CHAPTER 3  Notes on plantation life: 1752–1754

Introduction

Here we learn something of what life was like, for slaves and for free persons, in the height of the sugar-slave society. Thistlewood records the actions of others who, like himself, took slave women in lasting ‘man-wife’ relationships, and others still more numerous, whose relationships were obviously more exploitative.

As one would expect, there was resistance. Slave women occasionally braved resistance to the sexual demands of their masters, and were usually punished for their ‘impudence’. Slave men sometimes made clear their disapproval of the masters’ assaults on slave women. Quashe, the Egypt slave driver, more than once made threatening remarks occasioned by Thistlewood’s favouring Jenny with gifts and lighter tasks. Individual slaves assaulted their masters, sometimes in offensive attack, sometimes in self-defence against assault. Usually they suffered dire consequences, but not always.

But the challenges of individual slaves, though often personally dangerous to the master, were, in general, symptoms of a wider resistance which only rumbled under cover until such times as a leader, with a plan and an ability to recruit and to organise the disaffected, rose into action. And, constantly on the road, as Thistlewood records, were the Maroons, in search of runaways, insurgents, and prize-money.

Also on the road, especially following the closure of a crop-season, were a surprising number of whites (European and Creole) in search of employment. Some, like John Filton before Thistlewood, had been fired by their employers. Others, like Thistlewood himself, had severed connections in order to move in search of a better livelihood. As they moved they visited the estates they passed, sometimes finding a welcome beyond a meal because they brought good company and conversation to break the daily round.

But there were other forms of entertainment and relaxation. Thistlewood tells of shopping in Savanna la Mar, visiting neighbours, exchanging news and gossip with others in the Tavens, and of course, welcoming the ships as they arrived in port with goods and letters, and passengers and crew with the latest news and fashions from abroad.

And, for Thistlewood now, there was the end of his affair with Jenny and his taking Phibbah who was to be his ‘wife’.

Until December 1752, the Egypt slaves laboured on Paradise. They began by settling in.

‘Thursday, 25 June 1752: Was in the field betimes. Salt River Negroes weeding canes, loading manure [presumably in cart-loads], &c. Paradise Negroes clearing ground to build huts, some of Salt River Negroes here cutting fences, &c. White Peter (usually called Irish Peter) lopping fences with the Negroes.’

On Saturday afternoon, having nearly completed the building, the Paradise Negroes ‘... went for Egypt everyone except Big Mimer.’ That still was home and that was where some of their children and their provision grounds were. On Monday morning they were back at Paradise. Later in the week, Thistlewood located ‘Bowen’s old Negro ground’ in the bushy backlands. It had ‘plantains enough, and a good soil.’ On Saturday 11th the land was shared out between the Paradise slaves: ‘enough and to spare.’

And so the labour continued, at Salt River weeding canes, at Paradise cleaning pastures and grounds and cutting fences. Thistlewood was overseeing both properties, with Robert Robertson as his assistant on Paradise, while Thomas Christy supervised the limited activity at Egypt.

By the end of July the cleaning, trenching and fencing, with logwood, of the Blue Hole plantain walk was done. On the 30th:

‘Employed lopping the fence against Blue Hole plantain walk. Finished it. This is a prodigious large plantain walk of above 60 acres, and taking in the Negroes ground far above an hundred.’

A couple of days before, while supervising a party hoeing about the house at Blue Hole, Thistlewood had met

‘... Mulatto Dick belonging to Florentius Vassall. Had some discourse with him about the Vineyard, &c.’

A week later, he rode to Sweet River to buy some rum for himself, and ‘saw Marina, and many of the Vineyard Negroes.’ He made no further comment. At Egypt he had taken Nago Jenny into his house and was involved with her until the end of 1753 when they finally parted and he began his life with Phibbah. However, he was now ‘in sad pain with the buboes.’
There had been more difference of opinion with Mr Dorrill than was explicitly recorded, for on:

'Tuesday, 11th August 1752: This morning Mr Dorrill sent for me, and told me as he heard I was unsatisfied in his service he did not desire me to stay against my will, which I gladly yielded to. He said he did not turn me away, but that I turned myself away. He ordered Mr Fookes to remark that my wages ceased today, which Fookes willingly would. Rode over to Paradise, acquainted Robert, &c. got my horse and brought him to Salt River. Gave Quamina a pair of old breeches. In the evening sent Robert, by George, 4 quart bottles of rum. Hercules made me a staple and hasp for my book chest, put a padlock on it, got all things in readiness, &c.'

Next morning, having locked up his things in the house he had occupied and given the key to Billy Mould, he:

'Set out on my horse for Egypt, by Mr Dorrill's approbation, having orders to look over Tom. Breakfasted with Mr Mordiner at the Bridge. Also dined with him there on stewed turtle.'

He intended 'to stay at Egypt till I perfectly recover my health.' Clearly Mr Dorrill did not want to be rid of him.

In these last months of 1752 and the first of 1753 there were the usual comings and goings of visitors to Egypt.

'Wednesday, 1st November 1752 p.m: called here a man (a distiller) servant to Captain Forsyth, just came from the Vineyard; gave him punch, &c. He says Mr Bennett, at Rowe's barcadier at Black River is dead.

Tuesday, 12th December: ... Mr Mordiner and Carpenter George, who now works with him, called to see me. Mr Mordiner has been purchasing Quasheba [a Salt River slave]. He gives for her, two new Negroes cost him 48 pounds each, beside duty. He paid 14 pounds per annum for her: he paid in ready cash for her and his two children about 166 pounds — besides what they have cost him in victuals, clothes, etc.'

One morning in mid-November Thistlewood rode into Savanna la Mar to see Mr Storer but he was out. So he went and sat with Mr Barnett, the schoolmaster, for a couple of hours before going home to Egypt. Then on the way:

'... overtook a white young woman (riding), she said, to Jacob Allen's. She says she was born at Hull, brought up at

Louth, knows Bucknall very well, having been several times at Mr Dobb's; Knows my brother, cousin Nanny Longstaff, &c. Gave her an invitation to Egypt to rest and refresh herself. She went with me, and stayed an hour or more, I rode to the end of the estate with her. Mary Holmes.'

No particular interest in the young lady was recorded, but she seems to have enjoyed his company, for two months later she sought him out.

'Friday, 19th January 1753: Miss Mary Holmes called to see me. She is going down to the Bay.'

And that, apparently, was as far as it went. The year 1752 was however, to move to a climactic end.

On Sunday, 3rd December, Thistlewood, at the Styx Bridge, found men belonging to Thomas Williams and Colonel Barclay fishing. He confiscated fish, baskets, a fishing net and a line, a knife, some tobacco, and two pairs of breeches. He drove the men off, left the net in the care of Tony in his watch hut, and took the other goods back to Egypt yard and distributed them between Salt River Flora (the knife), Old Catalina (the tobacco), Achilles (a pair of breeches and some fish), Sampson (breeches), Phibbah (a basket), and 'gave the fish to the rest and only kept for myself one basket, the line and 8 tarpons.' But when he sent back to Tony's hut for the net, he learnt that Tony had given it back to Colonel Barclay's men.

'Monday, 4th December 1752. Rode over the estate. Brought over Tony and had him whipped for yesterday's work. In coming home he threw himself into the water by the Styx bridge, and so run into the morass. I stripped and followed him, but was forced to knock him down when I came at him, for he threatened me with his stick he had in his hand; but with much to do I tied his hands behind him and got him home.'

On Saturday, 16th December, Quashe brought word from Salt River that Thistlewood should '... keep 40 hands, and take care the drivers don't cut and slash the Negroes.'

Mr Dorrill had decided that the canes on Egypt should be harvested. Thistlewood was to take charge with John Russell newly employed as his assistant. He picked out 41 of the original Egypt hands, 22 men and boys (including Quashe, the driver) and 19 women and girls (including Jenny). His other current favourite, Susanah, had not been sent to Paradise; nor, or course, had Phibbah, with whom he was later to be involved. Monday morning they began to cut copper wood and the preparations for crop taking began.
Christmas 1752 was spent in the usual fashion with entertainment at Salt River and elsewhere.

'Tuesday, 26th December: Mr Dorrill says, by a very good computation, the Negroes in this Parish lay out near 20 thousand pounds per annum.'

Wednesday 27th: At Home most part of the day, in expectation of Mr Emetson and Mr Groves, who promised to come see me.

They did not arrive, and following his disappointment, Thistlewood went for a walk. He strolled into a struggle:

'In the evening, walked to Tony's gate, &c. Killed a black snake by the Styx bridge. Thence walked towards Paradise canepieces, but a little before I got to Cabrito bridge, just at the small causeway end in the little morass (about sunset) met Congo Sam, who has been runaway since the 2nd Instant. Attempting to take him, he immediately struck at me with a backed bill he had in his hand, and repeated his chops with all vehemence, driving me back into the morass towards the river 25 or 30 yards from the road, but through the great mercy of God, his blows either fell short of me or were warded off with a pimento stick I had in my hand, with which I sometimes got a good stroke at him. And although he let on my jacket several times yet, as pleased God, I received no harm; the bill being new was not very sharp. But what the most showed his intention was when I kept him off with my stick saying, "You villain, runaway, away with you, &c." he answered in the Negro manner, "I will kill you, I will kill you now, &c." and came upon me with greater vigour. I called out, Murder, and help for God's sake, very loud, but no assistance came, so that I had no prospect but to lose my life, till I threw myself at him and fortunately seized hold of the blade of the bill. (Since he made the first chop at me, to this time, might be 5 or 6 minutes). He kept fast hold of the stock or handle. I endeavoured to draw him into the road; he went readily, but would not go homewards. We went in this manner over Cabrito bridge, till we came against the watch-hut then he would go no further. Bella and Abigail there, but would not assist me. (He spoke to them in his language and I was much afraid of them). We might stand against the hut 6 or 8 minutes, nobody came. At last, he suddenly quit his hold and threw himself into the river. I, being possessed of the bill, leaped in after him, made 3 or 4 chops at him, and the bill flew out of my hand into the water.

