiences on railroads, stagecoaches and steamboats in the South. However, he did much traveling on horseback, too, and this is the form of transportation that took him into the backwoods of the South. His overnight stays in hotels, inns and private homes will also be a topic of this paper, as these three concerns, transportation, lodging and meals are the main concerns of any traveler, anywhere, at any time. It has been noted that "much of his observation of the South and slavery [came] from chance encounters on trains, stagecoaches and steamboats, and in hotels and houses where he stopped for the night" (Beveridge 1981 2;10) so most of the anecdotal material presented in this paper took place on public transport or in hotels or private homes. This is natural because it follows Olmsted's experience of the South. He for the most part "got his knowledge (of the South)... from conversation, observation along the road, and what he saw in the houses where he spent the night" (ibid. 11).

A study of his experiences in the South should give insight into southern life and culture in the 1850's. His observations also provide an understanding of some of the ways northern and southern society differed at this time.

Because his initial letters on southern life were published in a national newspaper and read by thousands of people, he somewhat influenced public sentiment in the North. These newspaper letters were also read in the South, where they of course elicited strong criticism. His books, especially The Cotton Kingdom, also had a good deal of influence on educated people prior to the War. An in-depth study of northern thinking on the South at this time in U. S. history is beyond the scope of this paper, as is southern thought on the subject of the North. However, an examination of Olmsted's reactions to what he found in the South and a survey of his opinions on southern life help make this period in American history more understandable.

In investigating Olmsted's writings, certain historical forces will become evident; one of the most important, already mentioned, was the sectional feeling that prevailed between the North and the South before the War. Olmsted "wrote about the South at the moment when the sectional crisis was starting to overheat" (Powell 1984, x). This paper will therefore treat sectionalism as being one of the primary forces predisposing the North and the South to Civil War.

While traveling in the South in the pre-War years, Olmsted carried with him the "sectional feeling

and the New England values he had absorbed while growing up (and these) would in time influence the way he perceived the South and responded to it . . ." (Beveridge 1981,2;3). In this regard, cultural preconceptions and their influence on perception will be a leitmotif of this paper. Olmsted's early life influenced what he thought and wrote about the South. He "carried with him to the South a set of standards of civilization that he had been formulating for a . . . long time. These standards were drawn for the most part from the values of the regional culture in which he grew up --- the precepts of community and domesticity that were rooted in the Puritan values of the seventeenth century founders of Connecticut . . . . It is not surprising that his image of the good society was to a large extent an idealized version of the New England town" (ibid. 6-7). In this sense, Olmsted was a typical Yankee and epitomized the values of his section. His writings reflected not only what he experienced in the South but the attitudes and values of many northerners of this time.

It will also be necessary in this paper to give an overview of American society in the 1850's as a means of understanding the historical setting and the background against which Olmsted moved.

Finally, Olmsted's thoughts on the character and manners of northerners and southerners will be surveyed. It will be seen that the greatest single factor separating these two parts of the U. S. was slavery. Olmsted came to the conclusion that slavery was responsible for the barbaric nature of southern life; he felt that southerners were truly backward when compared to northerners.

## 2.1 Olmsted's Early Life

Frederick Law Olmsted was born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1822. He came from an old new England family and was raised to be a gentleman. However, his education was limited and sporadic.

At the age of 14 he contracted sumac poisoning and this caused problems with his eyesight; as a result, he was practically unable to study in school, though he did have tutors at different periods in his early life. This misfortune actually helped shape his later interests in travel and landscape architecture because he spent much of his youth outdoors roaming the countryside of the Connecticut Valley. He developed a "propensity for wandering" which his parents did not try to inhibit; he always seemed to be "busy and happy outdoors" so that, instead of school, "his occupation and his pleasure were rambling over hills, woods, and meadows and laying away, not at all consciously or deliberately, countless impressions of characteristic New England scenery" (Roper 1973, 9). Not only did he explore much of the area around Hartford, but with his family, he went on numerous trips in New England and Canada --- his father also communicating his own love of the outdoors to his son.

It is important to remember that this early experience would also influence his concept of what a civilized and settled countryside should be like. As he roamed the countryside around his home he acquired a "thorough acquaintance with the habits and industry of this compactly settled region of family farms, villages, and small towns, just as it was entering the initial phases of America's Industrial Revolution" (Powell 1984, xi). The process of urbanization, industrialization, improved transportation, the increase in manufacturing activity, and the changes in society were "already well advanced by the time of Olmsted's youth, and the outlines of the future were distinct. A valuable part of Olmsted's

peripatetic education was the experience of witnessing the birth of this new order" (ibid. xii). The industrial revolution, as noted earlier, greatly improved the quality of life in the North. When Olmsted later traveled in the South, where many of the conveniences and comforts he had known were not available, he would find much to complain about.

As a young man in the 1840's, he had next to think about a career. For a short time he was apprenticed to a dry goods importer in New York, but stayed only long enough to realize he did not like business. He then went on a merchant voyage to China but was seasick much of the time and hated the life aboard ship.

In 1847, at the age of twenty-five, he decided to become a scientific farmer and he persuaded his father to buy a farm for him on Staten Island in New York. He was enthusiastic about his new vocation for the first few years, winning several prizes for different crops he raised, but was soon traveling again. With his brother and a friend, Charles Loring Brace, he embarked on a trip around England. Olmsted's first book was an account of this journey published as Walks and Talks of An American Farmer in England (1852) ; the success of this book had much to do with inspiring him next to become a full-time writer. He began to make friends within the literary and publishing circles in New York and it was at this time that he was invited to prepare a series of articles for the New York Daily Times in the form of letters on southern life and industry.

## 2.2 The Cotton Kingdom

Although a majority of the quotes in this paper are from The Cotton Kingdom, selections from Olmsted's articles, published letters and his collected private letters will also be cited from time to time. The Cotton Kingdom itself appeared successively in 1861, 1862 and 1953. The 1953 edition was edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. and is the version used as a source in this paper. The specific edition used, Modern Library (1984), is the Schlesinger edition, with notes by Lawrence N. Powell (Powell 1984). As noted earlier, most of the text, about two-thirds, of A Journey Through Texas, was cut by Goodloe because of the focus on a single state. Powell states that "in terms of pages alone, the Seaboard Slave States qualifies as the chief source. But proportionately the fewest reductions were made in the Back Country, which is the most polemical of all the volumes because it was the last to be written" (ibid., xviii). This latter work, unlike the two earlier books, was decidedly unsympathetic to the South because by this time Olmsted's attitude toward the South had changed from an earlier, more conciliatory point of view, to one of strong disapproval. One of the primary causes of this disapproval was slavery and the effects it had on southern society. In contrasting the early letters and published articles with the later books, it has been noted that "the most striking change in Olmsted's writings is the absence in his books on the South of those pleas to Northerners for understanding and forbearance toward their Southern brethren that he made repeatedly in his newspaper letters" (Beveridge 1981, 2;14-15). In his books he . . . "undercut the myth that southern chivalry and hospitality were so benign and creative that they justified the institution of slavery. Instead, he pictured a stagnant, even retrogressive, society...." (Beveridge 1977, 1;13). It has been noted that "much of Olmsted's view of the South was influenced by cultural preconceptions derived from his New England heritage" (Powell 1984, xx). He himself noted that he "had the strongest (sectional feeling) in the World" (McLaughlin 1977, 1;304). This sectional feeling comes out

clearly in the Cotton Kingdom.

The Cotton Kingdom has been chosen for use in this paper because it is the last book Olmsted himself saw published and as such can be considered the work he felt he was leaving to history. The edition used in this paper also contains appendixes containing his views of northern and southern character. These are also extensively quoted here.

### 2.3 Olmsted's Methodology

Olmsted had the fortunate, (for us), habit of recording everything of interest as soon as possible in a notebook he carried with him; this may be why the conversations he recorded appear so authentic. Powell praises Olmsted's writing for its "comprehensive coverage, rich and precise detail, and conversations convincingly rendered" (Powell 1984, 86). Olmsted was not only an accurate reporter, he was:

A tireless observer, he described the dress and manner of people he talked to; the construction and furnishings and upkeep of houses and hotels where he stopped; the management of plantations, from marginal to model; methods of agriculture, backward and modern; the roads, railways, and boats by which he traveled; and the appearance of the country through which he passed. From slaves, barroom acquaintances, traveling companions, overseers, poor farmers, rich planters, housewives of all classes, he gleaned information on a multitude of subjects: the price and productivity of land, methods of cultivation, population changes in a given locality over a period of years, the character of the nonslaveholding whites, the discipline and punishment of slaves, their abilities, the cost of their labor, the amount of work they did per day, their food and housing, their religion and morals, their amusements, and their relationship to their own families and their owners. When he could, without giving offense or arousing hostility, he even asked his interlocutors their opinion of slavery. Throughout, he sought to determine the typical fact and condition, while recognizing the exceptional.

(ibid. 86-7)

### 2.4 A Preliminary Example

Olmsted's powers of description and eye for detail make his narrative not only historically accurate and interesting but worthy of recognition as literature. The following is an excerpt from *The Cotton Kingdom* that clearly demonstrates this. The scene is a train in South Carolina:

The old man had a good-humored, thin, withered, very brown face, and there was a speaking twinkle in his eye. He was dressed in clothes much of the Quaker cut --- a broad-brimmed, low hat; white cotton shirt, open in front and without cravat, showing his hairy breast; a longskirted, snuff-colored coat, of very coarse homespun; short trousers, of brown drilling; red woolen stockings, and heavy cowhide shoes. He presently asked the time of day; I gave it to him, and we continued in conversation, as follows: ---

"Right cold weather."

"Yes."

"G'wine [Going] to Branchville?"

"I am going beyond there --- to Charleston."

"Ah --- come from Hamburg this mornin'?"

"No --- from beyond there."

"Did ye [you] ? --- where'd you come from?"

"From Wilmington."

"How long yer ben [been] comin'?"

"I left Wilmington night before last, about ten o'clock. I have been ever since on the road."

"Reckon [I guess] yer [you are] a night-bird."

"What?"

"Reckon you are a night-bird --- what we calls a night-hawk; keeps a goin' at night, you know."

"Yes --- I've been going most of two nights."

"Reckon so; kinder [kind of] red your eyes is."

(Olmsted [1861] 1984,169-70)

They continue to discuss, among other things, their respective farms, the price of land per acre in New York and South Carolina, and slavery. This farmer is under the impression, as Olmsted notes with surprise, that New York is part of the city of New Orleans, Louisiana! But such ignorance of geography was common in rural parts of America in those days.

As for the language, the farmer's dialect is convincingly rendered but I have felt it necessary to provide a gloss in brackets [ ] where confusion might arise.

It should be clear from this excerpt that Olmsted's writing is interesting and valuable in a number of ways. First, the manner in which he narrates his experiences convinces the reader that he is not editorializing or adding any fictional elements to his reporting. The old man had a "speaking twinkle" in his eye and proceeds to ask the time of day; both of these communication strategies are completely natural and accepted ways of beginning a conversation in American culture. Olmsted's presentation of the conversation is natural and convincing and the flow of the conversation is natural. It is clear that Olmsted is reporting things just the way they happened.

Secondly, he is very observant and especially aware of detail. The description of the old man's appearance is convincing and immediately says much of the old farmer's life and background. His clothes, "much of the Quaker cut" indicate that he is a simple and honest farmer. The shirt "open in front" discloses an outgoing, informal and friendly man. The "coarse homespun" coat and other details of dress, his "good-humored, withered, very brown face" --- all these give a remarkably lifelike picture of Olmsted's subject.

Finally, his writing style is clear and natural, and because of this, it is pleasure to read. He perhaps uses the semicolon a bit too often but this was a convention of nineteenth-century writing and does not really detract from the readability of his prose.

Before proceeding to a selected presentation of more of Olmsted's writing, it will be necessary to fill in some of the background against which he moved. A brief account of conditions in the 1850's in America should prove helpful at this point.

### 3.1 The U.S. at Midcentury

...by the 1850's Americans on both sides of the line separating freedom from slavery came to emphasize more their differences than similarities. Yankees and Southrons spoke the same language, to be sure, but they increasingly used these words to revile each other.

James McPherson

There were several elements that gave definition to life in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century. Of these, the most pervasive issue was slavery. Slavery was a fact of life in the South, and as such it caused great uneasiness. One scholar has even remarked that "the driving force propelling southern identity was racial fear" (Wilson 1989, 586). While this may be somewhat of an overstatement, there is support for the notion that southern society took great care to prevent slave uprisings and that most southerners daily lived with the fear that something of the sort might take place. In fact,

It...required the masters to be mentally prepared at all times to respond, with violence, to any sign of insubordination. They must, Olmsted said, 'hold themselves always in readiness to chastise, to strike down, to slay, upon what they shall individually judge to be sufficient provocation.' . . . One perverse effect of the use of violence to safeguard slavery was the barbaric quality it gave to the upper classes of the South. A Southern gentleman might attack and kill a slave for a slight show of insubordination, and indeed the stability of his society required that he do so.

