

A SLAVEOWNER IN A FREE SOCIETY:  
JAMES HENRY HAMMOND ON THE GRAND TOUR,  
1836-1837

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For the mid-nineteenth century American, a European journey was an event of far greater moment than it has become in our modern world of rapid and luxurious low-cost travel. The Grand Tour was quite literally an occasion of a lifetime, a journey expected to be of crucial significance in the formation of the traveller's character and attitudes, an episode to be recorded, remembered and reconsidered. On one level, the undertaking of such a trip was evidence of the voyager's prosperity, and thus his social position, for the expense could be borne only by a privileged few. The choice of this mode of displaying ones wealth, moreover, testified to cultural and intellectual pretensions as well, for the discomforts and dangers accompanying nineteenth century travel made it far from unmitigated pleasure. But in spite of the physical strains and disruptions such a trip involved, the European journey was often prescribed as therapy for a variety of medical complaints among America's well-to-do.

For young James Henry Hammond, a nervous collapse during his freshman term as United States Congressman in 1836 provided the immediate motivation for him to realize a long-cherished dream of crossing the Atlantic. The wealth he had acquired upon his marriage five years earlier made the expedition a possibility; his pretensions to both intellectual and social preeminence joined together with his apparently failing health to make the journey seem a necessity.

Ultimately, however, the fifteen months Hammond spent travelling about the British Isles and the Continent between July 1836 and October 1837 were to have less effect upon his physical constitution than upon his understanding of social and political realities. Although his European voyage was to prove but a brief interlude in a distinguished career of public service and prominence, as South Carolina's Governor (1842-44) and as her Senator (1858-60), the trip would make a lasting impact on his political

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perceptions and values. In the company of his young wife and four-year old first born son, Hammond departed from the familiar surroundings of his ten-thousand-acre plantation, located on the Savannah River at the Barnwell-Edgefield County line. Taking leave of his three younger children and his hundred and fifty slaves, he set forth on what he clearly regarded as a voyage of sociological exploration as well as a search for health. Each new experience abroad promised to open "to an American a new chapter on the social system, as it exists all over Europe."<sup>1</sup> Each country would serve as a testing ground for the emerging social theories of a young Southerner who during his inaugural appearance in Congress had assumed a leadership role in the defense of the peculiar social institutions of his section.

Nearly every American voyager of this period was confronted in Europe by a compelling realization of the adolescent status of his own society. In consequence, many felt a need both to assert American independence of parent European civilizations and, paradoxically, to define the United States within the context of European customs and values. Nineteenth century travel literature is filled with examples of Americans caught up in this youthful ambivalence about their own national and cultural progenitors. For a Southerner, however, uncertain not just about the meaning of Americanism, but about his degree of commitment to it as well, these problems of cultural evaluation and definition were rendered especially acute. James Henry Hammond would find that the peculiarities of European life cast into relief confusions about the meaning of Americanness and its relationship to Southernness, conflicts that would influence both his thought and his actions for the rest of his life.

Hammond's vehement opposition in the winter of 1836 to Congressional reception of abolition petitions had launched his career as an advocate of the justice of human bondage, a position that his observations of Europe's laboring classes would help both to elaborate and reinforce. His travels would provide the opportunity for comparison and contrast between the familiar culture and institutions of his native South Carolina and the political

<sup>1</sup> James Henry Hammond, Jan. 12, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 1, James Henry Hammond Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia (cited as HP, SCL). See also Hammond's *Medical Diary*, 1836-37, South Caroliniana Library.

economy of the Old World. But more than just a test of the comparative value of his own society, European travel would seem to Hammond to pose a challenge to his personal identity and competence as well. Would he, born just thirty years before to a family of no "connections, wealth or rank"<sup>2</sup> be able to encounter European aristocracy on its own terms? to avoid feeling or demonstrating provinciality? to make the voyage, as it was intended, a reinforcement of his security in a recently achieved personal position of wealth, as well as a confirmation of the more general social views upon which his status as plantation master rested?

Like American travellers before and since, Hammond arrived in Europe determined to be overwhelmed neither by the sophistication, nor the cunning and deceit of this older world and its inhabitants. Yet at the same time, he brought with him to England in the summer of 1836 a genuine awe of the achievements and traditions of these parent civilizations. For the duration of his tour through France, Switzerland, Italy, the German States, Holland, Belgium, then once again, the British Isles, Hammond would vacillate between these two logically inconsistent but emotionally compatible attitudes: on the one hand an almost mystical admiration; on the other, arrogant contempt.