He endeavouring to get it, I enclosed him, and a stake, in my arms, resolving to keep my hold, (up to the breeches waistband in water). 5 Negro men, and 3 women, strangers, went over the bridge and would by no means assist me, neither for threats nor promises; one saying he was sick, the others that they were in a hurry. After we had stood in this manner maybe 8 or 10 minutes, London came and assisted me; tied his hands behind him with my handkerchief; but whilst I was seeking my stick in the morass, which I quitted when I seized hold of the blade of the bill, London, having a load of provisions on his head, Sam got away into the bushes, where he by some means had his hands loosed, and lost my handkerchief. Presently, London called out that Sam had seized his machete and would kill him. Two gentlemen being just rode by towards the bridge, I ran after them and begged their assistance, being afraid to continue into the bush, for it now began to be pretty dark. They went back on the road with me, [London ...] I secured his hands with my garters, took [him prisoner] guarded him home, put him safe in irons [and a] watch put over him.'

That night he sought solace 'cum Jenny', but there was much in his head.

'Note: last Friday, in the field, Quashe told me (before all the Negroes) that I should not eat much more meat here! I, asking him if he meant to poison or murder me, after a pause he replied, neither, but he intended to invent some great lie and go and tell his master, to get me turned away, etc. etc. Am also of an opinion that London had no good intent when in the bush with Sam, if he had not heard company coming with me. Titus with great reason may also be suspected. Have also reason to believe that many of the Negroes, as Quashe, Ambo, Phibbah &c. knew that Sam had an intent to murder me when we should meet, by what I heard them speak one day in the cookroom when I was in the back piazza reading.'

Next morning, with Sam guarded by London, Thistlewood went to make report to Mr Dorrill. Sam was secured, handcuffed, and thrown in the dungeon. Later in the day, Thistlewood laid charges against him before Colonel Rickets and Mr Lewis. He was told to have Sam at Mr William Cook's at eight o'clock next morning, Friday. There, Sam was charged and sent to gaol to await trial. At Egypt, meantime, Abigail and Bella were given 100 lashes each. They then ran away and Plato was sent in search; but they had gone
only as far as Salt River, to complain, and returned about mid-day, Saturday. It must now have seemed to Thistlewood that there was no doubt that Congo Sam would be convicted.

When he was warned to be in Savanna la Mar on Saturday, 6th January for Sam's trial he summoned London, whose evidence would be required.

'Friday, 5th January: At night London refuses to go with me to Sam's trial: told me he would not go.'

And he didn't. Sam was acquitted.

'Saturday, 6th January: Was down at Savanna la Mar. Mr Lewis, Col Barclay, and Mr Stone try Sam. (Old women).

Tuesday, 20th March 1753: About 7 at night Mr Paul Stevens & Thomas Adams, going to tear Old Sarah to pieces in her hut. Had a quarrel with them. Note, they both drunk.

Monday 26th: Guy, belonging to the Vineyard, a Negro, called here today.'

Sunday 8th April: The Captain of Mr Dorrill's new sloop called. Lent him a mule to ride to Mr Crawford's. Came back, dined with me.

Tuesday 17th: Wrote to Mr Dorrill & sent over Quashe very ill of the toothache. In the evening he returned.

Saturday 21st: Am forced to give Celia a weekly allowance of 3 old wives & a bunch of plantains. ''A nut more'', an expression used by sugar-boilers when scarce boiled enough -- Imagining a string of nuts. Old Simms.

Sunday 22nd: Dined at Mr Mordiner's; Captain Hartley, Mr Baker, &c. there. Quasheba big, she dined with us.

Last night about 10 p.m. Miss Molly Dorrill married to young Mr Cope, Mr Cope's son of Strathbogie (Captain of a London ship), by parson Harris of St Elizabeth. Much doubt if true, but believe will be.'

It was not yet true. John Cope, Jnr, at the time in his early twenties, was however, courting Molly Dorrill who was 'just turned 16.'

'Wednesday 25th: This morning Doctor Cutting called. I rode with him past Mrs Hall's and took leave, he going to Guinea again. (Rhode Island ship, Wilson).

Salt River Guy acted [..?] his Obia, &c. with singing, dancing, &c. odd enough.

Thursday 26th: 3 Wild Negro men (one of them Capt. Cuffee's son) and a woman, belonging to Cudjoe's town, called to beg refreshment and lodging. Gave them about a quart of rum, a bottom of sugar, and 8 mackerel, and leave to stay in the plantation all night.'

On Friday, 11th May Thistlewood went to Savanna la Mar to exercise with the militia. The roll was called and the men discharged until Friday, 15th June.

It was now cropover. On Thursday, 17th May news came that the slaves were once again to be transferred to Bowen's (Paradise). Thistlewood recorded:

'The Negroes one and all declare they will not move to Bowen's except I go with them to take care of them. They are instigated to it by Philip for certain ends.'

Perhaps Philip Gudgeon, who had succeeded John Russell, thought that if Thistlewood went to Bowen's he would succeed at Egypt. Thistlewood does not say. Philip was himself recalled to Salt River on 21st May; the Negroes were to go to Bowen's in mid-July, and Thistlewood remained, unsettled, at Egypt. On Thursday, 24th May, in the morning:

'Met Col Cudjoe just by the Styx Bridge. Shook him by the hand. He was aloft, several other Wild Negroes with him. Had on a beaver, feathered, and a large medal hung on chain about his neck.'

On Monday 28th he eventually caught up with Mr Thomas Storer at his house in Savanna la Mar, and was 'well received', but there was, it seems, no further mention of a small sugar works Mr Storer had 'been about purchasing' in the previous November. It was a bad time to be job-hunting. The crop season now being generally over, there were many on the roads seeking employment for the next crop year. When Thistlewood got home from Mr Storer's:

'One William Ward, born at Dublin, wanting an overseer's place, called and dined here. Says about a fornight ago our Negroes sold 2 pistoles worth of land turtle; that William Slater, distiller, has but one stone, now playing at Bo Peep in Thomas William's plantation walk, &c.'

Tuesday, 29th May: This morning Quashe beat Morris in a very bad manner in the field with his whip, &c. He went to Salt River. So did I & Morris, (put Quacco for driver) Had him given 100 lashes & put in the dungeon.

Thursday, 7th June: Today being a Fast, in remembrance of the great Earthquake, 1692, gave it the Negroes.

Friday 8th: Big Mimber, Little Mimber, Quasheba, Hannah, Yara, Beneba, Yabba, Joe, Teresa, Margie, Rose, & Ellin who
is at Hill [with Yaws] = 12 all sick & home, not at work.
Thursday 14th: After dinner had Prue & Clara whipped for
going to Salt River last night and pretending sick today.'

As the work went on he observed the birds:

'Cling clings (as the Negro pickanninies call them) or Barbadoes
black birds have tails stand open down, like a ship's rudder,
very odd.
Thursday 28th June p.m.: Wrote to Mr Dorrill and sent
Plymouth over to Salt River sick of the foul disease (by Plato),
and above 300 lignum vitae seeds.
In the evening the overseers of Quaaco Hill & of Retrieve
called and drink some punch with me. Looking for above a
score of Negroes that today left Quaaco Hill (Dewsberry) in a
body, going to complain against the overseer to Major Clarke
who has some care of the estate.'

Early in the following week Thistlewood having heard that Mr
Jacob Allen, at Jacobisfield, needed an overseer went there to
enquire. The place had already been filled.

'Tuesday, 10th July: a.m. met Mr Thomas Adams by Sam's
hut almost, in his Troop dress. He asked pardon for his ill
language he gave one night by Sarah's gate, with Mr Paul
Stevens, both being almost drunk, we parted good friends.
p.m. William Ward, who is yet out of place, one Evans who
lives as overseer, and a highlander in Colonel Barclay's service,
all called to beg refreshment. I gave them dinner & punch.
In the evening, Mr Davidson, who some 7 or 8 years ago lived a
short time overseer at Salt River, called to beg refreshment &c.
and stayed all night with me. I liked his company very well. He
has been to Windward seeking employ, but can find none
worthwhile. He told me of Mrs Anderson's tricks with
the Scotch doctor, &c. (2 horses & a Negro boy).
And enough about Collgrave, &c. Collgrave used to buy good
clothes for the Negro girls that were handsome, on the estate, and
they were to give him half what they got from any white
person, &c.'

On Monday, 16th July:

'About sunrise in the morning got the Negroes forward to
Paradise. The cripple Negroes and all their victuals &c. in the
canoes, all the rest walk by road - Quashe and 44 other Negroes.
Cruddon is run away long ago. 13 belonging this place already
at Paradise. Left here, Old Sharper & Ellin at Hill, Daniel and
old Phibbah at hogstyes. Tony and Titus. Dickson, Sam and
Celia. Old Sarah. Ambo fisherman, Nimine with him. About
the house: Phibbah, Dianah, Susanah, Coffee, Nathan, Old
Catalina; most of the Negroes' pickanninies. Sampson look
after cattle. Gave the Negro men each a dram. Phibbah gave
me a fine pineapple.
Wrote to Mrs Anderson and sent by Susanah, c.c. in the canoe
33 ducks, squabs. Rode over the estate, was at home rest of the
day, very dull and lonesome.'

There were, nonetheless, diversions. On Egypt itself, there was the
shooting and fishing, and there were visitors and outings.

'Friday 20th: Mr Griffith Williams called and dined with me.
Sat a while after dinner.
p.m. I rode to Savanna la Mar. To Mr Clemens for 3 lbs
cheese, 4 bitts. Drank tea at Mr Emetson's. Went to see the
camels at Wade's (in Wade's yard) about 40 of them, and in
very good order. I take them to be dromedarys, though all at
the Bay hold them to be camels.'

A few days later, another visitor, and a much more surprising one:

'Wednesday 25th: In the morning, Dianah Jones, who came
over in the ship Flying Flamborough that I came in, called to
see me. She lives on Mr Woodcock's estate, the Delve, has had
a child by Mr Thomas Adams the overseer (now living) and has
been free sometime, I rode as far as Tony's hut with her.'

He also decided, or had been invited, to visit.

'Sunday, 29th July 1753: a.m. I rode to Delve estate, Mr
Woodcock's and dined with Mr Thomas Adams and Mrs Dianah
Jones. Was mightily made on. They have a fine child, a girl of
about 7 months old. She told me many of her secrets, &c. and
is a sensible woman. Showed me a muff of her working, in
imitation of Dresden work, admirable. Mr Adams going to
leave the Delve.'

There would have been much to talk about. It was after dark when
Thistlewood got back to Egypt, and he would visit them many
times more.

'Wednesday 15th August: a.m. Andrew Miller called. He
says he hears Forrester is to leave Salt River, Mr Dorrill
provided another.
In the evening William Ward called and stayed all night.'