(Beveridge 1981, 2;29)

While many white southerners felt they had to guard against a slave rebellion, they felt further isolated from other whites in the Union because of "the peculiar institution," as slavery was then termed. By the 1850's the South had a "siege mentality"; it felt it was necessary to guard against enemies within, in the form of the slaves and from the enemies of slavery without. The abolitionists, in particular, were hated and feared, especially because of their growing political power. Slavery, and the mentality it engendered in both the North and the South, increasingly polarized the two sections.

The South was predominately an agricultural society and its great crop was cotton. Without slave labor, the entire economic and social system would collapse. The North, while overwhelmingly agricultural only a generation of two before, was industrializing and urbanizing rapidly. This additional difference between the two sections --- a rural, agricultural, slave society on the one hand and an urbanizing, manufacturing free-labor society on the other, heightened the sectionalism that already existed between the North and West on the one hand and the South on the other.

A spur to the increasing industrialization of the North was the industrial revolution, which had started in England, and had by this time taken firm root in the U.S., first in New England, where Olmsted was born and raised and later in the West and South. Improvements in transportation, manufacturing, education, and commercial systems profoundly changed the way people lived.

For example, more children were able to get an education as they were freed from farm labor by the introduction of machinery. Rising levels of education increased the productivity of the workforce.

Also, workers in factories were able to produce more goods than previously, again with the aid of simple machines; this in turn lowered prices so more people could afford these goods. The standard of living increased for most people and the quality of life was enhanced.

Roads and canal systems were improved as trade developed. Produce from farms reached urban centers more cheaply and freshly; in turn, manufactured goods were more widely available. Transportation went hand in hand with increasing urbanization. There was also a population shift from the country to cities as rural residents found work there.

In general, the changes caused by the industrial revolution in America were for the better, but they took place unevenly --- the South lagged behind the North and the West because much of its economy was tied to an agricultural system that was so hugely profitable to a few powerful groups that it dominated all other enterprise. As a result, the South, in effect, became the consumer of manufactured goods produced in the North, while it supplied cotton to the North and to England to earn currency to buy these manufactured goods.

Another factor in the increasing tension between the North and the South was of a moral and spiritual nature. A wave of protestant revivals known as the Second Great Awakening had a great influence in American society through the first decades of the nineteenth century. This religious phenomenon spread through the country in the 1820's and 30's and generated many moral and cultural reform movements, one of the most militant being abolitionism. The abolitionists caused resentment and anger in the South through their strident demands for immediate freedom for the slaves; they also caused a certain amount of anxiety in the North among the more conservative elements of the population who had little idea of what to do about the "race adjustment" problem. But it was in the South, naturally, that the reaction against calls for abolition was most vehement. The more widespread northern antislavery sentiment grew, the further away the South drifted from the Union.

The slaveholders reaction to the abolition movement was to convince non-slaveholding whites, many of whom were "poor whites" or small farmers, that abolition of slavery would lead to the freeing of blacks who would then become a direct threat to life and property in the South. Various extreme scenarios put forward by slaveholders contained images of blacks robbing and raping innocent whites once they were freed.

It has been noted that the abolition movement had, by midcentury, "gone into politics and had begun to polarize the country" (McPherson 1988, 8). From this time the movement was a force that could not be ignored by people on either side.

While pro and anti-slavery groups caused great tension and sectionalism increased alienation, there were also larger, and in some ways more pervasive historical processes at work:

The conflict of North and South, of slave and free, was part of a broader movement for the unification of the nation, for the merging of elements both varied and conflicting into a homogeneous whole. The country felt a strong tendency to organize its energies, knit closer its economic structure, and standardize its moral and social values.

Most of the forces created by science, invention, and business technology thrust toward unification. This tendency had to contend against centrifugal impulses born of the wide spaces of the land, the varied national origins of the people, and the existence of two utterly different labor systems. The slavery quarrel and the social differences of North and South were simply the most important of certain disruptive tendencies; but all were gradually being forced to yield to the powerful impulses that were making the United States homogeneous in economic life, political ideals, and social outlook. By 1860 men who gave their patriotism to region, not country, saw the handwriting on the wall. Irresistible factors were making unity triumph over sectionalism, homogeneity over heterogeneity.

(Nevins 1947, 1;xix)

The move toward resolution of these conflicting forces would require a Civil War; thus, the war can be seen as a critical stage in the evolution of a more unified United States.

The southern states had traditionally favored a weak central government so that each state could retain greater power. The North and West, on the other hand, generally sought a larger role for the federal government in state affairs. A primary reason for this was the need in the newer western territories, as they were being opened to settlement, for government funds, participation and recognition.

Another important development in national life at this time which tended to increase centralization was a revolution in transportation. Many areas in the North and West wanted the federal government to sponsor internal improvements; again, mostly in the newly settled areas of the country but also in the settled areas. The building of new railroads and the improving of older lines, and the construction of roads and canals were seen as steps that would greatly stimulate widespread economic growth and commerce. The South, on the other hand, and in a very general way, was reluctant to allow the national government so much power over state internal affairs and, since it was a predominately agricultural rather than commercial area, the more traditional forms of transportation, such as river transportation, were thought to be sufficient at this time.

Along with the centralizing influence of improved transportation systems, parallel advances were

made in communications; telegraph lines were strung alongside the railroads, and the telegraph, in turn, increased the influence of newspapers. Newspapers were the main form of information dissemination and they had a great effect on how and what people thought, just as TV does today.

While the revolution in transportation stimulated and facilitated the opening of the Western territories, it also brought together pro and anti-slavery settlers and, ultimately, conflict resulted. The South wanted the federal government to protect the rights of slaveholding settlers in the newly organizing territories and to insure that the government would not prohibit slavery in these areas; anti-slavery elements in the North and West supported settlers who were against slavery and who wanted any new states that might come into the Union to be free, not slave.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 were essentially pieces of legislation that attempted to deal with the growing tension in the territories where slavery and anti-slavery elements were in conflict. The Missouri Compromise worked fairly well for a number of years because it limited slavery to a specific area that had been traditionally recognized by both sides. The Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Compromise and left the question of which territories would be free or slave up to the residents. This led to outright violence at polling stations and the tragedy of "Bloody Kansas," where hundreds on both sides were killed. With this growing political conflict over slavery it became clear that a break between the North and the South was at hand.

The balance of power between the shifting political factions in the North and South, slave and free. Democrat, Whig and later Republican is too complex an issue to go into in this paper, but some general trends are easily grasped. Power had started to shift from the South to the North in politics. Population declined in the South and rose in the North. Economic activity and wealth in the North increased while in the South the situation remained relatively static. The southern way of life was not one that accepted new ideas and innovations readily; it was one of tradition that resisted change. In contrast, in the North and the West change and modernization were essential and defining elements of society.

### 3.2 Sectionalism

As the sectional struggle developed, nearly all groups involved in it steadily substituted emotion for reason. They used stereotypes for facts, and epithets in lieu of cool arguments.

Allan Nevins

A consciousness that the North and the South were separate entities began with the founding of the country. Thomas Jefferson, in 1785, in a letter to a French correspondent, noted that "northerners were 'cool,' 'laborious,' 'interested,' and 'jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others'" this is in contrast to southerners who were "'fiery,' 'indolent,' 'generous,' and 'zealous for their own liberties, but trampling on those of others'" (Rose 1995, 57).

While it is difficult to pinpoint the beginnings of this feeling of difference or separateness, some idea can be formed by noting that Patrick Henry in 1774 told the members of the First Continental Congress that he was "not a Virginian, but an American," the alternatives he chose were state and nation, not

North and South. Fifteen years later he had changed both his outlook and his choice of terms. Fighting adoption of the Constitution, he was to argue that 'southern' interests would be overpowered by the demands of the 'northern' states (Ammerman in Wilson and Ferris 1989, 660). Traditionally, the colonial period has been seen as a time of northern and southern amalgamation and consolidation, but:

The South was different, and the difference could not be masked. In agriculture, in political institutions, in culture, and --- most importantly --- in the development of slavery and the plantation system, there were differences that set the region solidly apart from the rest of the nation. The Revolution did not create those differences and, for a time, the development of a new nation seemed to reduce their importance. But for good or for ill the South was a distinct region in 1776 and despite many variations on the theme has remained so.

(ibid. 661)

One plausible explanation for northern and southern regional differences, alluded to earlier, holds that the early settlers in each region were culturally distinct from the very beginning:

... fundamental and lasting divisions between Southerners and Northerners began in colonial America when migrants from the Celtic regions of the British Isles --- Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Cornwall --- and from the English uplands managed to implant their traditional customs in the Old South. From a solid eighteenth-century base in the southern backcountry, these people and their descendants swept westward decade after decade throughout the antebellum period until they had established themselves and their anti-English values and practices across the Old South. By 1860 they far outnumbered the combined total of all other white Southerners and their culture dominated the region. The antebellum North, on the other hand, was settled and influenced principally by people who had migrated from the English lowlands. They were joined in some places, and in their movement westward, by other immigrants, especially Germans, who easily meshed with prevailing northern ways but often suffered cultural isolation or serious problems of adjustment when they settled in the Old South. The course of antebellum American history was shaped far more by the differences between Northerners and Southerners than by any likenesses. Their conflict in the 1860s was not as much brother against brother as culture against culture.

(MWhiney 1988, xiii-xiv)

It seemed inevitable that heightened southern regional consciousness would grow stronger over time, so that "after 1830 the self-conscious identification with 'the South' notably increased, and a distinctive pattern of institutions, values, myths, and rituals took shape, reflecting a southern worldview that developed but never fully matured before the Civil War" (Wilson 1989, 586). The culture and the patterns of thought that developed from this consciousness in the South and the contrasting culture of the North are the subject of the next section.

### 3.3 Two Cultures

The two societies that existed in the United States in the 1850's not only were conscious of their differences but had developed fairly sophisticated ideologies based upon them. Propaganda grew and intensified before the war: "...in the North such men as Henry Wilson had made the characterization of Southerners as "lords of the lash' familiar to everybody," while southerners read and were told that "in the Northern states free society has proved a failure. It is rotten to the core" and that it should be replaced eventually by a system based on slavery, which was "a social system as old as the world, universal in man" (Nevins 1992,516;1). This type of invective was all too common on both sides just before the war.

One of the most significant general differences, already mentioned, was the rural, static nature of southern society as opposed to the more urban and dynamic character of life in the North and West. Some scholars have noted that "it is certainly true that agrarian traits marked the South. In contrast with the more and more urbanized, industrialized North, its life was rural..." (Nevins 1947,1;538). The South was:

completely committed to agriculture, and in a great degree to the plantation system; to a labor force which had to be kept ignorant and unenterprising; to a patriarchal ideal of social organization; to such limited production of wealth that great bodies of illiterate, shambling, badly-nourished whites became accepted as natural; to a soil-and-labor exploitation which gave one or two classes the means of elegance, learning, and leadership; to the mental conservatism which is bred by isolation...

(ibid. 538-9)

In addition, that "Southern culture was stamped above all by a conservatism based upon class stratification and the absence of competitive struggle, engendering an aristocratic, leisurely way of life, with much pride of family, scope for learning, and attachment to outdoor pursuits" (ibid., 587). However, it should be noted that most whites in the South, rich and poor alike, "had a sense of solidarity as against the Negro, and as against the encroaching North," (Nevins 1947,1;542); this tended to reduce class stratification.

Since it is sometimes difficult to separate fact from opinion when discussing the nature of society in the North and South, a less emotional course is to look at some contemporary statistics:

From 1800 to 1860 the proportion of the northern labor force in agriculture had dropped from 70 percent to 40 percent while the southern proportion had remained constant at 80 percent. Only one-tenth of southerners lived in what the census classified as urban areas, compared with one-fourth of northerners. Seven-eighths of the immigrants lived in the free states...the military profession claimed twice the percentage of southerners as northerners, while the ratio was reversed for men distinguished in literature, art, medicine, and education. In business the proportion of Yankees was three times as great, and among engineers and inventors it was six times as

large. Nearly twice the percentage of northern youth attended school. Almost half of the southern people (including slaves) were illiterate, compared to 6 percent of residents of free states.

(McPherson 1988, 40)

It has been noted that "though the South was by no means static in any absolute sense, it seemed so by comparison with the North and West...the ruling class of Southerners (and it was a class) clung to the aristocratic and conservative ideals which the North and West instinctively disliked. As Northern capital, technology, and labor-saving machinery forced the pace of industry, the gulf between the sections grew deeper. Those who crossed the Potomac felt they were entering a foreign land" (Nevins 1950, 2;7) .

Other ways of thinking about the South have, in many cases, become stereotypical? phrases like 'the merry South' and 'the Sunny South' connoted a great deal...it was a country in which romantic and hedonistic impulses, born of the opulence of nature, had freer rein than in the North..." (ibid., 541) . Added to the outdoor lifestyle allowed by the milder climate, plantation life helped maintain a social system that has been compared, perhaps too superficially, to that of England. The planters "enjoyed the social dignities and political leadership of the English squires..." and, "like the English, as a rigorous code of personal honor was enforced by the duel rather than by law, and gentlemen deemed themselves highly sensitive to slights, they developed a punctilious courtesy" (ibid. 541) . The fine manners of southerners have been a stereotype for many years.