The area in which this conflict manifested itself most markedly, as well as most frequently, was in his financial transactions with Europeans, for these represented a direct and constantly recurring challenge to his *savoir-faire*. Morbidly fearful of being cheated, Hammond took pride in refusing to be victimized by merchants or by landlords in the inns and apartments where he took rooms. But this determination not to be bettered compelled him to question and resist nearly every bill and transformed his European vacation into an ordeal nearly as ego-threatening and anxiety-provoking as his tenure in Congress. "I have had a quarrel with every tradesman," he wrote his brother from England several weeks after his arrival.<sup>3</sup> Bargaining for everything, he confided to his mother late in the fall, was so stressful that it threatened to undermine the improvement in health the journey had been intended to induce. "I cant help fretting at the little vexations of travelling & the

<sup>2</sup> Hammond to H. I. Caughman, Dec. 9, 1833, James Henry Hammond Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>3</sup> Hammond to Marcus Claudius Marcellus Hammond, Aug. 20, 1836, HP, SCL.

impositions of all sorts of people.”<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of the humiliation of having been deceived was unbearable. “If ignorance is ever ‘bliss,’” he confided to his travel diary, “I think it is so to a certain extent in dealing here that you may not be too much harrassed by knowing too well how much you are fleeced.”<sup>5</sup>

For Hammond, it was as if issues of cultural value could be directly expressed in monetary terms; a refusal to pay what he regarded as an inflated European price came to represent resistance to Europeans’ exaggerated image of the world of their own culture, as well as of any of its particular products. Often he could not resist exulting over superior values available in America, even at the risk of sending insulted natives into “a perfect rage.” In a London store, Hammond announced to the proprietor that books were far cheaper in the United States. “He said authors were paid higher here—I told him we would send him books—that he said would not do & got mad—said the English cannot furnish brains and books too as cheap as we did—brains he said were much higher here than in America. They must then be scarcer said I.” With this parting shot, Hammond then fled the shop for fear the owner would “cut me up.”<sup>6</sup>

Hammond’s quarrel with European values, however, was hardly restricted to these business transactions. His fears of appearing provincial led him to constant critical appraisal of what he saw around him, assessments that often serve as evidence of the very parochialism he sought to disavow. London houses were in his estimation no finer than the more substantial dwellings of South Carolina’s capital city. Exalted French cuisine, he suspected, consisted of “dead & rotten cats, dogs & horses &c &c disguised with spices.”<sup>7</sup> The English King himself possessed little grandeur in Hammond’s eyes. “Dignity,” the Carolinian proclaimed, “is a thing entirely unknown in England to man or woman.” Indeed, the royal gait seemed more like “a waddle.”<sup>8</sup> Opera at la Scala was a disappointment as well, for even slave corn shucking songs had more spirit. European ways not only failed to impress; occasionally they served to shock the American visitor. Even to one as perfunctorily devout as Hammond, the total disregard of the Sabbath by French

<sup>4</sup> Hammond to Catherine Spann Hammond, Nov. 15, 1836, HP, SCL.

<sup>5</sup> Hammond, Sept. 25, 1837, European Diary, v. 2, HP, SCL.

<sup>6</sup> Hammond, June 29, 1837, European Diary, v. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Hammond to Harry Hammond, Oct. 5, 1855, HP, SCL.

<sup>8</sup> Hammond, Aug. 20, 1836, European Diary, v. 1.

and Italians seemed scandalous.<sup>9</sup> But these condemnations somehow lacked complete conviction. Hammond's disdain for the King was counterbalanced by his almost childlike delight at the magnificent pomp of the ceremony of Parliamentary prorogation over which the monarch presided.