Ward was still in search of a job. On that day also was held the trial
of several Salt River slaves who had been charged with the theft of
goods from the estate stores.
Mr Dorrill’s Negroes tried today: Oliver’s Quaw hanged; Fortune’s Quaw both ears cropped, both nostrils slit, and marked on both cheeks; Cheddar’s right ear cropped, right nostril slit, & marked on the left cheek. Mr Dorrill vouched Robin was runaway (false) but he punished him himself.

We are left to wonder, with what greater violence, or with what favoured restraint.

Sunday, 19th August: Gave a man dinner who is seeking employment. He has been travelling on horseback ever since the 12th of last month & can’t find any place worth anything.

Other visitors at Egypt included two of Col Cudjoe’s men who, on a furlough for nine days, stopped in and drank some punch; and Samuel Matthews, who had replaced Thistlewood and Russell at Paradise. In the other direction, on the 28th:

‘Gave Ambo a ticket and leave to go and see his pickanniny who is dangerously ill, until tomorrow morning.’

On Sunday, 2nd September the road through Egypt was crowded with ‘an abundance of Negroes’, and there was ‘a large Negro market by Tony’s gate’ near the river Styx. On Sunday 14th, ‘Cudjoe’s men — perhaps the same two — were allowed to sleep in the cookroom for the night.

Towards the end of the month, Thistlewood and the surveyor, Wallace, and his assistant, Blythe, surveyed boundaries between Salt River, Paradise and neighbouring properties. Thistlewood got back to Egypt tired and his current bedfellow caused him some discomfort:

‘Thursday, 27th September: Last night Sus[ana]h piss the bed again, makes 3 times, will bear no more.’

But he did.

On the last day of September, Mr Mordiner’s Quasheba was brought to bed of a girl.

By the end of 1753 Thistlewood’s affair with Jenny was at an end and he was turning to Phibbah. She was very likely a Creole for she had relatives among the slaves on properties in the neighbourhood. Her only child, a daughter, Coobah, was a slave on Paradise Estate and was a frequent visitor at Egypt. So too, was her sister Nancy. As woman in charge of the Egypt great house cookroom she carried the same sort of responsibilities as had the other household Phibbah at Vineyard. But Egypt Phibbah, unlike Vineyard Phibbah, moved frequently between the Egypt cookroom, and the
great house at Salt River where her owner and his household lived. She was thus full of information about the goings-on of Thistlewood’s employer and his other employees and his other slaves. Moreover, what news she gleaned herself was added to by the information she frequently received from her widely scattered friends and relatives. Although we have no picture of her physical attributes, she certainly seems to have attracted attention. He had first taken her in early October 1753; but she was not an easy conquest. Not until the end of November did she spend a night with him, and it was February 1754, before she really yielded.

‘Sunday, 6th January 1754: In the forenoon, a Negro man belonging to old Tom Williams, named Jinney Quashe (a noted Obia man) pretending to pull bones, &c. out of several of our Negroes for which they was to give him money, was discovered by them to be a cheat, and they chased him out of the estate, frightened enough. Remember to have seen one Black Lambert (a noted conjurer) of Wakefield in Yorkshire so chased at Acworth.

Monday 7th: Mr Mordiner breakfasted with me, also Capt. Quaque, his son and other attendants. The Capt. had a silver medal of King George 2nd. hung on a silver chain about his neck.

Tuesday 8th: Samuel Matthews come over to Egypt as an assistant to me.

Sunday, 24th February: About noon a white man, with Wild Negroes armed, and 2 Baggage Negroes, from Trelawny Town, Vulgo. Cudjoe’s Town, called to beg refreshment. I gave them punch, &c. They are going to bring in Woodcock’s Negroes who are now out, &c. Capt. Ton Ton Parne, and a Lieutenant with them.

Tuesday, 5th March 1754: Last night Quashe lit of Salt River’s Roger at our Negro houses and as I hear gave him a whipping.

Wednesday 6th: At noon had Quacoo whipped for beating Yara in the mill house in a very bad manner last Friday. His was an old gudge. She has laid in the hot house of it ever since.

Wednesday, 13th March: I spoke to Mr Dorrill again about leaving the care and management of this plantation, &c. and had his approbation, but not consent.

Saturday 23rd: In the morning Sam Matthews come home, having been at Paradise to see his wife Dido last night.’
And now, although Phibbah was his she was not always at his beck and call.

"Tuesday, 19th February 1754: At night Cum Phibbah, Sup. me. lect.
Thursday, 21st February: p.m. Cum Phibbah. Illa habet menses.
Friday, 22nd February: At night Cum Phibbah.
Sunday, 24th February: At night Cum Phibbah.
Monday, 25th February: At night Cum Phibbah.
Tuesday, 26th February: Phibbah keep away.
Thursday, 28th February: At night Cum Phibbah.'

At this time his gonorrhreal infection was either cured or dormant. His only complaint was of a long persistent sore 'very much resembling the dry crab yaws' between thumb and forefinger of his right hand. Phibbah, well-informed of these matters, told him that Mr William Dorrell had had the yaws when he was a boy. That might have been small consolation. The little sore did not, however, much alarm him.

'Friday, 1st March: p.m. Cum Phibbah ... and, in the evening, Cum Susanah in the curing-house, stans.'

In March, the ascendency of Phibbah was clearly established, as was a continuing concern for Jenny.

'Saturday, 23rd March 1754: Delivered to Phibbah 12 bitts to buy Jenny a coat & frock.
Friday, 3 May 1754: Hear Mr Cope and Miss Molly were married last night.
Tuesday 7th: In the evening received a letter from Billy by Philip Gudgeon, who came with the canoe. Received 3 sugar tierces. Also come in the canoe a young man who belonged to Mr Cope's ship and I understand is to live here, to learn the plantation business. Let him lie in the hammock in the hall. [Samuel Matthews had been called back to Paradise].
Tuesday 14th: In the evening came here the young man recommended to me by Capt. Cope ... [William Crookshanks] ... put up the bed for him in the N.E. room of the Overseer's house.

Wednesday 15th [At night] Bess became William's bedfellow.'

Upon the marriage of John Cope and Molly Dorrell, William Dorrell allowed young Cope to take over the management of Egypt estate. For the time being, the newly-weds lived at Salt River.

'Friday, 24th May 1754: This afternoon was the first good shower we have had for four or five months past; which occasioned an excessive drought and scarcity of water; and the country has in most places been over-run with fire, most provision grounds and many plantations burnt up.
Saturday 25th: p.m. Mr Cope sent an Ebo Negro man (a new Negro) he bought today. Our Negroes have named him Hector. I put him to live with London.'

During 1754 the Egypt labour force was considerably increased by new purchases of slaves and by the hiring of jobbing slaves.

'Tuesday 28th: At night Mr Thos. Adams called, and supped with me; says he is to be married to Dianah Jones on Saturday next, and that he is shortly to have the care of Blue Hole and Cambleton estates, and has already left off tavern-keeping.'

Following his departure from Delve Estate Adams had opened a tavern, but he had allowed too much on credit and now was back to oversuse/his search in financial recovery.

'Wednesday, 5th June 1754: William has a scalding of urine & is afraid he has got the clap.
Hear Philip Gudgeon and William the barber ran away last Monday.
Tuesday 6th: Lent William the dun mule, to ride over to Mr Beckford's Craal. p.m. He returned, and brought me a letter from Dr Walker, who informs me Wm. has got a confounded clap.
Saturday 8th: Wrote to my brother and sent the letter, with a Bill of Lading enclosed, by the Swinton, Captain Fullerton, of Hull ....
Sunday 30th: A girl took away from Nago Hanah, by Dr Walker. Some say a Mulatto. [Thistlewood had had sexual intercourse with her on September 2nd and October 4th, 1753.]
Sunday, 7th July 1754: Am informed Nago Hanah died today.
Monday 8th. In the morning Colonel Cudjo, with his attendants, called and stayed about an hour. I gave them a dram each, &c.
Saturday 13th: Gave the Negroes today. Have no provisions for the new Negroes ... Gave [them] 17 bitts amongst them and six shads each.
Saturday 20th: The Negroes had today by Mr Cope's order and are to have every Saturday till provisions begin to be plentiful.'

Rice was now handed out daily for several weeks. Quantities varied, but on most days about 10 to 12 quarts were distributed between the
ten new Negroes. On weekend days they got about three quarters of that amount. At the same time, numerous attempts, some successful, were made to purchase provisions in the countryside and on neighbouring properties.

'Friday, 6th September 1754: A little before noon Mr Cope came and stayed dinner with us (pickled herring, bread & butter) ... [then they went shooting].

Mr Cope proposed giving me 60 pounds per annum till we make 60 Hhd's and then as many pounds more as we make Hhd's more ....

Monday 9th: In the morning accompanied Mr Taffe to Lucea and beyond, almost as far as Mr Haupton's [Haughton's] whom we met in the road. Returned to Lucea, Mr Phil. Haupton Sr offered me 70 pounds per annum to go live at his estate near Montego Bay, to live & eat at his table, and have the liberty of killing fowls or a shoot when I pleased if he was not upon the estate, &c.

Thursday 12th: Mr Cope here from noon till almost night. I acquainted him what offer Mr Haupton had made me; upon which he offered me 80 pounds per annum till we make above 80 Hhd's, and then 20s per Hhd for every one over. I agreed to stay.'

At the beginning of October they began to put the Egypt great house in readiness for occupation by Mr and Mrs Cope. By Wednesday 9th, Thistlewood had been required to move into the 'old Overseer's house'. In December, he would move again, into a newly built Overseer's house.

'Tuesday, 8th October 1754: Mr & Mrs Cope, Mrs Gorse, Miss Bessy Storer, and Mr Hungerford dined here. A second table in the back piazza. Mrs Anderson gave me 26 black crabs. William very officious about the house, but no concern about the field. 2 fine mahogany tables &c. brought from Strathbogie in a cart. Great enquirer whether I keep Phibbah.

Sunday 13th: For 300 corn, to Col Barclay's Negroes, 6 bitts.

Sunday 17th, November: For 350 corn, 7 bitts, and 75 plantains, 3 bitts.

Thursday 28th: Guilemus & Mirtilla *primus somnus-a nocte*.

Tuesday, 10th December 1754: In the night Mr Mordiner called me up twice going for Drs Graham & Smith. He says he does not expect to find Mr Dorrill alive when he goes home.'