Closely allied to this "sensitivity to slights" in the South, and tied up with southern pride, was what can only be called an inferiority complex vis-a-vis the North. Intelligent men in the South understood that because of the institution of slavery their section was being left behind economically and politically. For example, while "at the beginning of the century most Southerners had believed that Virginia would keep her primacy among the States in wealth, population, and influence...that their whole section would grow faster than the chilly North..." they now understood that "in nearly all material elements of civilization the North had far outstripped them; and they knew that slavery stood indicted not merely as a moral wrong, but as responsible for this painful lag in progress. In the Southern mind a defensive mechanism clicked into operation. Slavery? It was a blessing. The Negro? They best understood him. Progress? No sane man wanted the 'calculating avarice' that, as Calhoun said, marked the factory owner driving his wage slaves" (ibid. 543) . Another scholar has noted that in the South a "minority psychology developed as the northern population outgrew that of the South" (Wilson 1989, 586) .

The defensive attitude many southerners adopted caused much of the belligerent posturing that was evident in the South before the war; often when one feels inferior, and the source of those feelings is identified, that source is attacked. "Many slaveholders liked to talk...of the defects of shirtsleeves democracy, Yankee industrialism, and the vomit of European slums" (ibid., 544) . The North was seen as a mongrel society by many elitist southerners.

Because southern pride was perceived as being insulted by northern criticisms of southern life and values, a compensatory overconfidence in southern superiority arose. One result of this was a belief that,

if war came, southern arms would surely triumph. Northerners were, quite stereotypically, seen as "counter jumpers" (shop clerks who jumped over counters in stores to wait on customers) and as such were thought to be generally weak physically and mentally. Like many stereotypes this proved to be quite false. While southerners recognized that the North had a larger population and superior resources, they generally felt that if war came "the conditions of Southern life" had created a nation that held the military advantage because of:

...much hunting, general use of horses, and frequent marksmanship contests; the existence of two fine schools of war, the Virginia Military Institute at Lexington, and the South Carolina Military Academy or "Citadel" at Charleston; and the memory of Southern prowess in the Mexican war.

(ibid., 544)

The North and the South also differed in educational systems and goals. Education in the North was predominately for utilitarian purposes, while in the South it was chiefly intended to develop the character of the student (ibid.). The statistics quoted earlier also indicate that northern education was more democratic and thus available to a greater number and broader range of students, while education in the South, especially higher education, was principally available to the upper classes. Though there were fewer colleges in the South compared to the North, higher education was still available; it was in primary education that the South failed its people: "The South was for the most part a land without free public schools --- a land where a poor man's son was likely to go untaught, and the working man or small farmer to be ignorant if not illiterate. Here lay one of the great gulfs separating North from South" (ibid., 548).

These are only a few of the ways in which the North and the South differed. What is given here is by no means adequate for a comprehensive understanding of these two cultures; but should serve to orient the reader. Next, we turn to Olmsted's reasons for his travels. His initial purpose in traveling in the South contained both altruistic and selfish motives, as most worthy human actions do. He wanted to communicate to the readers of the Times what life in the South was actually like; he also wanted to further his reputation as a writer. He saw literary fame on the horizon.

#### 4.1 Olmsted's Initial Purpose

Olmsted's editor at the Times, Henry J. Raymond, in sending him on his first southern journey, stressed that his submissions should "contribute somewhat to the general and reliable public knowledge of the actual condition and character of the Southern States, upon which public sentiment concerning them ought to rest" (Roper 1973, 90). Olmsted's own avowed aim was to send letters to the Times "further to promote the mutual acquaintance of the North and South" (ibid. 92). His first letters to the Times were published in 1853.

Southerners as well as northerners read these criticisms of southern life. Most of the southern reaction to these letters was negative, of course, but some southern commentators thought he was being "manly and honest" or praised him for his "candor and intelligence" (ibid. 90). Olmsted initially was

trying to be objective and fair. It has been noted elsewhere that though he was "disappointed in the condition of the southern people, both citizens and slaves, and resentful of the southern press's insinuations of venality, Olmsted nevertheless tried conscientiously to be just in his reports" (ibid. 90).

His main preoccupation was to investigate slavery and its impact on the southern economy, but he was not an abolitionist; in his newspaper letters he tried at first to conciliate the two sections by advocating reason. He thought "the process of emancipation would be long and complex and could be carried out effectively only by carefully preparing the slaves for freedom. He saw social change as a slow process and believed that social reform should come about through an educational process that would change the habits as well as the beliefs of men" (Beveridge 1981, 2;3). He "urged the North to realize that slavery was a matter beyond its control, to correct the injustices of its own labor system, and to abandon denunciation..." (ibid., 90).

Before he really had direct experience of the South, his initial purpose was to increase understanding between the North and the South at a very dangerous time in American history.

#### 4.2 First and Second Trips

Olmsted left on his first trip in December of 1852. He initially stopped in Washington, D. C. and also saw some of Maryland. The cities he visited in Virginia: Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk, were all later to become a major theater of operations in the War.

Heading further south, he traveled through the Carolinas (North and South) and on into Georgia. At Savannah he turned west and reached Montgomery, Alabama then turned south again and arrived at Mobile, Alabama where he boarded a steamship for New Orleans. After New Orleans, he made a side trip up the Red River to Colfax, Louisiana before taking a Mississippi River steamboat north to Vicksburg and Memphis. He then traveled east, mostly on horseback and on untrodden paths, through northern Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, western North Carolina and Virginia. He got back to New York in April 1853, five months after he had begun (Powell 1984).

He had gathered on this trip enough material to give his editor an initial eight letters for publication, under the title "The South" and later, forty-two more articles. The articles he wrote for the Times were so popular that Raymond decided to send him on another journey.

On the second trip he left in November of 1853 and this time his brother John accompanied him. His brother was troubled by tuberculosis and was seeking a healthier climate in which to make his home and thought "the sunny South" might offer such a place. Rather than going south along the seaboard this time, they proceeded directly west and arrived first at Louisville, Kentucky and then Nashville, Tennessee. They then turned south to New Orleans where they bought horses and entered Texas. They made a side trip into Mexico but could not manage a trip to California as planned. They then returned to New Orleans where, due to worsening health, John left for home by ship while Frederick started out on horseback again and traveled through Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, the Carolinas and Virginia. He arrived home in New York in August 1854. From this trip he had gathered enough material for fifteen more articles, this time under the title "A Tour of the Southwest" and three years later published

ten more articles under the title "The Southerners at Home" in the New York Daily Tribune (ibid.). The later collection, revision and publication of these articles in book form has been treated in section 1.2.

### 4.3 In the Eye of the Beholder

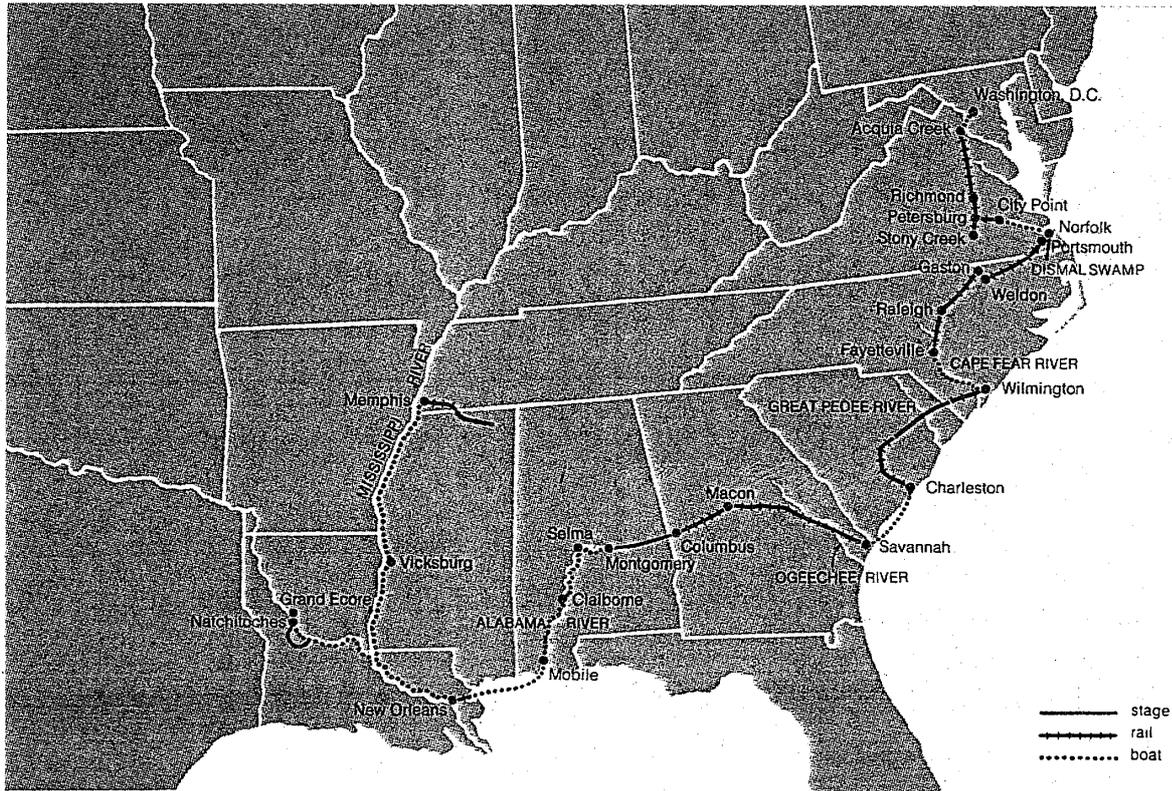
It is of course impossible to truly know Olmsted's innermost feelings about his southern experiences, but it is possible to gain a reasonable knowledge of his attitudes and beliefs by looking at his writings. In this he presents a puzzle because, on the one hand, as a newspaper reporter, he was constrained to be objective, and he was just this in his early newspaper articles, but on the other hand, as a white New Englander in the South, his feelings, preconceived ideas and the stereotypes he held about the South cannot but have influenced his thinking and writing. We will see in the course of this study that he was more objective and open-minded about some things at the beginning of his travels than he was at the end, and that, like many others in the North, as the Civil War approached, his perspective shifted and he became very negative about the South.

As war approached "the tone of his writings (became) more polemical all the while. None of the magnanimity of his newspaper articles found its way into his southern trilogy. By 1856, when the Seaboard Slave States, the first of the trilogy, was published, he had lost all interest in conceding the slave states any redeeming virtues" (Powell 1984, xxix). By the year 1856, "he was . . . convinced that the brutalities of slavery were integral to the system, not merely incidental. He found southern hospitality mercenary and stingy. He ridiculed the myth of southern gentility..." (ibid. xxix).

While some of his opinions changed for the worse as he traveled through the South, others were already fixed. These preconceptions were in the main not favorable to the South and many would remain so, leading him, in some cases, to misinterpret what he saw. Such misunderstandings occurred in part because of "cultural preconceptions derived from his New England heritage" (ibid. xx). Since one definition of stereotype includes the concept of a "preconceived, standardized impression or attitude" (OED), we can assume that his years growing up in New England caused him to form certain attitudes and preconceptions about what "civilized" life should be like. His southern experiences presented a whole new way of life; a new culture that did not match what he had become used to. This new culture as seen by Olmsted was very unlike his own:

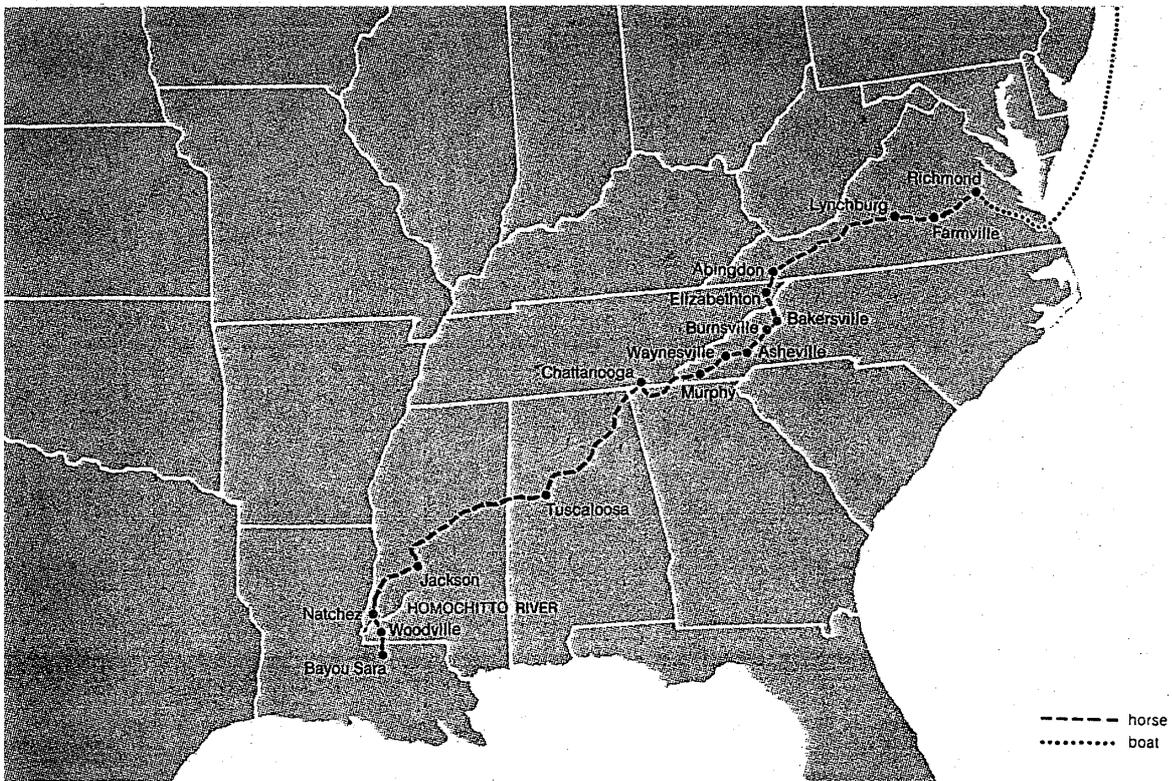
In the South, Olmsted found . . . its villages and towns scanty and ramshackle. Even the services offered reinforced his image of backwardness. In nearly every establishment where he stayed he found the accommodations filthy, the food cold and unappetizing, the help lazy and incompetent, and the management surly and indifferent, if not downright dishonest. The means of transportation were little better. Coaches, trains, and steamboats seldom left on schedule.