Indeed, Hammond's contempt no doubt was designed in part to compensate for his awe, for London appeared almost overwhelming. "I do not know how to go about finding anything of it. There appears no clue, no beginning, no ending—all is utter confusion to me."<sup>10</sup> Scorn served perhaps as a means of reasserting mastery over a situation out of his control. When he returned to England after nearly a year on the Continent, the comforting familiarity of English language and customs prompted Hammond to regard his surroundings quite differently and to conclude with the generosity of a new-found confidence that "After all, there is no city like London."<sup>11</sup> The sophistication he had gained as a traveller enabled him, he proudly noted, to reduce his expenses from the \$38.50 a day he paid during his initial visit to a mere \$16.55.<sup>12</sup> "I could not help saying that after all Old England was nearer and dearer to me than any other part of Europe & to recall much of the blasphemy I lavished on it when here before."<sup>13</sup> But no Englishman would receive the satisfaction of a compliment from this testy American. Those sharing first-class passage with Hammond to New York in October 1837 were to find themselves and their nation constantly berated. "Our intercourse," Hammond reported, "was very unpleasant & in fact nearly ceased before we arrived."<sup>14</sup>

Unwilling to admit any ignorance or inexperience, Hammond was eager nevertheless to profit from his contacts with Europe, and in particular its art, history and taste, at the same time that he felt compelled to judge it so harshly. He arrived abroad with an assortment of Romantic expectations nurtured by his childhood acquaintance with the dramas of Roman antiquity, the legends of British nobility and Napoleonic genius, the classical and military exploits that served as spiritual nourishment for Southern

<sup>9</sup> Hammond, Aug. 30, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Hammond, Aug. 15, 1836, *European Dairy*, v. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Hammond, June 13, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>12</sup> James Henry Hammond, *Travelling Account Book*, HP, SCL.

<sup>13</sup> Hammond, June 13, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Hammond, Nov. 1, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

youths. Hammond anticipated that his presence in places so well known to him from his reading would produce an elevation of feeling and excitement of passion to transport him toward a kind of personal participation in the historic and literary events themselves. His first castle evoked visions of feudal knights and barons. "This is a realization of those pictures of Romance & Poetry which I have been accustomed to dream of from my infancy . . . To one coming from the wilds of the new World it looks like enchantment itself."<sup>15</sup> At Abbotsford, home of Sir Walter Scott, Hammond eagerly sought a clue to the genius "to whom in common with all the world I owe so much," but the Southerner was forced to leave unsatisfied. "There was something unseen, but I know not what . . . It would take days & weeks to familiarize me with the *spirit* of the place which alone could satisfy me."<sup>16</sup> While he was sometimes disappointed, often his hopes were realized. On his arrival in Italy, he found he could not "but feel uncommon sensations in putting my foot for the first time on the native soil of the Romans."<sup>17</sup> And in his excitement striding the fields about Charleroi, he succeeded in identifying with the protagonists at Waterloo and in some measure reliving their struggle.

Hammond's notions about the inspired character of certain historic places were coupled with equally Romantic conceptions about art. But he was not content simply to admire the treasures of the British Museum or the Louvre, although he dutifully visited both. No artist himself, Hammond nevertheless discovered that through the purchase of paintings and sculpture he could achieve a measure of the transcendence deriving from personal involvement in artistic creativity. Moreover, as connoisseur and collector he could combine with these benefits the more practical and worldly advantages accruing to the upwardly mobile from profitable investment, education in taste, and the acquisition of *objets d'art* to dazzle ones friends at home. "I have become smitten," he confessed in a letter to South Carolina in January 1837, "with the prevailing mania for the fine arts."<sup>18</sup> Hammond became a patron of a young American artist in Rome, commissioned a portrait of his wife, and sat himself for a bust by the sculptor Bartolini,

<sup>15</sup> Hammond, Aug. 11, 1836, European Diary, v. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Hammond, July 21-22, 1837, European Diary, v. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Hammond, Oct. 2, 1836, European Diary, v. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Hammond to Dr. Milledge Galphin, Jan. 8, 1837, Hammond-Bryan-Cumming Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

who was shrewd enough to remark to the vain Carolinian that he bore a "striking resemblance" to a bust of Augustus in Rome.<sup>19</sup>

By February of 1837, seven months after his arrival in Europe, Hammond had spent \$2,000 on art work, a sum amounting to about fifteen percent of the cost of his trip. Each purchase represented to him the achievement of a new level of artistic sensibility and thus symbolized his continuing progress toward that enlightenment and sophistication his European travels were designed to impart. Upon his return to France in April of 1837 after a winter in Florence, Rome, and Naples, he was able to recognize with pleasure and pride that "Italy has improved my taste."<sup>20</sup> By the time he departed for the United States in October, he had acquired between forty and fifty paintings and the same number of engravings. Hammond would be crushed when South Carolina neighbors only gazed at his collection "with the apathy of Indians," for he was well-pleased with his accomplishments as a connoisseur of the arts.<sup>21</sup>