William Dorrill died between 7 and 8 a.m. on Wednesday, 11th December 1754, and was buried at Salt River on the following day in the presence of 'a multitude of company'. Minute guns were fired at noon.

'Tuesday 17th: This morning I found Adam dead in the hot house. Had a grave dug and buried him by the cherry trees, not far from the old barcadier.'

**Notes**

1 Mulatto Dick, a slave, had been the 'Driver' on Vineyard while Thistlewood was there. Shortly after his departure Florentius Vassall had sold the Pen with all its livestock and transferred the slaves to his properties in Westmoreland.

2 Mr Mordiner was at the time engaged in repairing the Cabarritta 'big bridge'.

3 Edward Long, planter and historian of Jamaica, and others, made similar claims. The slaves, as we shall see from Thistlewood's accounts, were very much involved in petty trading or higgling. A main source of their money income was sales in the Sunday roadside markets of the surplus produce of their provision grounds.

4 William Crookshanks had now taken Mirtilla to be his 'wife' - for the first time they now slept together.
CHAPTER 4 Notes on plantation life: 1755—1759

Introduction

In the Jamaican slave society the sugar plantocracy were supreme. They were white, they were wealthy, and they were the better educated in the formal sense since they could afford a schooling in England. Moreover, they controlled the island legislature since they had the property qualifications to support them either as voters or as candidates for election, and free persons of colour, however wealthy, were legally barred from both those categories. The slaves, of course, as the property of others, had no rights at all except those allowed by their masters; and it was the planter-controlled legislature which enacted the Slave Laws which purported to protect the slaves against abuse. In such a society, obviously, the behaviour of the masters was largely ungoverned, except by general consensus of opinion of what might be done without incurring the disapproval of one’s peers, and by the state of mind of the individual at the given moment.

Through these years of his diary Thistlewood records excesses of behaviour beyond anything previously described, and indeed, he is himself guilty of the worst. We do not know if he was following the examples of others, or simply displaying a personal, sadistic disregard for the feelings and sensibilities of fellow humans. Perhaps he later felt remorse, perhaps he was admonished by his employer or his peers, or even by Phibbah, herself a slave, with whom he was now closely and obviously affectionately joined. For whatever reason, he was to exercise a greater control over his behaviour in the future. It is in a sense remarkable that in these same years he displayed to the full the warmth of his relationship with Phibbah and his apparently friendly attitude towards many of the slaves under his management. Apparently, because he does not tell us, and we have no certain means of knowing, what the slaves thought about him and how they reacted to his ‘apparent’ friendly concern.

The diaries for this period bring much else of interest to our notice. We read of food scarcity in the area, of rice-planting in the Egypt morass (precursor to the enterprise of the later twentieth century); of slave ‘plays’ and other ceremonial rites; of fights and quarrels, often over sexual relationships, among the slaves themselves; and of the apprehensions following the outbreak of the Seven Years War (1756—1763) between England and France with Spain as a late entrant ally.

And there were more particular events such as the surprise with which the slave woman, Doll, recognised the newly acquired man, Achilles; the arrival, but by no means the first, of a large box of books for Thistlewood who would lend out several to his friends; and his observations of a now famous comet.

But these and other happenings would soon be overshadowed, for in the north-central parish of St Mary a leadership of slave resistance was in the making.

‘Saturday, 4th January 1755: In the forenoon, myself, William Crookshank, Ambo & Daniel, walked through our Sand Ground Plantain Walk, westward, to a large sand ground, and came to a piece cleared lately, now in corn and cassava. In going saw a logwood fence Daniel says he planted, runs nearly NW & SE. Returned through marooned grounds, by where Sarah Ward lives. Eat some breakfast of buttered toasted cheese and roast plantain with her (Homer Jackson come here). We got home about noon.

p.m. Cum Phib.

At night Phibbah slept in the hammock in the hall; would not come to bed. She was rather too saucy.’

On the 28th January, Thistlewood put the mill about in commencement of the year’s crop taking.

‘Thursday, 30th January 1755: At night Cum Phib.
Friday 31st: Nancy, Phibbah’s sister, here tonight.
Saturday, 1st February: About 2 p.m. Cum Phibbah. At night she slept in the cook-room.
Sunday 2nd: Phibbah did not speak to me all day.
Monday 3rd: At midnight last night I fetched Phibbah from her house. Had words with her again in the evening. At night Cum Phibbah.
Friday 7th: Phibbah denied me.’

While Thistlewood and Phibbah were having their temporary differences, Mrs Anderson at Salt River was becoming more involved with William Mould.
The plantocracy, as distinct from their white employees, differed from the latter only in their greater possession of resources and authority and, therefore, of responsibilities which Mr Cope at any rate seemed unable to bear. He was always in financial distress, and frequently in other predicaments, often of his own making.

'Tuesday, 15th April 1755: Sent Port Royal with a mule and bags to Dr Frazier's at Negril, for corn. [He got a bag full.]

Monday, 19th May 1755: Although Whitsun-Monday, Mr Cope made the Negroes work as a punishment (he says) for eating canes so much.

Tuesday, 25th February 1755: At dinner-time rode over the plantation to see who would be eating canes. Found Hector & Beck. Had them whipped.

Sunday, 2nd March 1755: Bought plantains for the new Negroes, house Negroes, &c. &c. at nine hundred for 27 bitts.'
first Sunday in August plantains were still at 4, but corn was being offered variously at 2, 2½, and 3 bits per 100. Thistlewood planted corn at Egypt.

By this time, Mr Cope had changed his mind and re-employed Mrs Mould's slaves, but Mr Mould still seemed to carry some resentment, and perhaps with good reason for John Cope seemed never to be in good financial standing. When, in early April, Mr Cope offered to pay him for the slaves' hire with an order upon Mr Gardiner in Savanna la Mar, Mr Mould refused to accept it. It might even have come to blows.

'Wednesday, 23rd April 1755: Being St George's Day, Mr Cope dined out, and at night came home seemingly in liquor, and bloody, his lips seem bruised, &c. W[illiam] C[rookshanks] sent to Mr Mould's to enquire.'

No more was recorded, but time apparently mended differences.

'Sunday, 15th June 1755: Mr Cope dined out. Mrs Cope told me how much Mr Cope wants her to cut the entail off and settle upon him for life. Or, as it is going to be a war, he must go home and try to make his fortune that way, if she don't.

Wednesday, 13th August 1755: At night Mr Cope come home in liquor; wanted Silvia very much and was like a madman almost.

Had my supper sent into my house to me.

Monday, 6th October 1755: Mr Cope and Mr Christopher Senior went and took possession of Salt River and Paradise estates last Saturday p.m. and have agreed to pay the debts off if possible before they make any dividend.

Wednesday, 15th October 1755: Mirtilla has been at home all this week, ails little or nothing, only resolved to put William to a needless charge through spite.

Sunday, 28th December 1755: Mason Quashe had a feast here tonight'.

And in January, 1756, Thistlewood recorded a striking co-incidence:

'It is remarkable that one of the last New Negroes, named Achilles, is he who took Doll and sold her; and that having some clothes, some tobacco, drum & a gun; &c. was robbed going home, &c.'

And now, as a consequence of an increase in assault on the canefields by slaves who were by his own account on very short rations, Thistlewood inflicted punishments which seem to have gone even beyond the accepted bestiality of the time. One of the chief consumers of young canes was Derby.

'Wednesday, 28th Jan 1756: Had Derby well whipped, and made Egypt shit in his mouth.

Tuesday, 24th February 1756: Mirtilla went away into the Savanna. It seems her time is up. Hear her neck is to be put in the yoke. She has worked 244 days in her year and earned William Crookshanks £15 15s. At night William Crookshanks abused Mr and Mrs Mould in an extraordinary manner in the Savanna, at their own house; afterwards crazed went down [on] his knees & begged their pardons, &c. . . . Mirtilla the cause.'

Mirtilla was now pregnant, near childbirth. In mid-March she was sent to Paradise where Crookshanks went to see her.

'Saturday, 13th March 1756: Hazat caught Derby last night stealing cane. Derby wanting this morning.'

Two days later he was caught, escaped, and a short while after recaptured and put in the bilboes. For days, said Thistlewood, he remained sullen, not eating or drinking, and not seeming to care when he was whipped.

'Monday, 15th March 1756: In the morning W.C. went to Paradise, Mirtilla in labour all day. At night Dr Robinson sent to her, who delivered her of a girl (a mulatto) after supper. Mr and Mrs Mould also came over to see her, and returned again in the night. W.C. came home & cried. She is in Egypt Lucy's house.' [At Paradise]

On the 19th Thistlewood went to visit Mirtilla and her daughter. About a week later Crookshanks was transferred to Paradise, Mirtilla was to remain there and Sancho would be sent to Egypt in her stead. At Paradise, William Crookshanks (according to Thistlewood) continued to pamper Mirtilla.

On Monday, 5th April 1756, the Moulds left Jamaica for England. For a while, before their departure, they had stayed at Egypt. It was also cropover time.

'Mr and Mrs Mould went away into the Savanna this morning. Wrote a letter to Mr Henry Hewitt, by Mr Wm. Mould . . . p.m.

Mr and Mrs Cope went into the Savanna to take their leave of Mr and Mrs Mould. Egypt now seems very dull. However, I had a bottle of good ale at my supper, which I mixed with sugar & water & grated some nutmeg over it. Roast beef, roast turkey, cold tongue, cheese, &c. to my supper.

At night Cum Phibbah.

Sunday, 2nd May 1756: Sometime in the middle of last night Mr Cope come home and Mr McDonald with him. They sat
drinking for sometime, then went to bed; Mr McDonald had
Eve to whom he gave 6 bitts, and Mr Cope made Tom fetch
Beck from the Negro houses for himself, with whom she was till
morning.
Wednesday, 5th May 1756: p.m. Egypt Susanah & Mazerine
whipped for refusal last Saturday night, by Mr Cope's order.2
Little Phibbah told Mrs Cope last Saturday night's affair. Mrs
Cope also examined the sheets and found them amiss.'

Mrs Cope had been away on the Saturday night spending a few days
with Dr and Mrs Gorse. She had returned to Egypt on the morning of
the 5th.