Fields were often desolate. Poverty hung over the land like a curse. Enterprise and bustle were scarcely to be seen unless introduced by northern newcomers . . . People in Alabama were content with wheat yields that a New York farmer would be ashamed to make public. Southern agriculture was still carried on with the most primitive tools.



**THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE SEABOARD SLAVE STATES, 1852-1853**

From northern Mississippi, Olmsted returned to the North "along the eastern base of the Appalachian Chain in the upper parts of the States of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia..."



**THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE BACK COUNTRY, 1854**

Most of the houses that Olmsted visited (and mentally inventoried) were rude and sparsely furnished by Northern standards. From the standpoint of comfort, many were no better than Northern stables. There were few schools, public lectures, or libraries. Illiteracy was widespread. Even simple geographical knowledge seemed beyond the grasp of ordinary Southerners, who seldom read newspapers and often did not know how to read.

(Powell 1984, xxi-xxii)

Olmsted was by no means alone in seeing the South as primitive and backward, however. Various other visitors, both American and European, had similar reactions to the poor transportation system, substandard hotels, poor food and the unusual manners of the people. Olmsted met a great many "poor whites", these:

White nonslaveholders lived near the edge of squalor. Large planters usually wanted them cleared out of their neighborhoods for fear their indolence would set a bad example for the slaves. The poverty of the "poor whites" was largely a matter of choice. In Southern parlance, to labor industriously was "to work like a nigger," So, to maintain their caste pride, they sank into a self-satisfied stupor on their barren sand hills.

(ibid.xxii)

It is generally acknowledged today that "far from being downtrodden 'poor whites,' the vast majority of the South's white population were yeoman farmers who owned sufficient land and livestock to be secure in the means of subsistence" and that "the Southern yeomanry enjoyed an adequate and satisfying standard of living" (ibid. xxvi). Other scholars have it that while "it is erroneous to say that slavery was the main reason for the existence of the degraded poor-white class..." it is agreed that "slavery was one element in producing the poor-white problem" (Nevins 1947, 1;489-90).

It has been noted previously that Olmsted's "ideological preconditioning shaped his understanding of what he observed in the South" (ibid. xxvi); he saw many "poor whites" and assumed that they had come to this state because slavery had demoralized them. Since Olmsted was an economic liberal who believed free labor was superior morally and economically to slave labor, he had difficulty understanding why, since free labor was available in the South, it had not supplanted slavery. A demoralized class of "poor whites" who were downtrodden because of the institution of slavery explained this difficulty. His "Northern vocabulary and cast of mind . . . supplied the rest, plus a derisive tone and a supercilious attitude" (ibid. xxvi). However, his preconceptions, though inadequate in accounting for what seemed to be the true state of the "poor whites", contained some truth. Quite a few observers have noted that "where the laborer was held in contempt, labor was necessarily also...even conscientious and energetic workmen lost heart where work was habitually ill done and the standard of workmanship was low" (Roper 1974, 89).

It may be that labor was held in contempt by many elements of southern society; still, Olmsted's preconceptions misled him in many ways:

He observed a homespun economy and considered it impoverished. He observed a premodern work ethic and condemned it as laziness. He observed farmers living on the margins of the cash economy and mistook their situation for 'barbarism.'

(ibid. xxvii)

Olmsted was not only biased because of his background and attitude but also because of the increasing sectionalism in the North. In addition, the less than friendly reception he sometimes received in the South served to increase his feelings of "being a stranger in a strange land." On his first trip, especially, he felt that the "southerners' reticence toward a northerner was an impediment" to his research (ibid. 89).

Since Olmsted was a journalist and an early "tourist" in the South, one scheme of organization in this paper that readily presents itself is to look at the main concerns of all travelers throughout history: transportation, lodgings and food; therefore, the first three sections of this part of the study will concern themselves with these topics. Of course, other aspects of southern life will be noted as they relate to these main divisions.

### 5.1 Roads and Transportation

"The road was bad, the weather foul."

"The prosperity of a country can be estimated from the character of the roads."

--- Olmsted

Roads in the South were generally much worse than those in the North and public transportation was also inferior. Most foreign visitors to the United States were of the same opinion: "roads in the northern United States...generally received praise from voyagers, but not those of the South, 'We pursued our journey southward by the public stages, and found both the roads, the vehicles, and every arrangement in connection with them, very inferior to those of the North,' stated a nineteenth-century visitor" (McWhiney 1988, 218).

Olmsted, like many men of his time, especially those from the more developed and "civilized" sections of the country, saw the road system as symbolic of the level of progress attained in any given geographic/economic area. It has been noted that he grew up in New England during the opening years of the Industrial Revolution, that he spent much of his time roaming through the towns and villages of that area and that his observations led him to form certain concepts of what a settled, developed and civilized landscape should look like. It is hard to know what he expected in the South; if he expected roads that were always passable, in many cases he would learn about trailblazing; if he expected public transport that was reliable, he was in for a disappointment; if he expected anything like the life he had become used to in New England and New York, he was in for a rude shock.

## 5.2 The Stagecoach from Hell

The antebellum South was behind the North and most of the West in the development of its road system. And while Olmsted spent a great deal of time on horseback, he also traveled quite a bit by stagecoach. While the coach services in the North were not always known to be on time and reliable, they were better than those of the South. Northern coaches were also relatively comfortable, well-managed and run and fares were reasonable. The following incident took place in North Carolina. This is a fairly good example of what it must have been like to travel by stage in a semi-wilderness:

When we stopped at Weldon, a man was shouting from a stagecoach, 'Passengers for Gaston! Hurry up! Stage is waiting! As he repeated this the third time, I threw up to him my two valises, and proceeded to climb to the box, to take my seat.

"You are in a mighty hurry, ain't ye ?

"Didn't you say the stage was waiting?

"If 'ye'r going ter get any dinner to-day, better get it here; won't have much other chance. Be right smart about it, too." [right smart = quick]

"Then you are not going yet?"

"You can get yer dinner, if ye want to."

"You'll call me, will you, when you are ready to go?"

"I shan't go without ye, ye neendn't be afeared --- go 'long in, and get yer dinner; this is the place, if anywhar; --- don't want to go without yer dinner, do ye?"

(Olmsted [1861] 1984, 129)

After a hurried, tasteless and overpriced meal inside the small public house run by the stage line, he emerges to find that the stage has gone, and his bags with it! Angry and distressed, he sets off at a run to catch up to the stage. After thirty minutes he comes in sight of the slow-moving vehicle; as he nears, the driver hails him:

"Hallo! That you?"

"Why did not you wait for me, or call me when you wanted to go, as you promised?"

"Reckoned yer was inside --- didn't look in coz [because] I asked if 'twas all right, and somebody, this 'ere gentleman here" --- (who had got my seat) --- "Yes, says he, 'all right'; so I reckoned 'twas, and driv along. Musn't blame me. Orn't [Ought not] to be so long swallerin' yer dinner --- mind next time!"

(ibid., 128-9)

This failure in communication, if such it was, between the driver and his passenger might not have occurred at all in the North. Other travelers have noted similar unpleasant experiences on southern stages. "One Englishman contended that southern stage 'drivers...were inferior to those of the Northern States'; and another Englishman wrote: 'The stage was overset last week, an occurrence which happens, on an average of six times a-year'" (McWhiney 1988, 224).

Stages often overturned or "overset" because of the poor roads. Often there were tree stumps in the road or huge holes. Olmsted continues;

The road was as bad as anything under the name of a road can be conceived to be. Wherever the adjoining swamps, stumps, and plantation fences would admit of it, the coach was driven, with a great deal of dexterity, out of the road. When the wheels sunk in the mud, below the hubs, we were sometimes required to get out and walk. An upset seemed every moment inevitable. At length, it came...

(ibid., 129)

The coach turned over and came to rest on its side. The driver then climbed onto the upper side, opened the door, and noted:

"Got mixed up some in here then, didn't ye? Ladies, hurt any? Well, come, get out here; don't want to stay here all night I reckon, do ye? --- Ain't nothin' broke, as I see. We'll right her right up. Nary durn'd rail within a thousan' mile, I don't s'pose; better be lookin' roun'; got to get somethin' for a pry." [I don't suppose there's a rail (from a rail fence) within a thousand miles; we have to get something we can use to pry the coach upright]

In four hours after I left the hotel at Weldon, the coach reached the bank of the Roanoke, a distance of fourteen miles, and stopped. "Here we are," said the driver, opening the door.

"Where are we --- not in Gaston?" (the scheduled destination of the coach)

"Durned nigh it. That ere's Gaston, over thar; and you just holler, and they'll come over arter you in the boat."

[Close to it. That's Gaston over there across the river. If you yell to the people on the other side they'll come pick you up in a boat]

Gaston was a mile above us, and on the other side of the river. Nearly opposite was a house, and a scow drawn up on the beach; the distance across the river was, perhaps, a quarter of a mile. When the driver had got the luggage off, he gathered his reins, and said ---

"Seems to me them gol-durned lazy niggers aint a goin' to come over arter you now; if they won't you'd better go up to the railroad bridge, some of ye, and get a boat, or else go down here to Free

Town; some of them cussed free niggers'll be glad of the job, no doubt."

"But, confound it, driver! you are not going to leave us here, are you? We paid to be carried to Gaston."

"Can't help it; you are clus to Gaston, any how, and if any man thinks he's goin' to hev me drive him up to the bridge to-night, he's damnably mistaken, he is, and I ain't a goin' to do it not for no man, I ain't."

And away he drove, leaving us, all strangers, in a strange country just at the edge of night, far from any house, to "holler."

(ibid. 129-30)

From this experience, one can see why Olmsted may have preferred to travel on horseback. Of course, he and his fellow passengers, as paying customers, had every right to expect to be taken to their destination. They had been cheated and were helpless to do anything about it:

The only way to stop him was to shoot him; and, as we were all good citizens, and travelled with faith in the protection of the law, and not like knights-errant, armed for adventure, we could not do that.

Good citizens? No, we were not, for we have all, to this day, neglected to prosecute the fellow, or his employers. It would, to be sure, have cost us ten times any damages we should have been awarded; but, if we had been really good citizens, we should have been as willing to sacrifice the necessary loss, as knights-errant of old were to risk life to fight bloody giants. And, until many of us can have the nobleness to give ourselves the trouble and expense of killing off these impudent highwaymen of our time, at law, we have all got to suffer in their traps and stratagems.

(ibid., 129-30)

In a letter to his father, Olmsted says of this incident: "in coming from Weldon to Gaston (see my letter that will be published, giving amusing account of it), coach turned over; was not hurt any...a regular swindle the whole route" (McLaughlin and Beveridge 1981, 2:113).

Olmsted and his fellow passengers finally reached Gaston after much trouble and extra expense. The stage service was not just bad, it was larcenous; the roads were not just poor, they were non-existent; the inhabitants were not just unhelpful, they were actively unfriendly.

### 5.3 And One from Pennsylvania

Rather than leave a stereotyped impression that most stage services were like this in the South, and as a contrast to the former incident, a later episode will serve to show that Olmsted did have at least one positive experience traveling by stage in the South. But this is because, as Olmsted notes, the line was owned and run by northerners. This journey took place in the state of South Carolina:

I had been greatly pleased with the driving --- the coachman, a steady-going sort of fellow, saying but little to his horses, and doing what swearing he thought necessary in English; driving, too, with great judgment and skill. The coach was a fine, roomy, old-fashioned, fragrant, leathery affair, and the horses the best I had seen this side of Virginia. I could not resist expressing my pleasure with the whole establishment. The new team was admirable; four sleek, well-governed, eager, sorrel cobs, and the driver, a staid, bronze-faced man, keeping them tight in hand, drove quietly and neatly, his whip in the socket. After about fifteen minutes, during which he has been engaged in hushing down their too great impetuosity, he took out a large silver hunting watch, and asked what the time was.