The mixture of awe and contempt in Hammond's attitude toward the wonders of the Old World was evident not just in his view of places and artifacts, but of the living society he found all around him, the social order that had emerged from amidst these monuments. Entranced by the turrets and towers of Warwick Castle, Hammond reflected upon the influence of these remnants of the past on present realities. With a typically Romantic understanding of the significance of place, he mused, "Is there not a great moral difference between a man, born and nurtured amid these scenes, & one bred in the forests of the West? And must he not be less than a man whom it would not elevate & ennoble to have been not only born and nurtured here, but be the hereditary master of the grand and hollow monuments of his illustrious ancestry?" Yet he did not fail to recognize the personal implications of such infatuation with an hereditary aristocracy to which he had no claim. "Let it not be supposed," he quickly added, "that I am dazzled by Warwick Castle & ready to stoop before a titled aristocrat . . . I am still as proud a freeman as ever, & except in mere outward circumstances feel myself the peer of any nobleman nor would I at this or any moment of my life, by word or act convey

<sup>19</sup> Hammond, Nov. 22, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Hammond, April 12, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Hammond, Feb. 28, 1841, *Diary*, Hammond Papers, Library of Congress.

even the inference, that I felt myself inferior in any of the attributes that constitute a man.”<sup>22</sup> Yet even as he rejected any implication of genetic or hereditary inferiority, he could not entirely convince himself of his equality with those raised in the traditions of the English aristocracy. “I cannot but believe that I should in many respects have been another being had I passed my life amid the massy battlements of these feudal structures, & inspired my imagination with the ideas that from these very towers my forefathers had hurled destruction on their foes.”<sup>23</sup>

With increasing wealth and social prominence, Hammond would come later in his life actively to defend the aristocratic aspects of South Carolina government and society against the encroachments of democracy. But his European experiences forced him to recognize that he was no thorough-going aristocrat, at least not in the European sense of the term. Perhaps his own comparatively humble origins combined with his high aspirations to compel him to defend as the American ideal a natural aristocracy of talent, in contrast to the English elite of birth. The “inherent difference between a gentleman born & a gentleman only bred, of which so much has been said is far more obvious among the English than us, and arises from that subserviency to rank which an American never feels and an Englishman never gets over.”<sup>24</sup> Himself but a “gentleman bred,” Hammond understandably defended the social mobility that his very presence in Europe represented. “The American citizen,” he would write in 1845 to an English abolitionist who had criticized the unfree labor system of the South, “counts *your* freedom slavery, and could not brook a state of existence in which he daily encountered fellow mortals, acknowledged and privileged as his superiors, solely by the accident of birth.”<sup>25</sup>

Even to a citizen of the most aristocratic of the United States, European hierarchicalism seemed extreme, and prompted the young South Carolinian to constant denunciation of the usages and affectations of class. Perhaps in part because of his erratic health and his lack of fluency in foreign languages, Hammond’s own

<sup>22</sup> Hammond, Aug. 11, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Hammond, Aug. 11, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Hammond, June 28, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2. See also *Diary entry for April 12, 1837.*

<sup>25</sup> James Henry Hammond, *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond* (New York: John F. Trow & Co., 1866), p. 111.



involvement with European society was limited, and he used his numerous letters of introduction only occasionally. But in his personal life as well as his more philosophical observations, he found himself at once attracted and repelled by the pretensions of the European elite.

In June of 1837, Hammond was invited to a breakfast given by Samuel Rogers, resident poet at Trinity College, Cambridge, and a friend of a friend of the South Carolinian's. Hammond found himself ignored during a two and a half hour conversation about an entirely unfamiliar bard named "Tennison or Dennison," and he complained to his diary of this "most excessive rudeness." But Hammond at first restrained his outrage by proclaiming himself "On the whole . . . amused, for once such things are worth seeing as matters of curiosity." Unable long to maintain this air of detachment, Hammond soon lapsed into an attack on the customs of the English elite: "damn such manners say I. I could not put up with it long. The Americans have brought themselves into contempt by succumbing to the English & suffering themselves to be treated like dogs in order to get into society—and brag of it at home."<sup>26</sup>