On Wednesday, 26th May, the Egypt slaves planted rice in the
morass behind the mill house; but that, like much of the corn
planted, would be eaten by the birds rather than them. And Derby
was again:

'... caught by Port Royal eating canes. Had him well flogged
and pickled, then made Hector shit in his mouth.'

This sadistic and degrading punishment seemed to appeal to
Thistlewood.

In June, 1756, came an interesting instance of an unusual
domestic event. Nancy, Phibbah's sister, was then a house slave at
Egypt and she had an infant son, Rose, an Egypt field slave who
had been sent to Salt River at the end of February '... to be
salivated for the bone-ache' now returned to Egypt.

'... and is to live with Nancy who is to give Mr Cope five
pounds per ann. for her.'

Unfortunately, Thistlewood made no further comment on the ar-
range-ment by which one slave was hiring another from the owner of
both, but the reason for it seems clear — little Davie was ill. About
noon on 18th July he died.

'Saturday, 24th July 1756: Nancy's play tonight.'3
' Sunday, 25th July 1756: Nancy's play ended, much music &
dancing all day, &c.'

In July, Port Royal, who had run away, was taken and brought
home.

'Gave him a moderate whipping, pickled him well, made Hector
shit in his mouth, immediately put in a gag whilst his mouth was
full & made him wear it 4 or 5 hours.'

Next day, the 24th, a woman slave, Phillis, caught breaking canes,
was similarly treated, but spared the gag. On the 31st her punishment

was repeated. The reason was not stated, but perhaps she had run
away after the 24th; for on the 30th two other runaways had been
apprehended and punished.

'Friday, 30th July 1756: Punch caught at Salt River and
brought home. Flogged him and Quacoo well, and then washed
and rubbed in salt pickle, lime juice & bird pepper; also whipped
Hector for losing his hoe, made New Negro Joe piss in his eyes
& mouth &c.'

On 1st August, another runaway, Hazat, who had absconded in
early April was caught.

'Put him in the bilboes both feet; gagged him; locked his hands
together; rubbed him with molasses & exposed him naked to
the flies all day, and to the mosquitoes all night, without fire.'

On the 4th, Derby was again caught, this time by the watchman as
he attempted to take corn out of Col Barclay's Long Pond corn-
piece. He was severely chopped with a machete, his right ear,
cheek, and jaw almost cut off. On the 27th of the same month,
Egypt was whipped and given 'Derby's dose' [that is Derby was
made to shit in his mouth] for eating cane. On Thursday, 5th
October, Hector and Joe and Mr Watt's Pomona were similarly
punished for the same misdemeanour. Thereafter, for unmentioned
reason, Mr Thistlewood shed his depravity of 1756 and resorted to
the usual whippings and chainings.

Late in 1756 the monthly musters of militia, perfunctorily
attended, were more regularly held and additional guard duties
instituted.

'Friday, 10th September 1756: Being warned, in the evening
rode to the Bay, supped at Mr Emetson's ... I watched in the
Fort from 8 till 10, and from 4 till daylight, Mr Stecher the Pilot
with me, but 6 more & the Sergeant besides ...
Saturday, 4th December 1756: Martial Law has now been
sometime. Rode down to the Bay and entered upon guard at 8
o'clock.'

But it was all still very much like play. A body of the militia had, a
few days before, been formed into a troop of Dragoons, headed by
Mr Crawford, who was appointed as their Colonel.

'The Troop mounted today. At night Col Witter, Mr Cope &c.
come into the Fort, &c, all drunk, &c. Young Mr Gooding, our
Officer, gave the guard 14 bitts to spend at night. Carr, the
wire-dancer, our Sergeant for the day.
Friday, 10th September 1756: Last night Mr Mould's Scotland was shot and cut with a machete till he died, in Col. Barclay's Negro ground, by Old Jenny's, by the watchman. He was stealing corn, plantains, &c. This morning Mr George Cummins came to acquaint me, and I rode with him to the place where he lay dead. Did not meddle with him, came home and acquainted Mr Cope.'

No more is mentioned of the Moulds themselves until late March 1758, when William Mould, returned from England.

'... came here, supped and slept. Mrs Mould dead. He had a Mulatto by her, &c. Phillis christened Pegg, &c.'

He subsequently went to live in Kingston.

'Saturday, 25th September 1756: Many reports about Mr Wm. Crookshanks, particularly in regard to his humouring Mirtilla, and about some rum sent to Mr Mordiner to sell, &c.'

Samuel Matthews was now sent back from Paradise to Egypt to replace Crookshanks.

'Sunday, 26th September 1756: p.m. Samuel Matthews come here as Driver. They are weary of him at Paradise, so I spoke to Mr Cope for him to come here. He lives where William lived.'

Matthews, while at Paradise, had hired Dido from Mr Cope at £15 a year commencing in mid-April, 1756. At the beginning of October she came to Egypt to live with him. For an unstated reason, she remained only 2 months.

'Tuesday, 7th December 1756: Dido went to Paradise, and Samuel Matthews also went to deliver her up to the Overseer. Mr Wm. Crookshanks sent me a piece of cheese by him.'

A week and a half later another white employee was taken on at Egypt, Thomas Fewkes. His employment lasted only a few months, during which he was housed with Matthews.

'Saturday, 9th October 1756: Mr C. in his tantrums last night. Forced Egypt Susanah in the cookroom; was like a madman most part of the night, &c. Mrs Cope very ill today. p.m. Dr Gorse come to her & stayed all night.

Sunday, 7th November: About 4 in the morning set off in Mr Mordiner's canoe to go a shooting to the seaside with him. Stephen Vidal steered us. James Perrin, Davie, Sussex & Lincoln rowed us. I shot a white curlew sitting on a mangrove. Mr Mordiner shot a sort of blue golding. We also got 21 young crab-catchers off the mangrove trees which grow out in the sea off Robin's Point, many coaches, &c. We went to the Creek westward of [the point] then returned towards the river mouth, went ashore, struck a fire, and made a fine breakfast of broiled herrings & plantains which we brought with us, as also salt, pepper, sugar, rum, limes, water &c. Broiled many young crab-catchers, very fat & sweet, broiled conch buttered, &c. During breakfast we hooked a young shark (the bait was crab-catcher's guts). I laid Mr Mordiner 4 bits that he was 2 ft 9 ins long, but he proved only 2 ft 8½ ins, so I lost. Then, we rowed to Mr Mordiner's house at Salt River and dined there. About 4 p.m. set out for home again, and got home before supper.'

Early in December a domestic disturbance ended in death.

'Wednesday, 8th December 1756: At dinnertime, Moll being jealous of Mr Mould's Lydde with Cobenna, she beat Lydde so that we were forced to have her carried home. Moll afterwards went to Cobenna's house, took out his clothes, &c. and made to the river's side.
p.m. Sent Cobenna and Dago to look for her. They could see nothing of her.

Thursday, 9th December: In the morning Sancho the fisherman found Moll in the river drowned wilfully (we imagine she thought she had killed Lydde). Hauled her upon dry land, and at night gave Cobenna leave to bury her. Have been very much afraid of Cobenna & Quamina's making away with themselves, they seem to be so much concerned, & by their looks.'

But Thistlewood gives no explanation of his remark about Quamina who seems not to have been involved in the unfortunate triangle.

Christmas Day 1756 passed uneventfully. The Copes dined with Col Barclay; Thistlewood dined at Egypt, sumptuously; and Mirtilla arrived at Egypt, from Paradise, with her daughter Sukey Crookshanks.

'Sunday, 26th December: Gave Mirtilla's Sukey, for a Christmas box, 3 bitts. In the morning served our Negros 6 herrings each, drivers 12 each, children some two some three each ... In the morning Mr Crookshanks rode over here (gave him a glass tumbler) then he prevailed with me to go to Paradise with him.

Called at Mr Mordiner's going, dined at Paradise, Mr Wm. Maddin, Mr John Bell, Mr Blanch, Mr Samuel Mordiner, his wife [Quasheba] & children also dined there. [These were all of
Thistlewood's and Mordiner's class. No large landed proprietor was there. In the evening got home. Samuel Matthews at Paradise all day and night.'

His wife, 'Dido, whom he had hired at £15 a year, had recently, on 7th December, been recalled to work on Paradise. Thistlewood himself should have gone to do guard duty with the militia on the 26th, but 'ventured not to do so, as we are going to keep guard upon Cabrito Bridge' where, earlier in the month, two Egypt slave women, going over the bridge at night had found it almost covered with smuggled goods. Although the Seven Years War had begun, it was not until the following year, 1757, that Thistlewood's notes begin to display some apprehension.

In mid-January 1757:

'Sam and Thomas parted their house, broke down a door at the end, &c. &c.

Sunday, 16th January 1757: Thomas Fewkes and Little Lydde made up a match.

Wednesday, 19th January 1757: Thomas Fewkes says Little Lydde has clapped him confoundedly.

Friday, 18th February 1757: Thomas Fewkes burnt Little Lydde's coat, a continual noise all night in their room, &c. Last night this happened.'

Since Dido's departure Samuel Matthews had been unmatched. At the beginning of March, 1757, he took Mrs Mould's Franke (not to be confused with Phibbah's close friend or relative, House Franke). Soon he would, for a time, replace Thistlewood as Egypt overseer.

'Tuesday, 1st Feb 1757: The chain and collars struck from Quacoo and Charles neck, Cobenna & Quamina being bound for Quacoo, & Plato for Charles.'

The meaning is not absolutely clear, but it would seem that Cobenna, Quamina, and Plato were 'standing surety'. This, remarkably, was the first mention of any punishment in the year, and there had been no record of any runaway. Perhaps he had been challenged by his conscience, or by Phibbah.

'Wednesday, 16th February 1757: Heard great guns fired out at sea.'

But the crop taking had begun on the 7th and, for a few weeks it was that and other estate business which primarily occupied Thistlewood's attentions.

'Monday, 7th February 1757: In the morning, at turn-out time, put the mill about. Was to have put about at the rising of the morning star, but did not [though I] strictly ordered Ambo to do so, for which gave him a good flogging, also one to his wife Agnes for her impudence.

Tuesday, 22nd February: Paradise and Salt River not about, can't make good sugar. (Ours very good yet, thank God.)

Wednesday, 23rd February: New Negro Quacoo seen in the morning, wanting all day.'

On Tuesday, 1st March he delivered two large pots of sugar from the curing house — one for Dr Gorse and one for Mrs Winn — and delivered ten hogheads of 'molasses out of the boiling house cistern' to a party of sailors to be put on board ship.