"Quarter past eleven," said the agent.

"Twelve minutes past," said the Philadelphian.

"Well, fourteen, only, I am," said the agent.

"Thirteen," said I.

"Just thirteen, I am," said the driver, slipping back his watch into its place, and then, to the agent, "ha'an't touched a hand of her since I left old Lancaster."

Suddenly guessing the meaning of what had been for some time astonishing me --- "You are from the North?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And you, too, Mr. Agent?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the coach, and the cattle [horses], and all?"

"All from Pennsylvania."

It seems that Olmsted felt he was among his own people. Even before he learned that these men, their horses and the stage were from the North, he felt "pleasure with the whole establishment." It seems clear from this, and is in great contrast to the other experience cited, that he had definite opinions on what constituted a "proper" stage service.

### 5.4 Railroads

The state of American railroads in the 1850's, when Olmsted was traveling on them and writing about the ones in the South, was a source of constant complaint, primarily by Europeans (specifically

Englishmen) visiting the U. S. Some felt that "most railroads in the South charged exorbitant fares compared to those of the North and that the cars were uncomfortable and 'miserably constructed'" (McWhiney 1988,225). Another feature of train travel that caused much anger was "the constant missing of connections; timetables (that) were arranged with too little margin for junction points, in an effort to persuade passengers that they would get through quickly and then they failed to get through at all" (Nevins 1950,1;232). Another difficulty was "bad ventilation. Every train was a moving pest-house, an antechamber of death, where customers were poisoned wholesale" and there was, in addition, an upsetting "lack of time for meals, the ten-minute interval allowed for lunch or dinner being ruinous alike to good manners and good digestion" (ibid.232).

"Finally," and perhaps most irritatingly, "no notice was given of the length of stoppages. Conductors, halting the trains for half a minute at one place and ten minutes at another, never took the passengers into their confidence" (ibid.232).

A revealing statistic from 1855 can perhaps help explain why American railroads caused so many complaints. The average cost of building one mile of rail in England at this time was from \$200,000 to \$300,000:the ordinary U. S. road, in contrast, spent only about \$25,000 to \$40,000 per mile in construction (ibid).

The development of rail systems in the South "lagged behind the North, and some of the gaps in its system remained deplorable" (ibid., 1;208). Olmsted time and time again faulted the southern roads for their lack of punctuality, want of system, and overall shoddiness. In one of his early letters to the Times, he complains that:

When I took the railroad train at Richmond for Petersburg... at the time advertised for departure, there was a shriek from the locomotive to intimate it was ready to be off; the train was presently jerked on a few rods; stopped; soon was shoved back; then ahead again, and so we continued 'backing and filling' upon the bridge for half an hour.

There was a loss of time, amounting in value, at ordinary men's wages, to not less than one hundred dollars, to say nothing of broken engagements, and plans interrupted by it among all the passengers, and those who were expecting them. All unnecessary and simply the worst of bad management. And the worst part of it was nobody seemed to care at all about it. Nobody seemed to have calculated on the railroad company's promises being kept.

(McLaughlin and Beveridge 1981,2;148)

There are clear reasons why the development of southern rail systems lagged behind other areas of the country; many of the problems had to do with the wide distribution of population, the nature of the crops grown in the South and the system of slavery:

The population of the section was widely scattered, and the social economy nearly static, with the result that passenger traffic was small. Travellers found the trains few and the cars half-empty. Since agriculture was insufficiently diversified, the regional exchange of farm products was slight, which meant that way-station traffic was small. The great staples of cotton and tobacco,

being bulky but light, were in large part hauled to points on the navigable rivers, never closed by ice. Then, too, the traffic was highly seasonal. It was heavy in autumn and winter but scanty in spring and summer, so that during one six-month period most roads had to earn enough to pull them through the next. Floating capital, which in the North went into better railroads, stations, and rolling stock was swallowed up in the South by slavery --- and as the price of slaves rose during the fifties, the situation grew worse. Since slavery repelled most European immigrants, unskilled labor for building roads was much less plentiful than in the North. . . . A dearth of good managerial talent was also manifest. Most of the able men went into plantation management, law, and politics, disliked business, and left railroad construction and management to eccentrics --- or to Northerners like J. Edgar Thomson, who was chief engineer of the Georgia Railroad for fifteen years. Railroad construction in the South also suffered from a deficiency of plan. Short roads aplenty were built, but the section developed no central trunk lines.

(Nevins 1959, 1;210)

It was noted earlier that rivers were an important part of communications in the South; river travel was much more important in the South than in the North. One reason was that "the mightiest river system of the world, the Ohio-Mississippi-Missouri waterways, rolling southwest, southeast, and south and draining every part of the nation's great central valley, emptied into the ocean at New Orleans" (ibid. 1;214) . Because of this river system, trade from St. Louis to New Orleans was of great importance and this had the added effect of making southern railroad development less important and urgent than that in the North.

The Cotton Kingdom contains quite a few examples of problems with southern railroads; inconvenience caused by late trains being common. Olmsted eventually learned to expect "late" trains almost everywhere.

At another station, also in Virginia, he arrived at "twenty minutes after the hour given in the time-table for the passage of the train...but it had not arrived; nor did it make its appearance for a quarter of an hour longer" (Olmsted [1861] 1984,72) . The average wait for a train varied, but a local resident and traveling companion informed Olmsted, when asked about the reliability of scheduled trains, that "those who would be safe, had commonly to wait an hour" (ibid. 72) .

On his way from Portsmouth, Virginia to Weldon, North Carolina, he was again late, this time by about half an hour "after the time at which the train should have left" (ibid. 126) . He need not have worried about making his connection, however, as "there was no sign of a departing train, and the ticket office was not open" (ibid.). This hold-up was due to a tardy boat connection; this time the train started an hour and half behind the scheduled time. Wondering if this was unusual, he asked and was told by the brakeman that it is "not very unusual, and that an hour's waiting time might be commonly calculated upon with safety" (ibid.). The examples given here are only a few of many cited in his writings.

Some of the railroads in the South were better run. One in Georgia, the Savannah and Macon Line, he singled out for praise:

The Savannah and Macon road has...been very successful. The receipts are now over \$1,000,000 annually; the road is well-stocked, is out of debt, and its business is constantly increasing; the stock is above par, and the stock-holders are receiving eight per cent. dividends, with a handsome surplus on hand. It has been always, in a great degree, under the management of Northern men, and a large amount of its stock is owned at the North. I am told that most of the mechanics, and the successful merchants and tradesmen of Savannah came originally from the North, or are the sons of Northern men.

(ibid. 212)

It is difficult to be sure, but it appears that Olmsted's bias for things northern is again showing. While it was generally true, as has been noted earlier, that most southern men of talent did not choose railroads as a career, it is interesting that Olmsted would make specific mention of the management of this road being northern, the stockholders mostly northern, the mechanics northern and even to stress that the successful merchants in Savannah, Georgia were northern!

### 5.5 Steamboats

Olmsted did a good deal of traveling aboard steamboats on various rivers; he was on the Potomac, the Cape Fear River, the Alabama River, and the Mississippi in 1852-53 ; he cruised the Red River, the Cumberland, and the Ohio River in 1853-54. He could not have chosen a better period in American history to be on the rivers, for "river steamboating reached its magnificent apogee in the fifties" (Nevins 1947, 1;214) . It was one of the most colorful eras in river travel; anyone who has read Mark Twain's stories of river travel would probably agree. The spectacle of a "mile-long expanse of boats smoking and throbbing at the St. Louis and New Orleans levees" must have been a memorable sight, but perhaps more vivid were:

...the motley crowds of passengers --- fur-traders, immigrants, soldiers, cotton-planters, land-speculators, gamblers, politicians, British tourists, Indians, and plain farmers; the avalanche of pork, grain, tobacco, cotton, and hides... cramming every deck; the lordly pilots, the hardbitten captains, the profane mates, the chanting roustabouts; the fierce races as the fireman tied down safety valves, the hands crammed fat-pine into the roaring furnaces, and the passengers cheered --- all this was romance in its day, and will be romance forever.

(ibid., 214)

The boats themselves were a wonder of the day. The Grand Republic boasted a "Belgian carpet specially woven in one piece three hundred feet long, and its white pillars, endless mirrors, and softly wavering candelabra, a vista of radiance, presenting a scene of fire and snow" (ibid., 215) .

River traffic at its peak must have been quite impressive. On the Mississippi and the Ohio in 1857 there were over 900 boats in operation and their annual commerce was valued at \$140,000,000 for both

passengers and freight (ibid.).

While the trains and stagecoaches provided Olmsted with various challenges and frustrations, his experience on southern river boats, while not always pleasant, proved of a more positive nature. In this "golden age" of steamboating and as a writer he was fascinated with much of what he experienced, though he did complain about such things as sleeping arrangements and scheduling etc. One of his fellow passengers, a cotton planter originally from Alabama who had moved to Texas had this to say about a previous steamboat trip on a vessel called the Louisa on the Alabama River:

She's a right smart pretty boat, she is, the Leewezay; the best I ever see on the Alabamy River.... She is a right pretty boat and her captin's a high-tone gentleman; haint no objections to find with him --- he's a high-tone gentleman, that's what he is. But the pilot --- well, damn him! He run her right out of the river, up into the woods --- didn't run her in the river, at all. When I go aboard a steamboat, I like to keep in the river, somewhar; but that pilot, he took her right up into the woods. It was just clairin' [clearing] land. Clairin' land, and playin' hell ginerally, all night; not follering the river at all. I believe he was drunk. He must have been drunk, for I could keep a boat in the river itself. I'll never go in a boat where the pilot's drunk all the time. I take a glass too much myself sometimes; but I don't hold two hundred lives in the holler [hollow] of my hand. I was in my berth, and he run her straight out of the river, slap up into the furest [forest]. It threw me clean out of my berth, onto the floor; I didn't sleep anymore while I was aboard.

(ibid., 217)

As a well-organized Yankee, Olmsted still had difficulty understanding the more lackadaisical and haphazard southern approach to schedules:

I had my luggage brought down, and went on board at half-past three --- the boat being advertised to sail at four. Four o'clock passed, and freight was still being taken on --- a fire had been made in the furnace, and the boat's big bell rung....At length, when five o'clock came, the clerk told me, he thought, perhaps, they would not be able to get off at all that night --- there was so much freight still to come on board. Six o'clock arrived, and he felt certain that, if they did get off that night, it would not be till very late. At half-past-six, he said the captain had not come on board yet, and he was quite sure they would not be able to get off that night...(the clerk) was positive they could not leave now, before Monday --- Monday noon. Monday at twelve o'clock --- I might rely on it.

(ibid., 268)

Olmsted returned before twelve on Monday:

...they had concluded not to sail till four o'clock. Before four, I returned again, and the boat again fired up, and rang her bell. (She was not) quite ready to leave at four o'clock. Not quite ready at five. Even at six --- not yet quite ready. At seven, the fires having burned out in the

furnace, and the stevedores having gone away, leaving a quantity of freight yet on the dock, without advising this time with the clerk, I had my baggage re-transferred to the hotel.

A similar performance was repeated on Tuesday.

On Wednesday,...there was not the smallest doubt of it --- at four they would leave. They were all ready, at that moment, and only waited till four, because the agent had advertised that they would --- merely a technical point of honor.

But, by some error of calculation, I suppose, she didn't go at four. Nor at five. Nor at six.

It was twenty minutes after seven when the captain observed --- scanning the levee in every direction, to see if there was another cart or carriage coming towards us --- "No use waiting any longer, I reckon: throw off, Mr. Heady."

(*ibid.*, 270)

We can assume from this anecdote that freight was given priority over passengers. This is understandable. As has already been noted, most of the South's cotton and tobacco crops reached ports on the East Coast and the Gulf Coast by steamboat.

While on a riverboat Olmsted did not have to worry about lodging and food, and this made river travel comparatively easy and comfortable. In contrast, Olmsted had much difficulty in finding places to stay for the night while he was on the road. He found the food offered him, whether in hotels or in private homes, less than appetizing, in most cases.

One feature that seems to have been almost universal in southern sleeping arrangements is rather peculiar at first glance: most beds had only one sheet. This might be due to the warmer climate, but Olmsted does not speculate.

### 6.1 Hospitality North and South

Perhaps nothing is more important to a traveler than good food and sleeping accommodations, especially the latter since loss of sleep can be much more serious than merely poor-quality food. As a traveler alone in a strange country, Olmsted depended on the hospitality of the southerners he encountered. He sought their aid in many ways: lodgings, food, directions, service, and companionship.

Southern hospitality was not what he probably thought it would be. He might have pictured, "southern doors swinging open to all comers" (Taylor in Wilson and Ferris 1989, 1133) and a friendly welcome at most hotels and private homes. However, like most stereotypes, southern hospitality had probably been misrepresented to him. While it was true that southerners warmly welcomed their neighbors and relatives, unless a stranger bore a letter of introduction, hospitality could not be expected. As late as the early nineteenth century there were dangerous outlaws all over the South; also, since many

householders were not well-off, they felt they should charge strangers for room and board. Whatever the reason, Olmsted was sorely disappointed with the quality of southern hospitality.