For the most part, Hammond seemed to prefer and even seek out the company of Americans as he moved from country to country. On a number of occasions, he was delighted by meeting acquaintances from South Carolina and Georgia, and in Italy he travelled in the company of a wealthy Louisiana family named Morgan. Obviously dependent on these acquaintances, Hammond confessed loneliness when they left Rome a few days before him. But his relationship with the Morgans made clear that despite his strictures upon European aristocracy, Hammond was by no means a democrat; his ambivalence about class was profound. Although he resented being patronized by Europeans, Hammond could take satisfaction in reasserting his own superiority in a similarly pretentious fashion and reclaiming the position of control in his social milieu. He complained constantly of the Morgans as *nouveau riche*, as people "vulgar in breeding" with whom he associated only because of the "want of better company."<sup>27</sup> Conflicting sentiments of egalitarianism and hierarchicalism were to trouble Hammond all his life, in large part, no doubt, because of the social ambiguities that derived from his own rapid upward

<sup>26</sup> Hammond, June 28, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Hammond, April 2, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

mobility. His friends the Morgans were scarcely more *nouveau riche* than he.

Throughout his political career, Hammond continued to invoke democratic principles against the entrenched power of the old families of low-country South Carolina, yet at the same time to defend South Carolina's aristocratic usages against her outside attackers. It was as if he endeavored to protect himself—as he had in Europe—against the claims of either democrats or aristocrats by calling upon the values and ideology of the other. Like other Carolina planters of his era, Hammond found himself compelled over the next three decades to defend his state's paradoxically aristocratic democracy, which exalted the privileged planter as just one among many agriculturists, as simply the first amongst equals. And throughout his life, as well as his European sojourn, Hammond would frequently seek to diminish the force of these contradictions by reference to the concept of a natural aristocracy open to talent.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time that Hammond's European travels forced him to confront such ambivalence, the trip brought into new perspective another dimension of personal as well as ideological conflict. In the years immediately preceding his embarkation, Hammond had evolved into a highly self-conscious Southern sectionalist. As a leading editor of the Nullification press, a Governor's aide-de-camp during the height of the crisis, and the voice of proslavery extremism in the Congressional gag rule debates of 1836, Hammond had seen his own reputation and fortunes rise as a seemingly direct result of increasingly vehement expressions of his sectional views. Abroad, however, Hammond was regarded not as a Southerner, but as an American, and he began himself to accept this view of his own identity, proudly distinguishing himself from Europeans around him. After only two weeks in Britain, Hammond patriotically relented in his view of Northerners as the leading swindlers of the earth. "As to honesty," he admitted, "I have done the Yankees great injustice in supposing them the greatest shavers of the world. The English are far ahead."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> On the "aristocratic democracy" see Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Ante-Bellum South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* XLV (Nov. 1979): 541-68; and Hammond, Dec. 25, 1850, Diary, HP, SCL.

<sup>29</sup> Hammond, Aug. 20, 1836, European Diary, v. 1.

When the King died during Hammond's stay in London, the South Carolinian at first copied those around him wearing tokens of mourning, for he did not wish to seem exceptional. But after a day's reflection, he removed the crape, for "I was afraid I should be taken for an Englishman."<sup>30</sup> After more than a year abroad, Hammond's homesickness for the United States became so intense that one day he left from a wagon to embrace a sack of South Carolina cotton on a cart passing by. But his nostalgia and affection encompassed as well a storeowner in Sheffield who, born and bred in Boston, was "a Yankee in every way." Hammond's national loyalties were sufficiently strong that he overcame his natural parsimony and purchased a porcelain from the merchant simply "because he was an American."<sup>31</sup> By the time he had come to the end of his travels, Hammond was well aware of these shifts in his identity and loyalties. Profoundly moved by his arrival in New York's magnificent harbor, Hammond thought that even after 15 months amongst Europe's marvels "I had never seen anything so fine," and he recognized tears in his eyes at the sight of the American flag. "I felt that I never loved my country so much. I wondered that I had ever felt otherwise & was conscience stricken for the sin of having at times heretofore wavered in my affection for her. I mentally renewed my allegiances to our glorious banner, and resolved to live and die beneath its folds."<sup>32</sup>

It is impossible to evaluate the abiding influence of such sentiments on the young South Carolinian. With the renewal of the North-South controversy over the tariff after 1842, he was soon to waver in his loyalties once again as he transformed his position as Governor into a role of leadership in the radically disunionist Bluffton Movement. But with age, Hammond's views mellowed somewhat. Although he was to die in 1864 a staunch Confederate, in the secession crises of both 1852 and 1860, he would at first offer moderating positions and compromise stands. Perhaps this reluctance to press for the ultimate break may have been created in part by the emotional realization as he steamed up the Hudson in 1837 that he was not just a Southerner, but an American.