'Saturday, 2nd April: Cobenna caught London and Rosanna (Cobenna's wife) at work upon London's bed. London got a good thumping as I hear. This was after the coppers done cooling.'

But already ominous rumours of war and insurrection, were spreading.

'Saturday, 26th March 1757: At night Mr Cope received a letter from Mr Antrobus, suspecting the French intend to invade this island, by the men-of-war arrived at Hispaniola, and their having took the Greenwich man-of-war of 60 guns.

Thursday, 31st March 1757: Reported: Bowman that murdered Priddie, his own child, Mrs Dunbar, &c and some of Cudjoe's Negroes, at last killed by them.

Thursday, 7th April 1757: p.m. Some French prisoners went by, well-guarded, towards Savanna la Mar, belonging to a French privateer in Little Bay this week.'

The capture brought its special rewards. On Sunday 10th, Thistlewood had guests for dinner:

'Had roast beef and plum pudding to dinner (as it is Easter Day), also mangrove oysters. Good porter to drink, and very good claret wine bought out of the French prize at 5 pounds per hogshhead [about 22 dozen bottles]. A bottle of this claret now sold in the Taverns at Savanna la Mar at 10s per bottle, and at other times at 15s per bottle ...'

It served also as a pre-cropover celebration, for on the 13th: 'Finished our crop this forenoon ...'; but it had not been an outstanding one. They had made only 991 pots of sugar.

The Martial Law instituted in late 1757 had, apparently, been relaxed, for on Wednesday, 27th April 1757:

'Martial Law commenced the 19th Instant in Town, and here today.'
Thursday, 28th April 1757: Capt. Quacoo and some of his attendants dined here.

Friday, 29th April: A report that ... the French have dispossessed us of all we had on the coast of Guinea.

Sunday, 5th June 1757: About 8 at night, many (10 or 12) great guns fired at the Bay.

But soon, he was to be for a time removed from the sounds of guns and the guard house carousings at the Fort in Savannah la Mar.

'Saturday, 18th June 1757: In the morning rode to Paul Island, and agreed with Mr John Parkinson [to whom Mr Cope had addressed "an extraordinary letter" of reference] to live at Kendal. Am to have an hundred per annum. the first year and afterwards to have my wages raised, 4 barrels of beef, one of flour, 2 firkins of butter, a box of soap & a box of candles, rum, sugar, plantains, &c. and to raise fowls.

Returned Mr Cope his law books which I have had a long time lent me.'

With him, went his own personal slave whom he had purchased from Mr Mason at Hertford on 3rd January 1756, for £43. As he had noted then:

'He is an Ebo, about 16 years of age, measures 4 ft 9½ inches.

Named him Lincoln.'

Nowhere in his diaries does Thistlewood state explicitly why he made the move, but there were two possible explanations. In 1756 he had suffered another painful recurrence of veneral infection. He first mentioned notice of the symptoms at the beginning of September. At the end of the month he was taking an electuary made up for him by Mulatto Will.4

'He says it is Rhubarb, Cassia & Balm Capivi and some Jollop scorched to make it mild over the fire.'

And, early October, Cobenna seeming to be cured, he took some of another mixture made up for Cobenna by Dr Gorse. That one contained 'Jollop, Rhubarb, Gum Guacum, Balsam Capivi and Mercury.' Neither seems to have brought complete cure. But if he hoped to elude further infection by removing himself from Egypt he was to be disappointed.

More likely an explanation was his constant bickering with Mr Cope over the terms of his employment. He might have felt that he was getting nowhere near to a fortune. There is some suggestion that he would have preferred the overseership at Salt River, if he had been offered it at an increased wage; but Cope made no offer of that.

So, on 23rd June 1757, Thistlewood and Cope settled their accounts, in a fashion. Cope owed him £29 9s 9d, and there was still an outstanding £15 12s 7½ d due from his short stay with William Dorrill at Salt River in 1752. Now, he received an order on a Savanna la Mar merchant for £8 9s 9d, was promised a luncheon of rum valued at £14, and was given Cope's promissory note for £70, currency, payable with interest at some future, unstated date. On the Salt River account he was paid a little over £14. Next day he left, after a hard parting from Phibbah.

'Sunday, 19th June 1757: Phibbah grieves very much, and last night I could not sleep, but vastly uneasy, &c.

Wednesday, 22nd: Took up of Mr Gardiner [in Savannah la Mar] 10 yards of brown oznabarig, 20 bitts (which oznabarig delivered to Phibbah for a certain use). Gave Phibbah 2 pistoles in money, mosquito net, 3 cakes of soap, about 3½ yards of cloth ... out-door lock, &c. Begged hard of Mrs Cope to sell or hire Phibbah to me, but she would not; he was willing. Gave 8 bitts for little Quaw,4 4 to Damsel, 2 to Silvia, 4 to Ambo, 1 to Mazerine, 8 to Franke, and 8 to Nancy.

Mr Cope dined and supped out. Come home in the night and had Little Mimer.

At night cum Phibbah.

Thursday 23rd: Phibbah gave me a gold ring, to keep for her sake.

At night cum Phib.

Friday 24th: In the morning parted with Phibbah and set off for Kendal.'

Now was the testing time. His offer to hire or purchase Phibbah indicates that he thought he wanted her with him. But he was now to be away from her for a prolonged period, and there were women to be had at Kendal, and it was not beyond possibility that he would find a new 'wife' there.

On Saturday, 25th June, he sent Lincoln to Egypt with a letter for Mr Cope. He was, he noted, 'mighty lonesome'. Sunday, Lincoln came back with Thistlewood's trunk, and among the things, 'a fine land turtle Phibbah sent me'. At the following weekend Lincoln was despatched again, this time with some plantains. Shortly after his departure, Thistlewood began his Kendal amours:

'Friday, 1st July 1757: About 7 p.m. cum Phoebe, the cook, Sup. Lect in North Room.'
Next morning Lincoln was back:

'... and little Quashe with him. Franke sent me 2 bottles of porter. Phibbah sent me some biscuit, cheese, bread, 6 naseberries, and 7 fine mudfish, &c. In the evening Sam Matthews [now Egypt overseer] come, rode on Mark Mule and Phibbah with him, rode on Sam's mare, a good while after sunset; come vastly unexpected; was sent to persuade me back to Egypt. At night cum Illa, Bis.'

Sam Matthews, we are told, lay in the south room bed.

'Sunday, 3rd July: About 10 a.m. Sam and little Quashe set out for Westmoreland .... Gave Sam a little sugar in his hankkerchief. He rode on his mare. Lent Quashe a bag and filled it with plantains, which he carried home on Mark Mule. Also gave Quashe 2 bitts.

In the morning walked about and showed Sam and Phibbah the garden, all the works, &c. &c. p.m. walked with Phibbah to the Negro houses, plantain walk, &c. &c. and discussed about various affairs, &c. At Egypt, the curing house has been broke open since I came away; by Port Royal and Pero &c. Nancy brought to bed of a girl about a week ago, had a very hard labour, the child dead.

At night cum Phib.

Monday 4th: Lent Phibbah my horse to ride home on. She set out before sunrise. Made Lincoln go with her. He carried some plantains in a basket, and a few French beans for her to plant. Sent Mrs Cope some roses. I wish they would sell to me. (She had Nancy's side-saddles). Tonight very lonely and melancholy again. No person sleep in the house but myself, and Phibbah's being gone this morning still fresh in my mind.'

Next day Lincoln returned with Thistlewood's horse, Toby. He brought gifts from Phibbah: 'a fine large pumpkin, 12 cashews, and 12 crabs, & a piece of soap. They got to Egypt in very good time yesterday'. The next week, Lincoln went back to Egypt. He took plantains for Phibbah. She sent back a land turtle, dried turtle eggs, biscuits, a pineapple, and cashews. 'God bless her!'

'Sunday, 17th July 1757: In the morning about 8 o'clock, little Quashe and Dover come from Egypt. Had a mule with them. Brought me a fine turtle and 18 crabs Phibbah sent me. Quashe says she is sick, for which I am really very sorry. Poor girl, I pity her, she is in miserable slavery.'

On Saturday 23rd, Phibbah came again, unexpectedly, and was joyfully received. She brought gifts, a letter from John Cope, and news. Plato and little Dover were with her. Monday morning, about seven o'clock, she set out for home with foodstuffs and a letter to Mr Cope. In it, Thistlewood said he would return to Egypt if Mr Cope would pay him £100 a year, as he had at Kendal. Lincoln provided escort. He came on the Tuesday with more foodstuffs from Phibbah for Thistlewood: 'So good a girl she is. I only sent 2 bitts by her to lay out in fish.' And so it went on every weekend. If Phibbah did not visit, Lincoln would be sent, and in any case there was the exchange of gifts.

On Wednesday, 3rd August, Thistlewood himself paid a visit to Egypt. He set out from Kendal at about seven o'clock in the morning.

'Rode down to Storer's barcadier, afterwards called at Dr Roberts in Camp Savanna, drank some wine and water, then rode on to Egypt. Got there just before shell-blow, dined with Mr Cope & Mr Deeble there. Supped and stayed all night, slept in my own parlour, and, at night, cum Phibbah, bis.

Gave little Quaw 2 bitts. Mr and Mrs Cope very glad to see me.'

On Saturday 13th, Phibbah returned the visit. She arrived at Kendal escorted by Lincoln and accompanied by Little Quashe and Egypt Susanah. She brought a basketful of goodies; and, as usual, news. 'Abraham is turned in the field at Egypt'. Poor Egypt Susanah, a frequent sex-partner with Thistlewood, and at Egypt 'kept' by Lincoln was neglected. Lincoln don't seem to look good upon Egypt Susanah, he has got Gordon's Polly here.'

'Friday, 26th August: Sent Lincoln with my horse to Egypt for Phibbah tomorrow, if she can come. He carried her some plantains, and Mrs Cope some roses.'

She came. And, in the same way, she came again on Saturday, 10th September, Saturday, 23rd September, Saturday, 8th October, and Friday, 4th November. In between, Thistlewood had once more visited Egypt, on Monday, 24th October. On her previous visit to Kendal Phibbah had complained, and they had quarrelled, about Thistlewood's association with Aurelia, who seems to have been la femme fatale of the Kendal slaves. But, as usually happened, by next day they had made it up, and she and Thistlewood 'walked ... as far as the cave at the head of Green Island River, &c.', and so to bed.