Often, since he traveled in sparsely populated areas, there were no inns or hotels and he had to ask for a night's lodging at a farmer's or planter's house. The following two, rather lengthy, quotes make very clear the type of hospitality he was used to in the North and the type of hospitality he usually found in the South. He was accustomed, in the North, to expecting the following type of hospitality:

If reader, you had been travelling all day through a country of the highest agricultural capability, settled more than twenty years ago, and toward nightfall should be advised by a considerate stranger to ride five miles further, in order to reach the residence of Mr. Brown, because Mr. Brown, being a well-to-do man, and a right good fellow, had built an uncommonly good house, and got it well furnished, had a score of servants, and being at a distance from neighbors, was always glad to entertain a respectable stranger --- after hearing this, as you continued your ride, somewhat impatiently in the evening chill, what consolations would your imagination find in the prospect before you? My New England and New York experience would not forbid the hope of a private room, where I could, in the first place, wash off the dust of the road, and make some change of clothing before being admitted to a family apartment. This family room would be curtained and carpeted, and glowing softly with the light of sperm candles or a shaded lamp. When I entered it, I would expect that a couch or an arm-chair, and a fragrant cup of tea, with refined sugar, and wholesome bread of wheaten flour, leavened, would be offered me. I should think it likely that I could then have the snatch of "Tannhauser" or "Trovatore," which had been running faintly in my head all day, fingered clearly out to my entire satisfaction upon a piano-forte. I should then look with perfect confidence to being able to refer to Shakespeare, or Longfellow, or Dickens, if anything I had seen or thought during the day had haply led me to wish to do so. I should expect, as a matter of course, a clean, sweet bed, where I could sleep alone and undisturbed, until possible in the morning a jug of hot water should be placed at my door, to aid the removal of a traveller's rigid beard. I should expect to draw a curtain from before a window, to lift the sash without effort, to look into a garden and fill my lungs with fragrant air; and I should be certain when I came down of a royal breakfast. A man of these circumstances in this rich country, he will be asking my opinion of his fruits. A man of his disposition cannot exist in the country without ladies, and ladies cannot exist in the country without flowers; and might I not hope for the refinement which decks even the table with them? And that the breakfast would be a meal as well as a feed --- and institution of mental and moral sustenance as well as a palatable nourishment to the body? My horse I need hardly look after, if he be a sound brute; --- good stables, litter, oats, hay and water, grooming, and discretion in their use, will never be wanting in such a man's house in the country.

(Olmsted [1861] 1984, 518-19)

But on many an evening in the South he experienced something quite different. With the previous quote in mind, he continues:

In what civilized region, after such advice, would such thought be preposterous, unless in the Slave States? Not but that such men and such houses, such family and home comforts may be found in the South. I have found them --- a dozen of them, delightful homes. But then in a hundred cases where I received such advice, and heard houses and men so described, I did not find one of the things imagined above, nor anything ranging with them. In my last journey of nearly three months between the Mississippi and the upper James River, I saw not only none of those things, received none of those attentions, but I saw and met nothing of the kind. Nine times out of ten; at least, after such a promise, I slept in a room with others, in a bed which stank, supplied with but one sheet, if with any; I washed with utensils common to the whole household; I found no garden, no flowers, no fruit, no tea, no cream, no sugar, no bread (for corn pone --- let me assert, in parentheses, though possibly as tastes differ, a very good thing of its kind for ostriches --- is not bread; neither does even flour, salt, fat, and water, stirred together and warmed, constitute bread); no curtains, no lifting windows (three times out of four absolutely no windows), no couch --- if one reclined in the family room it was on the bare floor --- for there were no carpets or mats. For all that, the house swarmed with vermin. There was no hay, no straw, no oats (but mouldy corn and leaves of maize), no discretion, no care, no honesty, at the (name omitted) there was no stable, but a log-pen; and besides this, no other out-house but a smoke house, a corn house, and range of nigger-houses.

From the banks of the Mississippi to the banks of the James, I did not (that I remember) see, except perhaps in one or two towns, a thermometer, nor a book of Shakespeare, nor a piano-forte or sheet of music; nor the light of candle or other good centre-table or reading lamp, nor an engraving or copy of any kind, of a work of art of the slightest merit. I am not speaking of what are commonly called "poor whites"; a large majority of all these houses were the residences of shareholders, a considerable portion cotton planters.

(*ibid.*, 519-20)

This is quite a contrast. This Connecticut Yankee in the Cotton Kingdom found a truly different culture; a culture that could have easily been on the other side of the world rather than a few hundred miles to the south. To balance Olmsted's impressions stated above, it should be noted that while he often "received less than an enthusiastic reception in the old South, (this) in no way refutes the claim of numerous contemporary observers that Southerners were hospitable" (McWhiney 1988, 95). What was the explanation for Olmsted's experiences? Why was he often charged money when he sought shelter in a private home and then given poor food and a filthy bed to sleep in? Was it simply the poverty of the residents? In many cases this seems to be the answer, but there may also be other explanations.

One cause, as Olmsted saw it, was slavery. It accounted for the want of a "civilized" home life in the South. The fact that most of the homes in which he stayed were lacking in even basic comforts he explained by noting that most of the extra income many slaveholders accumulated went to buy more slaves, not to make home improvements or buy comfortable furnishings. A more immediate cause for a lack of "luxuries" like sugar or tea he cites as one of supply and demand:

...the local demand, being limited to some fifty white families, in the whole district of twenty square miles, is not enough to draw luxuries to the neighborhood, unless they are brought by special order, and at great expense from the nearest shipping port. Nor is it possible for such a small number of whites to maintain a church or a newspaper, nor yet a school, unless it is established by one planter, or two or three planters, and really of private and very expensive character.

(Olmsted [1861] 1984,524)

Olmsted also notes that the way many southern planters raised cotton had something to do with the temporary and less settled appearance of most homesteads. One common method of cultivation entailed repeated intensive plantings of cotton until the soil became exhausted, at which point the land would be sold or abandoned and the owner would move west with his scant belongings and buy new, cheap land and begin again. This created a less rooted attitude toward settlement; planters saw no reason to improve their properties through investment when new land could be had so cheaply and when their prime investment was in slaves. A further dimension to this transience was a fragmentation of the local community:

...the white population of the district divides, one part, consisting of a few slaveholders, obtains possession of all the valuable cotton land, and monopolizes for a few white families all the advantages of the cotton demand. A second part removes with its slaves, if it possesses any, from the district, while a third continues to occupy the sand hills, or sometimes perhaps takes possession of the exhausted land which has been vacated by the large planters, because they, with all their superior skill and advantage of capital, could not cultivate it longer with profit.

(ibid. 525)

This pattern, where a few rich and powerful whites own the best land, forces another larger group unable to compete for land, to simply move on westward where cheap land is available, while a third, impoverished group of whites are left on the poorer land to scratch out a living. Olmsted sought shelter on many occasions among people of this last group and, since many of them were not well-off, he was asked to pay. Here the stereotype of southern hospitality does not apply. Perhaps only the rich whites could afford to extend hospitality to strangers. Whatever the case, he notes:

...I journeyed nearly six months at one time (my second journey) through the South. During all this journey, I came not oftener than once a week, on the average, to public houses, and was thus generally forced to seek lodging and sustenance at private houses. Often it was refused me; not infrequently rudely refused. ...Not once with the slightest appearance of what Noah Webster defines hospitality --- the "practice of receiving or entertaining strangers without reward." Only twice, in a journey of four thousand miles, made independently of public conveyances, did I receive a night's lodging or a repast from a native Southerner, without having the exact price in money which I was expected to pay for it stated to me by those at whose hands I received it.

(ibid., 550)

The following account of Olmsted's stay with a "poor white" family should give a fairly clear picture of how nonslaveholders in many areas of the South lived. These particular people, as will be seen, were poor but kindly disposed to their guest. This family probably lived in Winston County, Mississippi:

It was raining, and nearly nine o'clock. The door of the cabin was open, and I rode up and conversed with the occupant as he stood within. He said that he was not in the habit of taking in travellers, and his wife was about sick, but if I was a mind to put up with common fare, he didn't care. Grateful, I dismounted and took the seat he had vacated by the fire, while he led away my horse to an open shed in the rear...

The house was all comprised in a single room, twenty-eight feet by twenty-five feet in area, and open to the roof above. There was a large fireplace at one end and a door on each side --- no windows at all. Two bedsteads, a spinning-wheel, a packing-case, which served as a bureau, a cupboard, made of rough-hewn slabs, two or three deerskin seated chairs, a Connecticut clock, and a large poster of Jayne's patent medicines, constituted all the visible furniture, either useful or ornamental in purpose. A little girl, without having had any directions to do so, got a frying pan and a chunk of bacon from the cupboard, and cutting slices from the latter, set it frying for my supper. The woman of the house sat sulkily in a chair tilted back and leaning against the logs, spitting occasionally at the fire, but took no notice of me, barely nodding when I saluted her. A baby lay crying on the floor. I quieted it and amused it with my watch till the little girl, having made "coffee" and put a piece of corn-bread on the table with the bacon, took charge of it.

I hoped the woman was not very ill.

"Got the headache right bad," she answered. "Have the headache a heap, I do. Know I should have it to-night. Been cutting brush in the cotton this arfternoon. Knew't would bring on my headache. Told him so when I begun.

As soon as I had finished my supper and fed Jude, the little girl put the fragments and the dishes in the cupboard, shoved the table into a corner, and dragged a quantity of quilts from one of the bedsteads, which she spread upon the floor, and presently crawled among them out of sight for the night. The woman picked up the child --- which, though still a suckling, she said was twenty-two months old --- and nursed it, retaking her old position. The man sat with me by the fire, his back towards her. The baby, having fallen asleep was laid away somewhere, and the woman dragged off another lot of quilts from the beds, spreading them upon the floor. Then taking a deep tin pan, she filled it with alternate layers of corn-cobs and hot embers from the fire. This she placed upon a large block, which was evidently used habitually for the purpose, in the center of the cabin. A furious smoke arose from it, and we soon began to cough. "Most too much smoke," observed the man. "Hope 'twill drive out all the gnats, then," replied the woman. (There is a very minute flying insect here, the bite of which is excessively sharp.)

The woman suddenly dropped off her outer garment and stepped from the midst of its folds, in her petticoat; then, taking the baby from the place where she had deposited it, lay down and covered herself with the quilts upon the floor. The man told me that I could take the bed which remained on one of the bedsteads, and kicking off his shoes only, rolled himself into a blanket by the side of his wife. I ventured to take off my cravat and stockings, as well as my boots, but almost immediately put my stockings on again, drawing their tops over my pantaloons. The advantage of this arrangement was that, although my face, eyes, ears, neck, and hands, were immediately attacked, the vermin did not reach my legs for two or three hours. Just after the clock struck two, I distinctly heard the man and the woman, and the girl and the dog scratching, and the horse out in the shed stamping and gnawing himself. Soon afterward the man exclaimed, "Good God Almighty --- mighty! mighty! mighty!" and jumping up pulled off one of his stockings, shook it, scratched his foot vehemently, put on the stocking, and lay down again with a groan. The two doors were open, and through the logs and the openings in the roof, I saw the clouds divide and the moon and stars reveal themselves. The woman, after having nearly been smothered by the smoke from the pan which she had originally placed close to her own pillow, rose and placed it on the sill of the windward door, where it burned feebly and smoked lustily, like an altar to the Lares, all night. Fortunately the cabin was so open that it gave us little annoyance, while it seemed to answer the purpose of keeping all flying insects at a distance.

When, on rising in the morning, I said that I would like to wash my face, water was given me for the purpose in an earthen pie-dish. Just as breakfast, which was of exactly the same materials as my supper, was ready, rain began to fall, presently in such a smart shower as to put the fire out and compel us to move the table under the least leaky part of the roof....

My horse and dog were as well cared for as possible, and a "snack" of bacon and corn-bread was offered me for noon, which has been unusual in Mississippi. When I asked what I should pay, the man hesitated and said he reckoned what I had had, wasn't worth much of anything; he was sorry he could not have accommodated me better. I offered him a dollar, for which he thanked me warmly. It is the first instance of hesitation in charging for lodging which I have met with from a stranger in the South.

(Olmsted [1861] 1981, 376-381)

It is difficult to imagine in this day and age that people in the nineteenth century had such a hard life, but some rural areas in the southern U. S. up into the early twentieth century still had fairly primitive living conditions. As has been noted, Olmsted was "generally" forced to seek lodging in private homes, much like the one above. The arduousness of his travels takes on new meaning when we consider that, each evening, after hours spent on horseback, all he had to look forward to were an uncomfortable, often dirty and insect-infested bed, poor food and uncommunicative, mercenary hosts. His experience with southern hotels was generally even more trying, in some ways, than his evenings with poor white southern families.

## 6.2 Southern Hotels

"An inn and fresh acquaintances are dangerous"

--- American proverb

Like the transportation systems in the North and the South, the contrast between the hotels in the two sections could sometimes be dramatic. In fact, "some people believed that the only thing worse than traveling through the Old South was stopping there overnight" (McWhiney 1988, 225). Of course, the standards were very high in big cities like Richmond, New Orleans and Charleston, but the general level of quality in southern hotels was much below what Olmsted was used to in the North.