At the same time that certain of Hammond's European experiences worked to reinforce his national allegiance, other inci-

<sup>30</sup> Hammond, July 2, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Hammond, Sept. 16, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Hammond, Nov. 1, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

dents and perceptions had a countervailing impact, one that in the long run would prevail and come to serve as a pillar of his support for slavery and Southern sectionalism. While his observations of and reflections on free labor were for the most part less dramatic than his conversion experience in the New York harbor, they reinforced his commitment to the South's peculiar institution and provided him with concrete evidence from personal observation of the failures—as well as the inconveniences—of free society. Although he had travelled in the Northern United States, he had never before had the opportunity to observe long-established societies with mature and fully developed systems of labor; nor had he previously had occasion to compare the operation of these systems among people of varying history and character.

Hammond's attitudes about European labor were to derive most directly from his difficulties in securing coachmen and domestics during his sojourn abroad. "Servants . . .," he remarked after nine months of experience, "are enough to embitter European life."<sup>33</sup> Accustomed to the attentions of an army of slaves, Hammond demanded a great deal from those in his employ, and was constantly unhappy about the standard of performance he received. He was appalled that his hirelings should presume to declare limits on his rights over them; he sought in vain for the emblems of subservience to which he was accustomed even amongst the most recalcitrant of his slaves. A new servant, Hammond discovered, "commences cheating . . . in every possible way . . . & screening himself from every bodily service that he can, not . . . [by] laziness like a negro, but by claiming exemption from this, that & the other sort of service—in short he acts as tho' he was a member of some English Duke's establishment"<sup>34</sup> This presumption, Hammond found, greatly undermined servants' effectiveness and utility. "It is astonishing how little use they are to you compared with what they might be . . . you cannot trust them half so far as one of our negroes."<sup>35</sup>

Predictably, the South Carolinian's attempt to secure retainers who would meet his expectations posed difficulties and led to constant changes in his household staff. One valet quit, Hammond reported indignantly, because he was not permitted to have com-

<sup>33</sup> Hammond, April 12, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Hammond, April 12, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Hammond, May 5, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

pany or sleep past seven. Accustomed to restricting his slaves' consumption of spirits entirely to medicinal doses, Hammond recorded in amazement that the valet also complained of being supplied with insufficient wine.

The need to provide wages in cash prompted Hammond to fear that his servants—like all other Europeans he encountered—might be cheating him. “To feel another man’s hand in your pocket all the time is one of the most unendurable things on earth.”<sup>36</sup> In his later defenses of the South’s peculiar institution, Hammond would argue that the cash nexus of employer and hireling destroyed the natural bonds of human warmth and devotion that thrived in what he regarded as the non-pecuniary relationship between master and slave. In his dealings with servants in Europe, Hammond felt the constant intrusion of financial realities eroding trust and devotion between him and his retainers. “I have seen nothing from which I can infer,” he wrote several weeks after his arrival, “how the higher classes treat servants, postillions &c, but I imagine very harshly. I find that the shorter I am with them, the better it is—How different this from our negro servants on whom kindness is never lost.” Even from a distance of three thousand miles, Hammond thought frequently and fondly of his slaves at home, sending them “howdies” in letters to his family, purchasing decorated Venetian pipes as Christmas gifts for all hands, and speculating on the possibility of wooden shoes as an improved form of slave attire.<sup>37</sup>

The quick turnover of his European household personnel troubled the Carolinian, for he had become accustomed to legitimate his role as master with images of his benevolence and paternalism, notions than lingered even in this new European environment. In Rome, he discharged a servant who had been with him several weeks, and found that “This fellow who is rude, unfeeling, faithless, whose stupidity & cowardice has so often provoked me to abuse him more than I have ever done a slave, this fellow it cost me a severe pang to part with after all.”<sup>38</sup> Despite his objective failings as an attendant, Jean might have succeeded in winning reinstatement if only he had indicated an understanding of Ham-

<sup>36</sup> Hammond, April 12, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Hammond, Aug. 14, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1. On his slaves, see Hammond, May 3, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2; Hammond to Catherine Spann Hammond, Nov. 15, 1836, Sept. 2, 1836, and Jan. 1, 1837, HP, SCL.