Then, once again, a new infection. Phibbah's remonstrations
notwithstanding, Thistlewood had gone again with Aurelia on Thursday, 10th November, and on Saturday 12th another woman, Fanny, had spent the night with him. On Monday 14th: 'Headache, feverish, feel oddly, a small running, &c.' By the 17th he was quite certain that he was once again in trouble.

On the 18th he sent Lincoln with his horse to Egypt, and, on Saturday 19th Phibbah arrived. As usual she went back to Egypt on the Monday morning. On Saturday, 3rd December she returned to Kendal. On both those occasions there was the usual exchange of news and gifts. Phibbah must have been well aware of Thistlewood's condition, but there is no mention of complaint or quarrel. Nor is there any mention of sexual activity.

On Saturday, 10th December Thistlewood agreed to go back to Egypt to work for Mr Cope and Mr Dorwood at the Hill barracadi. On Tuesday 20th he made the final gesture at Kendal.

In the morning cum Sabina, Sup. seat, in Parv. Domo. A burning of the seed in coition.'

On Thursday 22nd he visited Egypt to make the final arrangements for his return. He slept there and Phibbah came to him. On Saturday, 24th December 1757 he made the move:

'... got to Phibbah's house late at night, where I supped and slept, as Mr and Mrs Cope had long been gone to sleep.'

There is no doubt that now he knew he needed her.

On his return to Egypt Mr Cope offered Thistlewood half the profits of operating a new wharf near the mouth of the Cabarrita:

'... provided I find 5 Negroes, attend myself, and give him the hundred per annum I should have from Dorwood; but I would not run the risk.'

This was a rather different proposition from one previously made. On December 10th, he had agreed with Cope and Dorwood, who were in partnership of the wharf, to live at Hill, to find 5 slaves and to feed himself (but his slaves would be fed), to manage the business of the wharf, and to receive £200, currency, per year, of which, apparently, Cope would pay half and Dorwood half. Now Cope seemed to want to sell his share of the profits (or losses) to Thistlewood for the fixed £200 a year. It was certainly not a tempting offer, and, in fact, the venture did not prove successful.

Thistlewood, however, set about preparing himself for eventualty. He stayed, restlessly, at Hill, in a house built there for him. On 3rd January he rode to Savanna la Mar and, among other purchases, acquired 'a silver mark', with which he would brand his belongings. He was offered an overseership by Mr Dorwood at Mountain Spring at £120 a year and salt provisions. He refused. Mr John Parkinson proposed a joint venture in tanning. Again he refused. Next day:

'Tuesday, 21st February 1758: p.m. Rode to the Bay. Bought of Mr Samuel Lee, an Essay Upon Plantership, by Saml. Martin, Snr Esqr. 3rd Ed. Antigua, 1756 ... 5 lotts.'

And, on the same day:

'Bought of Mr John Parkinson two New Negro men, at 51 pounds each, and a New Negro girl at £46 pounds = 148 pounds. Mr Parkinson would have no note or bond.

Monday, 27th February 1758: My two new Negroes in Egypt field. The one I have named Johnie lives with Samuel Matthews, the other named Simon with Coffee, & the girl, Abba, in the cookroom.'

As the weeks passed Thistlewood undertook the receiving and shipping of goods from the Hill barracadi. Continuing restless, and sometimes denied visits by Phibbah because of disagreement with the Copes, he was job-hunting, and performing in his usual various ways.

'Tuesday, 7th March 1758: Was Exercised at Salt River by Adjutant McGuire ... Exercise day first Tuesday every month.

Tuesday, 21st March: Write a Memorandum how Mulatto Will's goods are to be disposed of at his death. His wife's shipmate Silvia to have his cow; her daughter Hester, the heifer; Daniel his wife (Jimmy Hayes's wife) thefly & rest of what he has. He desires to be buried at Salt River at his mother (Dianah's) right hand, and that no Negroes should sing, &c.'

Mulatto Will must have known that his time was at hand. He died at Egypt on Easter Monday, 27th March 1758 at about 2 p.m. Thistlewood does not record whether his last wishes were honoured.

At the end of March he 'gave no answer' when Mr Cope, dissuading him from 'going to Honduras' made another offer of the overseership at Egypt.

'Wednesday, 19th April 1758: About 2 p.m. Cum mea Abba, Sup Lect, (sed non bene).'

That was his first occasion with one of his own.

On the following Sunday Mr Cope arrived with another offer at Egypt.

'With great promises, which refused; and told him about his
readiness to assist Cunningham [at Salt River] and Crookshanks [at Paradise] and of his opposing me in many ways, &c. about the mosquito net, feeding Lincoln, giving Phibbah no time, &c. &c.

In May, he went the round of estates, but without success. Places had been filled, or offers were unacceptable. Plagued by mosquitoes and jiggers [chigoes], and with an itch which he claimed had been given him by Harry Weech with whom he had shared his bed one night, he was 'vastly lonesome and disagreeable . . .'

'Sunday, 11th June 1758: . . . rode to Mr Mordiner's, dined there. (Read in the Humorist several entertaining things. This was the 2nd vol.) Stayed at Mr Mordiner's till the evening then rode home . . . Mr Mordiner says, reported, Mrs Cocker has made free with one of Michigan's Negro fellows! Strange, if true, but scarce to be doubted.'

On Tuesday 27th June he agreed with Mr Cope. He would go back to Egypt for:

'... £120 per annum certain, and 20s per hhd for all above 120. He is also to hire my Negroes.'

On the 30th he moved, and on 8th July the Copes moved out of Egypt back to Paradise. It is not improbable that that was part of the deal; not that Mr Thistlewood should occupy the great house, for he didn't; but that he should have no interference in his management of the estate.

There is little room for doubt that Mr Cope was glad to have Thistlewood back in charge at Egypt. Early in October 1758:

'Mr Cope told me to send to Hyndman's of Saturdays for 6 bitts worth of beef, and when crabs are good to buy a bitts worth of a Sunday . . .'

and, having thus expressed his appreciation, he departed, only to return:

'... at night in liquor, after bed time, slept here and had Silvia. He gave her a cob.'

On Sunday 19th, November, there was a repeat performance.

'In the night Mr Cope and Mr Stephen Coppige come & stayed all night. Mr Cope had Silvia. Mr Coppige had Egypt Susanah, gave her 6 bitts. She pissed the bed.'

Mr Thistlewood was well and minutely informed, no doubt by Phibbah. But, as we have already learned. Phibbah's great

house duties, perhaps with good reason, sometimes led Thistlewood to conjecture.

'Saturday, 2nd December 1758: a.m. Mr Cope and Mr John Dorwood come; dined here. (Suspect Phib.) p.m. They went away.'

On the last day of that year he recorded in detail an account of another kind of excessive behaviour, in which as a mere overseer he could not yet himself indulge.

'Cost of an entertainment given his Excellency the Lieut. Governor at the Court House at Savanna la Mar, by the Gentlemen of the Parish & furnished by Messrs Hayes and Brooks.'

The event had occurred on 2nd July 1757, and the Lieutenant Governor and his hosts had had at their disposal 6 dozen claret at 15s a bottle, 3 dozen old hock at £3 10s. a dozen, 3 dozen Span [Spanish?] at 30s a dozen, 1 dozen champagne at 17s 6d a bottle, 4 dozen madeira at 45s a dozen, 8 dozen cider at 30s a dozen, and dinner for all for £35.

On the same day, 31st December 1758, turning to an entirely different subject of immediate importance to him, he listed the titles of eighteen publications, some in several volumes, which he had received in a case sent by Mr Hewitt in London. They included:

'Religion, a poem . . . from the French of the younger Racine. (London, 1754)
The 2nd Edition of the Court and City Register for 1757, corrected to 19th January ... Printed for J. Barnes.
Observations in Husbandry by Edward Lisle, Esqr. (Lond. 1757)
Horse-hoeing Husbandry: or an Essay on the Principles of Vegetation and Tillage. by Jethro Tull, Esqr. of Shalborne in Berkshire. (Lond. 1751).'

And, he had been lent, by Mr Cope, two Caribbean works:

'... a Treatise upon Husbandry or Planting, by William Belgrave, a regular bred and experienced planter, of the Island of Barbadoes, printed at Boston, in New England, 1755, small 4 vo. as bound; [and]
Instructions for the management of Drax Hall & the Irish Hope
plantations; to Archibald Johnson by Henry Drax, Esqr.'
[The latter about 15 pages Ms.].

From both of these, he made copious notes.

On Saturday, 20th January 1759, there was another festivity in
which he could not share, a ball at Paradise, hosted by Phibbah's
sister Nancy, but the occasion was not explained.

'At night lent Phibbah my horse to Paradise, to Nancy's ball.'

Then, 'betimes' on Sunday morning, Phibbah returned bringing him
'a bottle of wine, &c.' During her absence, he had risked a wetting
'Cum Egypt Susanah, Sup. Lect. (Ter). Gave her 2 bitts'. But on
Sunday night he made it up 'Cum Phib.'

On Egypt, preparations were in hand for the 1759 crop, and on
12th February he put the mill about.

A few weeks later, a white employed at Paradise was murdered.
Suspicion fell on Salt River Duke, who ran away. Then on the night
of Friday, 30th March, Paradise great house was broken into. No
damage was recorded, but here suspicion fell on Prince, a Paradise
slave. The Copes decided to move. Next day, Sunday, 1st April,
they went to Egypt and remained there until the last week of April.

'Monday, 2nd April: Saw a large comet this morning to the
eastward.'

Next morning he saw it again.

'Sunday, 8th April: Last night Salt River Duke, at Old Sarah's
gate, seen by Old Sarah and Pero. He had a machete in his
hand, and enquired if any Salt River Negroes were this way. He
drank some of Pero's cane liquor he had in a calabash, went
towards Top-Hill.'

Thistlewood made no mention of any attempt to capture Duke, and
for the time being, things quietened down.

'Monday, 9th April: My Johnie wanting. In the evening
returned very loose with yaws.

Observed the comet (whose tail rather increased 1 think), it
rises about 2 hours before the sun. Its course is retrograde,
moves to the Southward. Began to give Simon a diet drink
again, of lignum vitae, sarsaparilla and sena; believe I shall
lose him, he is so meagre, &c., distempered.