It was not that Olmsted's standards were too high, for other travelers felt that southern hotels had no right to use the name:

Travelers often complained that in the Old South most hotels and inns were awful and that the accommodations provided by private individual were often worse. 'The hotels [in the South],' wrote an Englishman, 'are generally badly kept, and in several indescribable ways uncomfortable.' One pilgrim called a Richmond, Virginia, hotel 'a vilely dirty place.' Another pronounced a North Carolina inn the worst in America. 'We made a halt at Captain Bartley's inn, a real hovel,' wrote a tourist in Virginia, who two days before had declared: 'Put up at the Red Lion, a beggarly inn.' A rambler through Arkansas believed 'it required patriotism, or desire for distinction,' for the state legislators to spend three months of the year in any Little Rock hotel. He stayed in what he called an awful 'Irish hole, dignified with the appellation of hotel...' Rarely did journeyers display the wit of the yankee who concluded: 'of one thing I am certain, the innkeeper wisely concluded no man ever stopped at his house twice & so he made the most of his charge.'

(McWhiney 1988, 226)

## 6.3 Sleeping Accommodations

Olmsted was a resourceful traveler; he had to be because he was often faced with problems in southern hotels and inns that never would have arisen in the North. Sleeping arrangements in some southern hotels were a problem. Lack of privacy and cleanliness were two difficulties, in particular, he often confronted. The following took place in Woodville, Mississippi in May, 1854 :

...when shown by a servant to my room, (I) found two beds in it, each of which proved to be furnished with soiled sheets and greasy pillows, nor was it without reiterated demands and liberal cash in hand to the servant, that I succeeded in getting them changed on the one I selected. A gentleman of embroidered waistcoat took the other bed as it was, with no apparent reluctance, soon after I had effected my own arrangements. One wash-bowl, and a towel which had already been used, was expected to answer for the both of us, and would have done so but that I carried a private towel in my saddle-bags. ...The bill was excessive....

(Olmsted [1861] 1984,409)

Perhaps he should have been content with the soiled sheets and the greasy pillow, since these seem to have been adequate for his roommate in the instance cited above. However, it appears that northern and southern standards of comfort varied in this as in other ways. Perhaps one of the more irritating practices in many southern hotels, from Olmsted's point of view, was having to share a room with strangers. This custom inevitably led to the following mishap:

Later, I was awakened by a stranger attempting to enter my bed. I expostulated, and he replied that it was his bed, and nobody else had a right to his place in it. Who was I, he asked, angrily, and where was his partner? "Here I am," answered a voice from another bed; and without another word, he left us. I slept but little, and woke feverish, and with a headache, caused by the want of ventilation.

(*ibid.*, 334)

His first trip south commenced in Washington D. C., then as now, considered by many to be a southern city. A traveler might reasonably expect first-class accommodations in the nation's capitol, but Olmsted had the misfortune to stay at Dexter's Hotel. This first night at a "southern" hotel inspired some quite sarcastic comments. After he was shown to a little "square cell" of a room, he began to ruminate on his inability to accept with good grace his shoddy lodgings:

Food and shelter. Therewith should a man be content. But my perverse nature will not be content: will be wishing things were otherwise. They say this uneasiness --- this passion for change --- is a peculiarity of our diseased Northern nature. The Southern man finds providence in all that is: Satan in all that might be.

He then proceeded to survey his accommodations:

I am not satisfied with this quarter yard of towelling, having an irregular vacancy in its centre, where I am liable to insert my head. I am not proud; but I had rather have something else, or nothing, than these three yards of ragged and faded quarter-ply carpeting. I also would like a curtain to the window, and I wish the glass were not so dusty, and that the sashes did not rattle in their casements; though, as there is no other ventilation, I suppose I ought not to complain. Of course not; but it is confoundedly cold, as well as noisy. I don't like that broken latch; I don't like that broken chair; I would prefer that this table were not so greasy; I would rather the ashes and cinders, and the tobacco juice around the [fireplace] grate, had been removed before I was consigned to the cell.

(*ibid.*, 25)

Whether Olmsted was alluding to a jail cell or a monk's cell when referring to his hotel room is unclear; in any case, this began a long series of such complaints in Olmsted's experience of southern hostleries, if they can be so called.

#### 6.4 Meals

The breakfast, for which half a dollar had been paid, was not ready until half an hour after I had been called; and, when ready, consisted of cold salt fish; dried slices of bread and tainted butter; coffee; evidently made the day before and half rewarmed; no milk....

(ibid., 125)

Perhaps Olmsted's ultimate dining experience took place at the Commercial Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee, an establishment that was rated "first class" and with a published menu, or bill of fare, that listed eight types of roasts, twenty different entrees, fifteen types of vegetables, and over twenty kinds of pastry:

I did not get to the table as early as some others. The meal was served in a large, dreary room exactly like a hospital ward; and it is a striking illustration of the celerity with which everything is accomplished in our young country, that beginning with the soup, and going on by the fish to the roasts, the first five dishes I inquired for --- when at last I succeeded in arresting one of the negro boys --- were "all gone"; and as the waiter had to go to the head of the dining-room, or to the kitchen, to ascertain this fact upon each demand, the majority of the company had left the table before I was served at all. At length I said I would take anything that was still to be had, and thereupon was provided immediately with some grimy bacon, and greasy cabbage. This I commenced eating, but I no sooner paused for a moment, than it was suddenly and surreptitiously removed, and its place supplied, without the expression of any desire on my part, with some other Memphitic chef d'oeuvre, a close investigation of which left me in doubt whether it was that denominated "sliced potato pie" or "Irish pudding."

(ibid., 338)

If the food in most of the hotels, inns and taverns was of poor quality, the service, in most cases, was downright abominable. Much of the problem, of course, had to do with the fact that many of the service staff in the hotels were slaves who could not be expected to work well or efficiently.

#### 6.5 Service

Perhaps one of the most revealing and interesting anecdotes in all of *The Cotton Kingdom* concerns his stay at a stage house in Fayetteville, North Carolina. It is interesting because it conveys very well the attitude of many hotel owners and workers in the South, especially in the smaller towns:

Entering the office or bar-room of the stage-house, at which I had been advised to stay while in Fayetteville, I found it occupied by a group of old soakers, among whom was one of perhaps sixteen years of age. This lad, without removing the cigar which he had in his mouth, went to the bar, whither I followed him, and, without saying a word, placed an empty tumbler before me.

"I don't wish anything to drink," said I; "I am cold and tired, and I would like to go to a room. I intend to stay here some days, and I should be glad if you could give me a private room with a fire in it."

"Room with a fire in it?" he inquired, as he handed me the registry-book.

"Yes; and I will thank you to have it made immediately, and let my baggage be taken up."

He closed the book, after I had written my name, and returned to his seat at the stove, leaving me standing, and immediately engaged in conversation, without paying any attention to my request. I waited some time, during which a negro came into the room, and went out again. I then repeated my request, necessarily aloud, and in such a way as to be understood, not only by the boy, but by all of the company. Immediately, all conversation ceased, and every head was turned to look at me. The lad paused a moment, spit upon the stove, and then ---

"Want a room for yourself?"

"Yes, if convenient."

No answer and no movement, all the company staring at me as if at a detected burglar.

"Perhaps you can't accommodate me."

"Want a fire made in your room?"

"Why, yes, if convenient; but I should like to go to my room, at any rate; I am very tired."

After puffing and spitting for a moment, he rose and pulled a bell; then took his seat again. In about five minutes a negro came in, and during all this time there was silence.

"What'll you drink, Baker?" said the lad, rising and going to the bar, and taking no notice of the negro's entrance. A boozy man followed him, and made some reply; the lad turned out two glasses of spirits, added water to one, and drank it in a gulp.

"Can this boy show me to my room?" I asked.

"Anybody in number eleven, Peter?"

"Not as I knows on, sar."

"Take this man's baggage up there."

I followed the negro up to number eleven, which was a large back room in the upper story, with

four beds in it.

"Peter," said I, "I want a fire made here."

"Want a fire, sar?"

"Yes, I want you to make a fire."

"Want a fire, master, this time 'o night?"

"Why, yes, I want a fire. Where are you going with the lamp?"

"Want a lamp, massa?"

"Want a lamp? Certainly, I do."

After about ten minutes, I heard a man splitting wood in the yard, and, in ten more, Peter brought in three sticks of green wood, and some chips; then, the little bed lamp having burned out, he went into an adjoining room, where I heard him talking to some one, evidently awakened by his entrance to get a match; that failing, he went for another. By one o'clock, my fire was made.

"Peter," said I, "are you going to wait on me, while I stay here?"

"Yes, sar; I 'tends to dis room."

"Very well; take this, and, when I leave, I'll give you another, if you take good care of me. Now, I want you to get me some water."

"I'll get you some water in de morning, sar."

"I want some to-night --- some water and some towels; don't you think you can get them for me?"

"I reckon so, massa, if you wants 'em. Want 'em 'fore you go to bed?"

"Yes, and get another lamp."

"Want a lamp?"

"Yes, of course."

"Won't the fire do you?"

"No; bring a lamp. That one won't burn without filling; you need not try it."

The water and the lamp came, after a long time.

In the morning, early, I was awakened by a knock at the door.

"Who's there?"

"Me, massa; I wants your boots to black."

I got up, opened the door, and returned to bed. Falling asleep, I was soon again awakened by Peter throwing down an armful of wood upon the floor. Slept again, and was again awakened, by Peter's throwing up the window, to empty out the contents of the washbowl etc. The room was filled with smoke of the fat light wood: Peter had already made a fire for me to dress by; but again I fell asleep, and, when I next awoke, the breakfast bell was ringing. Peter had gone off, and left the window and door open, and the fire had burned out. My boots had been taken away, and the bell-wire was broken. I dressed, and walking to the bar-room, asked the barkeeper --- a complaisant, full-grown man --- for my boots. He did not know where they were, and rang the bell for Peter. Peter came, was reprimanded for his forgetfulness, and departed, ten minutes elapsed, and he did not return. I again requested that he should be called; and this time he brought my boots. He had had to stop to black them; having, he said, been too busy to do it before breakfast.

The following evening, as it grew too cold to write in my room, I went down, and found Peter, and told him I wanted a fire again, and that he might get me a couple of candles. When he came up, he brought one of the little bed lamps, with a capacity of oil for fifteen minutes' use. I sent him down again to the office, with a request to the proprietor that I might be furnished with candles. He returned, and reported that there were no candles in the house.

"Then, get me a larger lamp."

"Ain't no larger lamps, nuther, sar; --- none to spare."

"Then go out, and see if you can't buy me some candles, somewhere."

"Ain't no stores open, Sunday, massa, and I don't know where I can buy 'em."

"Then, go down, and tell the bar-keeper, with my compliments, that I wish to write in my room, and I would be obliged to him if he would send me a light, of some sort; something that will last longer, and give more light, than these little lamps."

"He won't give you none, massa --- not if you hab a fire. Can't you see by da light of da fire?"  
When a gentleman hab a fire in his room, dey don't count he wants no more light 'n dat."

"Well, make the fire, and I'll go down and see about it."

(ibid., 144-46)

Olmsted finally managed to get some candles after tipping a waiter in the dining room. His stays in southern hotels were all much like this; the service was poor and nothing was done on initiative. A guest who asked for anything extra usually had to be prepared to pay to get it.

### 7.1 Conclusion: Olmsted on the Character and Manners of Northerners and Southerners

Olmsted was shocked and amazed by his initial experiences with southern transportation and hotels, with southern "hospitality", and southern cuisine and service. Like anyone experiencing a new culture, he naturally formed opinions about southern character, and as a newcomer to southern life, he compared it to the culture from which he came. His comparisons of northern and southern character make up the final section of this paper.

His essay titled, "Slavery in Its Effects on Character, and the Social Relations of the Master Class" originally appeared in the New York Times on January 12, 1854 ; it was later reprinted as an appendix to The Cotton Kingdom. Other quoted passages included here on northern and southern manners come from Chapter XVII of The Cotton Kingdom.

At the beginning of the above essay, Olmsted declares that he intends to "describe certain apparently general and fundamental peculiarities of character in the people...from their importance with reference to the condition and prospects of the Slave States and their institution" (Olmsted [1861] 1981 614). While Olmsted was not a trained social scientist, his observations, mainly of a broad nature, contain elements of truth and are valuable today to anyone attempting to understand, in a general way, southern character and how it differs from that of the North.