<sup>38</sup> Hammond, Dec. 4, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

mond's *emotional* expectations of his servants. "Had he exhibited any contrition or shown any feeling of mortification," Hammond admitted, "I believe I should have relented & taken him back."<sup>39</sup> But the Frenchman obviously did not understand what it meant to play Sambo.

Europeans would not display the required subservience, and Hammond's failures to extract it provoked him to frustration and even rage. When he left England for the continent, he was infuriated by demands for tips from servants he thought he had already generously compensated. Having expected a satisfying exhibition of appreciation, Hammond was at first disconcerted and then angered by their ingratitude. "I peremptorily refused to pay a penny more to anybody . . . & being now in a passion began to throw out a few damns at the first of which the Porter fled & saved me the trouble of kicking him down Stairs."<sup>40</sup>

The discrepancy between the Carolinian's attitudes towards servants and prevailing European custom appeared most clearly when Hammond's physical abuse of a Belgian menial led to his imprisonment. When his landlady in Charleroi seemed to be cheating him, Hammond resolved as usual not to be victimized and ordered his coachman to drive away with the disputed charges unpaid. But a servant of the Hotel seized the reins and halted Hammond's carriage. Hammond "warned the servant . . . I would strike him." But the Belgian was not easily cowed, and surprised Hammond by challenging him to use physical force. Having been dared to defend his claims to authority, the Carolinian delivered the servant "a severe rap upon the hand." But the Belgian still felt no compunction to submit and no apparent fear of Hammond's power. When the servant "turned upon me," Hammond determined to punish him for his insolence. "He was a sturdy fellow & twice my strength but I held him off until I wore out my stick on him & then turning the butt gave him seven severe blows on the head which sickened him, but the stick was too light to knock him down . . . The fellow pulled off his hat & his head I was glad to see was in a gore & bled profusely."<sup>41</sup>

But insolence in the servant class did not in Belgian eyes justify the same response as would similar presumption on the

<sup>39</sup> Hammond, Dec. 4, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Hammond, Aug. 24, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Hammond, May 29, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

part of a slave in the American South. Hammond's next diary entry was written from "the midst of all the felons" in a Belgian jail. Despite the humiliation and inconvenience of this encounter with the law, Hammond was unrepentant, insisting he had acted properly to defend his own prerogatives and to maintain the appropriate line of demarcation between the master and the servant class. Indeed, he asserted that the true assault was not his physical attack upon the Belgian, but the servant's challenge to the Carolinian's authority in halting the movement of his carriage. Under prosecution of Belgian officials, Hammond demanded in return "a process against the servant who assaulted me by seizing my horses." After six hours of confinement "lighted only by two grates," Hammond's anger had dimmed sufficiently that he agreed to pay the 500 franc deposit required for his release. Although it was officially understood that he was to return for trial in ten days, the Carolinian forfeited his bond, and departed for France.<sup>42</sup>

These personal difficulties with European-style masterhood prompted Hammond to more general reflection upon the status and condition of the laboring and dependent classes. While he found their behavior to smack too much of independence and too little of subservience, the objective realities of their lives seemed to provide small foundation for such claims to autonomy. The actual circumstances of the European masses were those of dependence and deprivation. From Rome, Hammond informed an uncle that "The people are degraded below our negroes as are the lower classes everywhere I have been in Europe & much worse off."<sup>43</sup> All over the continent, Hammond was struck by the "excesses of suffering and despair" that seemed to consume fully one half the population. English villages too were filled with "dirty cheerless looking dwellings" certainly no more comfortable "than is commonly seen in our negro quarters."<sup>44</sup>

The situation of the European "surfs," as Hammond called them, seemed analogous to that of the Southern slaves, for he found amongst them the same stupidity, the same essential, "moral character" as that of his own bondsmen. His comparison of European with Carolinian social order prompted him to conclude that

<sup>42</sup> Hammond, May 29, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Hammond to John Fox, Dec. 18, 1836, HP, SCL.