Friday, 27th April: Observed the comet about 8 in the

To the south, about 25 degrees high with a bushy tail &c

Monday, 30th April: The comet resplendent tonight, making
its way to the westward of the north somewhat (about 50
degrees high in the south, before 8 p.m.) Tail about 20 degrees.

Tuesday, 15th May: About 8 p.m. saw the Comet again, in
the south-west, about 60 degrees high (Faint). This evening
some clouds in the west, of a greenish colour.'

And he recorded it twice again, on Wednesday 16th and, for the last
time on the 22nd: 'Saw the comet at night, faint.'

In mid-May, after the Copes had returned to Paradise, Little
Mimber was brought out of the field and put to sewing in Egypt
great house.

'Saturday, 19th May: At night Mr Cope come. Slept here, had
Little Mimber; but suspect he has the clap.'

Nonetheless, and indeed he had little reason to worry whether or not,
five nights later:

'In the evening, Cum Little Mimber, a Creole, Sup. Lect. in
meo domo parlour.'

Indulging other interests, he had also been discussing some of the
books going the rounds among the planters.

'Lent Mr Parkinson the Oeconomy of Love, a poem (said to be
written by Armstrong, a Scotsman). Mr Parkinson praises Tom
Jones, said to be wrote by Fielding, Joseph Andrews, by
Fielding's sister (Harvey's meditations). Roderick Random &
Peregrine Pickle, by Smollet, not quite so good, though praised
by the Scotch. (Maryland, said to be wrote by Chesterfield).'

On 21st June the Cope's daughter, Polly, was christened at Paradise.
Phibbah went over to help cook dinner. It was a busy afternoon for
Thistlewood.

'About 1 p.m. the canoe come. Received by her, 2 firkins of
butter from Meyler's wharf, a small barrel of herrings, and half
a barrel of beef; also received an old grindstone about 22 inches
& a half dr. from Mr Wheatley. Received a note from Mr
Stokes; a hog from Joseph Williams Esqr. — wrote to him.
They also brought Abba in the canoe, flogged her well.'

This was Egypt's Abba who had been runaway. Having thus attended
to her, he turned to others.

'About 2 p.m. Cum Mazerine, Sup. Terr. old Curing house
canepiece. Gave her a bitt.
About 3 p.m. Cum Warsoe, in the boiling house. Stars:
Backwards.'
Later, he settled down to a supper sent to him from Paradise by Phibbah who returned next day bearing gifts from the Copes — a leg of mutton, cheesecake, pine tarts, &c. There is no indication that she was told of his capers during her absence; but she soon caused him a good deal of anxiety which he apparently attempted to hide behind an unconvincing display of indifference. In the evening of Friday, 3rd August, Mr Cope, Mr Stephen Coppige and his brother Tom Coppige arrived. Mr Cope had Mimer, the others had Rosanna & Mazarine.

'I reprimanded Phib. for going in the house.

Sunday, 12th: a.m. Cum Little Lydde, Sup. Terr. [in a cane-field]. Gave her a bitt.

Wednesday, 15th: Phibbah last night at the Negro house. p.m. Mr Parkinson called to see me; told me he saw Mr Peter Collgrave in town, who enquired much after me. Phibbah sleeps in the great house, I take it.

Thursday 16th: Phibbah yet away.

Friday 17th: At night Cum Mountain Susanah, Sup. me lect. gave her 2 bitts. Phibbah, I don’t know where, at the Negro house, in the cookroom, or great house, &c., with Dago, &c.

Saturday 18th: Phibbah yet away. Received 6 lbs. beef from Mr Hyndman.

Gave our Negroes today.

p.m. Rode to the Bay, drank tea with Mrs Emetson, in the evening rode home.

In the evening (but after I was gone to bed) Mr Cope come, had Mimer or Venus. Phibbah in the great house also; what about I can’t tell.

Tuesday, 21st: Put Betty and Clara in steep for the crab yaws. Phibbah sleeps yet in the cookroom, or great house, Dago also.

Wednesday 22nd: a.m. Cum Violet Sup. Terr. [in a cane piece]. Gave her a bitt.

Thursday 23rd: In the night Mr Cope come. (Phib. I don’t know where).

Friday 24th: a.m. Mrs. Cope, Miss Polly Cope, &c. come to stay here awhile.’

And, perhaps in consequence, he enjoyed a Sunday dinner of ‘roasted bullock’s tongue, very good’. For the next day or two, there was no mention either of Phibbah, or of his interference with any other; then, on:

‘Wednesday 29th: p.m. Cum Mould’s Lydde, in the Curing house, Stans! Backwd. Made Phib. run for her impudence.’

Next day he took ‘Daphne, a congo, Sup. Terr . . .’ and on the 31st he noted: ‘Phibbah yet away, very saucy and impudent.’ And so, until:

‘Tuesday, 4th September: In the evening Cum Egypt Susanah, Sup. me lect. Gave her 2 bitts. Sent word by her to Phib., she might come if she would, and accordingly she did. At night Cum Phib.’

Towards the end of the year, Mr Peter Collgrave came and dined with Thistlewood at Egypt and they discussed the difficulties of overseership. Mr Collgrave remarked that

‘... the three essential qualifications of an overseer are Lenity, Industry, and Honesty, supposing him to have common sense also.

That the warm sun and blue skies in this country are all that is agreeable.’

The conversation must have been interesting. Thistlewood was in no doubt of his own excellence and never hesitant to record the failings, and the merits where he saw them, of others who supervised the work of slaves. On the neighbouring Long Pond Estate, Mr Reid, formerly at Salt River, had recently been employed by Col Barclay in the place of Mr Cummings who had been ‘too easy with the Negroes’. On Egypt there had been, and would continue, a rapid turn-over of white ‘Drivers’, or ‘Book-keepers’ as we refer to them — but Thistlewood seldom used that term. At the end of July 1759, for instance, Thomas Beard (apparently too lenient) had been replaced by Robert Lawrence. In early 1760 Lawrence was replaced by John Groves, of whom more anon.

Thistlewood himself was never really happy working in someone else’s employ. He had successively quarrelled with Florentius Vassall, William Dorrill, and John Cope of whom he seemed to have the least opinion. In mid-September he addressed himself to Mr Vassall.

‘Egypt Plantation, Savanna la Mar, Westmoreland, Jamaica, September 13th 1759. To Florentius Vassall

Sir, I have lately been informed that it is imagined you are not yet provided with a person in Mr John Brown’s place altogether to your liking, if not, and that you think me a proper person, I should be glad to serve you, which am in hopes I should to your satisfaction. The place I am in with Mr Cope, is as good as an hundred pounds, sterling, per annum, all necessaries found me, and no expenses, which is indeed as much as it can afford, therefore shall not leave
it except something offers very considerably to my advant-
age, as I imagine your employ would be; where I should also
hope to be fixed for many years, having a great dislike to
often changing, which must be very disadvantageous to the
owners of estates, as I have observed it is not uncommon
in these parts for a man to leave his place, by the time he is
acquainted with his business. I am, Sir, yr. most humble
servt., Thos. Thistlewood.'

This was not simply a shot in the dark. In conversation with others a
few days previously Thistlewood had been told that Mr Vassall
would like to have him, though others were trying to persuade him
otherwise. In any case Mr Vassall's reply was not recorded.

There were few remarkable events in the next two months
except Phibbah's announcement on Monday, 22nd October that 'she
suspects she is breeding'. In the same week, Thursday:

'Phibbah behaved oddly tonight, conscious of guilt in the great
house with J.C. this afternoon, &c.'

Since the incidents of late March and early April there had been
occasional rumours of restlessness among the slaves of one estate or
another, but there had been no great alarm. Such apprehensions as
there had been were of a more personal and domestic nature, and
had alarmed the planters rather than the slaves; but the year ended
with two events of a kind not previously recorded. One morning at
the end of September, some of the Egypt slaves had 'chased some
runaways from off an island in the morass ...'. Among those
chased was Egypt's Cambridge; and, in the afternoon he had been
found, by himself, 'in the Dunbar ground'. Brought home by Jackie,
Cambridge had been well flogged and secured in the bilboes. Later
in the year:

'Sunday, 2nd December 1759: About one p.m. Little Quashe
come and told me, that Cambridge was found dead, in the
morass, back of the cotton tree where we cut copper-wood last
year, in the water, by Daniel and Jackie, &c. The cattle boys
say they heard him holler last night, but thought it had been
cano-man in the river. Imagine he was murdered by runaways
who, it seems, threatened to murder him last time he was
runaway if he did not leave them, lest they should be found out
upon his account, by our looking for him. Wrote an account
to Mr Cope, per Prince.'

Next morning, Thistlewood went to Savanna la Mar and reported
the death to Mr Theodore Stone, the coroner. Then he returned to

Egypt, and only then did they fetch Cambridge's body out of the
morass and examine it. No mark of violence was discernible, but the
examination was rapid and perhaps perfunctory because of the state
of the corpse. Nonetheless:

'... I and the Negroes think he was forcibly drowned by
runaways.'

Again, Thistlewood reported to Mr Cope and to Mr Stone, and, on
the authority of the coroner, Cambridge was buried.

Exactly a week later, another Egypt runaway, Mould's Hazat,
came home, this time alive and voluntarily. Hazat had been runaway
for some time. Once, on 1st December, he was spotted by other
Egypt slaves working at Hill, but he had not been taken.

'Sunday, 9th December 1759: Received a letter from Mr Henry
Weech [Paradise overseer], per Mason Quashe, with whom
comes Mould's Hazat, come home of his own accord. He says
he was afraid of being murdered in the woods; has been shot at
3 times since he has been out.'

Notes

1 A blue-coated soldier.
2 They had refused to go to Cope and McDonald who had then
summoned Eve and Beck.
3 The beginning of the wake, which continued through Sunday.
4 A slave 'doctor' at Salt River.
5 This was Thistlewood's son borne by Nago Jenny. He would
later be referred to as little Thomas. He died in childhood.
6 This is not clear. Jimmy Hayes (colour unknown) was a
tavernkeeper in Savanna la Mar. Mulatto Will was a slave.
Damsel, clearly, had been one, and perhaps still was. Perhaps
she had originally been with Jimmy Hayes, either as his property,
or simply as his 'wife' though belonging to someone else. If
Hester was Damsel's daughter she seems not to have been
Mulatto Will's. Perhaps she was Jimmy Hayes's.
7 Halley's Comet on its first predicted return. It had first been
sighted elsewhere in December 1758.