Olmsted felt that the direct influence of slavery was "to make the Southerner indifferent and superior to small things...prodigal, improvident and ostentatiously generous" (ibid. 615) . Because many southerners have uncontrolled authority (over slaves) and are themselves free from control, they become "habitually impulsive, impetuous, and enthusiastic" with a strong sense of "self-respect and dignity of character" leading to a personality that is "bold, confident and true" (ibid.). The darker side of this is that every white southerner feels himself to be:

A person of importance; (who must) be treated with deference, every wish of the Southerner is imperative; every belief undoubted; every hate, vengeful; every love, fiery. Hence, for instance, the scandalous fiend-like street fights of the South. If a young man feels offended with another, he does not incline to a ring and a fair stand-up set-to (deciding a matter by a fist-fight) like a young Englishman; he will not attempt to overcome his opponent by logic; he will not be content to vituperate, or to cast ridicule upon him; he is impelled straightaway to strike him down with the readiest deadly weapon at hand, with as little ceremony and pretense of fair combat as the loose organization of the people against violence will allow. He seems crazy for blood. Intensity of personal pride...is more commonly evident, hence, intense local pride and prejudice; hence, intense partisanship; hence, rashness and overconfidence; hence visionary ambition; hence assurance in debate; hence assurance in society.

(ibid. 555)

Along with these traits goes a reserved character; he "minds his own business and lets alone that of others; not in the English way, but in a way peculiarly his own; resulting partly perhaps, from want of curiosity, in part from habits formed by such constant intercourse as he has with his inferiors (negroes,) and partly from the caution in conversation which the 'rules of honor' are calculated to give" (ibid. 615). Olmsted stresses that the southerner's reserve is not like that of the English because the southerner "meets a stranger easily, and without timidity, or thought of how he is appearing, and is ready and usually accomplished in conversation" (ibid. 616). Also unlike the English, he is "much given to vague and careless generalization, and greatly disinclined to exact and careful reasoning. He follows his natural impulses nobly, has nothing to be ashamed of, and is, therefore, habitually truthful; but his carelessness, impulsiveness, vagueness, and want of exactness in everything, make him speak from his mouth that which is in point of fact untrue, rather oftener than anyone else" (ibid. 615-16).

Olmsted felt that "from early intimacy with the negro...he has acquired much of his ready, artless and superficial benevolence, good nature and geniality" (ibid. 616). The terms just quoted are, of course, stereotypes that in a time of "political correctness" would cause great offense to most Americans; we must remember, however, that Olmsted was trying to convey the truth of his experiences. If he resorted to stereotypical thinking it was more in the spirit that behind every stereotype there is a "kernel of truth."

In section 6.1 of this paper Olmsted's views on northern and southern hospitality were considered. It will be remembered that he usually met with a less than cordial reception at most southern homes. While Olmsted conceded that "the monotonous duties of plantation life make guests exceedingly welcome,"...and the "abundance of servants at command...make the duties of hospitality very light," southerners are "wanting in hospitality of mind" (ibid. 616). Olmsted characterizes this mind as "large but unexpansive" (ibid. 616).

The greatest difference between southerners and northerners, in Olmsted's view, is that the "Southerner has no pleasure in labor except with reference to a result. He enjoys life itself. He is content with being" (ibid. 616). The northerner, in contrast, "enjoys progress in itself. He finds happiness in doing. Rest, in itself, is irksome and offensive to him" (ibid. 616). While the northerner enjoys the process of work, the action itself, the southerner:

cares for the end only; he is impatient of the means. He is passionate, and labors passionately, fitfully, with the energy and strength of anger, rather than resolute will. He fights rather than works to carry his purpose. He has the intensity of character that belongs to Americans in general, and therefore enjoys excitement and is fond of novelty. But he has much less curiosity than the Northerner; less originating genius, less inventive talent; less patient and persevering energy. And I think this all comes from his want of aptitude for close observation and his dislike for application to small details.

(ibid. 616)

And what is the cause of this character defect in southerners? It is "the result of habitually leaving all matters not either of grand and exciting importance, or of immediate consequence to his comfort, to his slaves" (ibid. 616).

Olmsted admits that he has been speaking in generalizations about the North and the South, and that "there are individuals in both communities in whom these extreme characteristics are reversed" and "those in whom they more or less harmoniously blend" still, "the grand distinction remains in the mass--manifesting itself, by strikingly contrasting symptoms, in our religion, politics and social life" (ibid. 617).

In social life, Olmsted rates most wealthy southerners as being "more agreeable, rational, and to be more respected, than that of the nearest corresponding class at the North" (ibid. 618). Part of the reason for this is that "planters, the details of whose business fall into the hands of overseers, and young men of fortune..." turn their talents "into channels, politics and sociality...." (ibid. 556). Olmsted states that "social intercourse at the North is a relaxation from the ordinary bent of men's talents; at the South, it is that to which mainly their talents are bent" (ibid. 556).

The classic image of the southern gentlemen, the stereotype made famous in books and movies, Olmsted refers to as "high-toned," which he notes is a southern expression. He compares this type to the "old English gentleman" (ibid. 618) and proceeds to give the southern gentleman's characteristics:

He has a peculiar pride and romance, and, though he often appears laughably Quixotic, he is, in the best sense of the word, also chivalrous, he is brave, magnanimous, courteous and polite, to all white people....he never values life or aught else more than he does his honor.

(ibid. 619)

The southern gentleman has the "honest and unstudied dignity of character, the generosity and the real nobleness of habitual impulses, and the well-bred, manly courtesy which distinguish him in all relations and occupations of life, equally in his business, in his family, and in general society, are sadly rare at the North --- much more rare at the North than at the South" (ibid. 620).

With the above praise of the southern gentleman's character in mind, Olmsted feels that one characteristic which he terms "enlightened conscience" and defines as "a spontaneous requisite perception and loyal love of the fundamental laws of Right"(ibid. 619) is more prevalent and strongly developed in individuals in the North than their counterparts in the South. There are obvious causes for its absence in the South:

The habitual reference of the Southerner in his judgment of conduct, whether of himself or another, whether past or contemplated, to the conventional standard of honor, prevents the ascendancy of a higher standard. This habitual contemplation of a relation so essentially wrong as that of slavery, . . . destroys or prevents the development of his sense of any standard of right

and wrong above a mere code of laws, or conventional rules.

(ibid. 619)

While the southern gentlemen is perhaps a well-known type, Olmsted does not neglect to consider what he terms the "lower classes<sup>1)</sup> in the North and the South. He says in the North that:

Our lowest class...has a higher standard (of conduct) than the lowest class of the Slave States. This, I understand, is made very evident where the two come together at the West, as in southern Illinois. The very poorest and lowest New England women who go there are frequently offended by the inconsiderate rudeness and coarseness of the women immigrating from the South, and shocked by their 'shiftless,' comfortless, vagrant habits, so much so that families have often removed, after having been once established, to escape being bored and annoyed by their Southern-born neighbors.

(ibid. 557-58)

Olmsted defines four classes in northern and southern society, from the lowest (fourth), to the highest (first). The next class, defined by the "regard its members (have) to the quality of their associates from other than moral motives, or the prejudices of locality, race, sectarianism, and politics. In other words, that in which there is a distinct selectiveness and pride" (ibid. 558) . He continues:

I think that everywhere in the Free States men of this class would almost universally feel their position damaged --- be a little ashamed --- if obliged to confess that they did not take a newspaper, or were unable to read it with a clear understanding of the intelligence it was intended to communicate.

(ibid. 558)

Those he refers to as the third class in northern society would be familiar with history, laws, the English poets and would have some of the works of the great novelists in their homes. In contrast, "nothing like this would you find in... a grade of society distinctly superior to the lowest in the South" (ibid. 558). Earlier in this paper statistics indicating a lower level of education in the South than in the North were given; Olmsted notes that "the ratio of the number of citizens who cannot read at all to the whole, appears, by the census returns, to be only three times larger at the South than at the North" however, Olmsted feels that:

Those who can read and do not read, or whose reading is confined within extremely narrow limits, are a much larger number at the South than at the North, owing to the much poorer supply of books and newspapers which commerce can afford to put within the reach of the former.

(ibid.558)

Since fewer people learned to read and write in the South than in the North, the added scarcity of reading material makes it even less likely that people could ever learn. In describing his stays in southern homes, Olmsted often says things like: "I did not see a single book in the house, nor do I think any of the family could read" (ibid. 396). Elsewhere he notes that one "might travel several days, and call on a hundred planters, and hardly see in their houses more than a single newspaper apiece, in most cases; perhaps none at all; nor any books, except a Bible, and some government publications, that had been franked to them through the post-office, and perhaps a few religious tracts and school-books" (ibid. 330).

The third class in the South (one up from the lowest), Olmsted characterized as "narrow-minded, rude, coarse, 'dangerous,' and miserable" (ibid. 559) when compared with the third class in the North. In addition, he notes:

The great difference in character between the third class of the South and that of the North, as indicated by their respective manners, is found in the much less curiosity and ready intelligent interest in matters which have not an immediate personal bearing in that of the South. Apathetic carelessness rather than simple indifference, or reckless incivility to your comfort, is what makes the low Southerner a disagreeable companion, it is his impertinent shrewdness which makes you wish to keep the Yankee at a distance.

The first seems without object, spiritless; the latter keen to better himself, if with nothing else, with information he can draw from you, and by gaining your good opinion.

(ibid. 559)

The second class, those "with whose habits and character I am most familiar" (ibid. 559), includes: educated farmers, manufacturers, merchants, shopkeepers, educated master mechanics, preachers, physicians and lawyers. Olmsted comments "that the number of those at the South who correspond in education and refinement of manners and habits to the average of this class of the North, it will be evident...must be very much smaller relatively" (ibid. 559). Planters and others of this class in the South, have commonly been considered to be "more social, more generous, more heartily kind and genial than Northerners" (ibid. 561). However, Olmsted feels that, generally, the opposite is true. Because many families in the South live in more isolated locations, any contact outside the family is considered eventful and exciting, and "this accounts for the common opinion" (ibid. 561). While refuting this stereotype, he adds:

As to manner or deportment simply, with the same impulse and intention, that of the Southerner will habitually, under ordinary circumstances, be best, more true, more composed, more dignified...

(ibid. 561)

Added to this praise is his feeling that:

Individuals...very generally have a strong desire to be thought better informed, more ingenious, more witty, as well as more successful in their enterprises than they are, and this stamps them with a peculiar quality of manners vulgarly called "smartness," the absence of which makes Southern men and women generally much more agreeable companions than Northerners of the same degree of education and accomplishments in other respects.

(ibid. 561-62)

Finally coming to the first, or highest class, Olmsted notes that "the traditional 'old family,' stately but condescending, haughty but jovial, keeping open house for all comers on the plantations of Virginia or South Carolina, is not wholly a myth" (ibid. 562). Noting however that they were few in number to begin with and that of this group "many have degenerated woefully in breeding" (ibid. 562), he continues:

Of the real "old families" which remain at all "well-bred" in their qualities, habits, and manners, by reason of their lineage, I think it will be difficult for most readers who have not studied the matter at all to form a sufficiently small estimate; call them a dozen or a hundred....

Associating with these are a few hundred more new or recuperated families, in which there is also the best breeding, and in certain few parts or districts of the South, to be defined and numbered without difficulty, there is a wealthy, distinct, generous, hospitable, refined, and accomplished first class, clinging with some pertinacity, although with too evident an effort, to the traditional manners and customs of an established gentry.

(ibid. 562)

This upper class in the South is, almost by its nature, a small one. This class in the South has been the subject of numerous stories and novels, perhaps because it is much like a hothouse flower: exotic and rare. Olmsted, true to form, feels that the upper class in the North is much larger because:

The North has been much more prosperous, as the value of its property has much more rapidly increased than that of the South, the advantages of wealth have, I believe, been more generally retained in families, and probably the number of those who could trace their breeding in an uninterrupted parental influence from the colonial gentry, is now larger at the North than at the South....there is unquestionably at this time a very much larger number of thoroughly well-bred people in the Free than in the Slave States. It is equally certain that the proportion of such people to the whole population of whites is larger at the North than at the South.

(ibid. 563)

Olmsted's final word on the aristocratic southern class of planters is perhaps more damning than anything he might have said about other classes of southern whites. He feels that their show of hospitality and good manners is nothing but a sham:

It is part of the role they undertake to act, to be hospitable and generous.... They are not hospitable and generous, however; they know not the meaning of these terms. They are absurdly ostentatious in entertainment, and extravagant in the purchase of notoriety; possibly they have more tact in this than our Potipars, but such has not been my personal observation.

(ibid. 563)

While the upper classes are small in any society, it is with the larger mass of people that Olmsted's thoughts remained. He in the end concludes "that the condition and character of our people (in the North) as a whole, to the best of my judgment, is better, more gentlemanly even, far more entitled to respect than that of the people, including all classes, of any other nation. Very much more than those of the South" (ibid. 620)

It is possible, from the evidence, to form an impression that Olmsted, himself, was an elitist. He was certainly of the upper class in New England: as a member of the upper class, however, he felt it his duty to raise the cultural level and the standard of civilization of those below him. Many of his later efforts, beginning with Central Park, were attempts to provide the "masses" with a more civilized life. His pronouncements on the South were essentially from the point of view of his class in society but they also contained a democratic element. He wished to share his sense of beauty and taste with all and to raise the level of civilization in the United States. He finally managed to do so by designing many beautiful public spaces.

As the environmental movement has raised American's consciousness about the need for environmental protection, Olmsted's work in landscaping has come to be seen as almost prophetic. He has since gained newfound respect and admiration today as the "father of landscape architecture" in America.

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