<sup>44</sup> Hammond, Feb. 5, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2; Aug. 14, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

of race and of environment, European laborers were the functional and moral equivalent of Southern slaves; each group was shaped "by the same causes, viz. uncultured minds—circumscribed locoeach system had produced a similar class. Despite the differences motion & constant labour."<sup>45</sup> In this perception lay the genesis of what was to be Hammond's most famous political pronouncement. In 1858 he would offer to his fellow United States Senators a ringing defense of the South's peculiar institution, proclaiming to the world at large that in every society "there must be a class to do menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life. . . . Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization and refinement. It constitutes the very mudsill of society and of political government."<sup>46</sup>

Travel in Europe provided Hammond with the opportunity to discover for himself the existence in a supposedly "free" society of a class whose condition and prospects differed little from those of Southern slaves. Indeed, Hammond concluded in 1836, the differences that he could discern for the most part reflected favorably on Southern society. As he noted in this same 1858 address, the racial identity of the Southern slave worked greatly to the system's benefit. "Fortunately for the South, she found a race adapted" to the role of the mudsill, one whose biological "inferiority" and natural "docility" eliminated the displays of insolence he had been subjected to by European laborers.<sup>47</sup>

And during his European sojourn, Hammond amassed evidence as well for his contention that in objective conditions of life and work, the Southern system was superior. The lot of Europe's mudsills was one of labour "more constant & unrelieved by far than our negroes from childhood to the grave." In Ireland particularly, Hammond was struck by the "greatest appearance of wretchedness and poverty." Amidst signs advertising cheap passage for immigrants to New York, Hammond found thousands living in miserable huts, unable to eat meat more than once or twice a year. Deeply moved, the Carolinian responded with unaccustomed generosity to Ireland's legion of beggars. "I don't know why it is, but

<sup>45</sup> Hammond, Sept. 25, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1; Aug. 14, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, p. 318.

<sup>47</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, pp. 318-319.



I feel inclined to give & do give five times as much as I did in France & Italy. . . . It makes the heart ache to walk the streets.”<sup>48</sup>

Hammond did not soon forget the impression of these scenes of poverty. It seems more than coincidental that the two philosophical defenses of slavery that made his reputation as an architect of the proslavery argument during the 1840s were directed against British critics of the American slave system and rested prominently on strictures against the deprivation that had so disturbed Hammond during his trip abroad. To the attacks of Thomas Brown of the Free Church of Glasgow and of English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, Hammond replied with an assertion of the superiority of the South's peculiar institution to the “squalid misery, loathsome disease, and actual starvation” of British laborers, conditions “verified by the personal observation of many of us.”<sup>49</sup> After his European trip of 1837-38, Hammond's proslavery sentiments would be strengthened by his scientific observations in comparative sociology, and they would be stimulated and vitalized as well by the emotional revulsion Hammond felt towards the crowds of beggars and the insolent servants who came to symbolize for him the European laboring class. The South was far better off, Hammond concluded, with a mud sill of laborers and domestics who were docile and black. He would join other defenders of slavery in arguing—now from the conviction of personal experience—that the freedom of free societies was greatly overrated.

While it is impossible ever to trace directly the sources of an individual's ideas or to determine with certainty the influences upon his thought, it is important to recognize the way in which the immediacy of personal experience can crystallize a variety of perceptions into a pattern of meaning that has profound and lasting effect. Indeed, this seems to have been the impact of Hammond's European trip. At a time when he sought reassurance about both his personal situation as a newly-arrived aristocrat and his philosophical stance as a defender of Southern slavery, he embarked on a journey to a different world where he could not help but search out emotional and intellectual reassurance for his position. Hammond went to Europe to find not just health, but a new sense of security. Undoubtedly he had already encountered comparisons

<sup>48</sup> Hammond, Aug. 14, 1836, *European Diary*, v. 1; Aug. 17 and 23, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Hammond, *Letters and Speeches*, p. 108.

of Southern slavery and European labor in his readings; certainly he was familiar with American discussions of European class and privilege. But the force of personal involvement with these realities was to refine his perceptions and provide them with an emotional underpinning that would fix them firmly in his mind and permanently affect his thinking about the nature of social order. For the rest of his life, Hammond would refer to his European experiences and the insights they had first compelled him to articulate. His travels had indeed opened for him, as he put it, "a new chapter" in his reflections "on the social system."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Hammond, Jan. 1, 1837, *European Diary*, v. 1.