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THE ELEMENTAL IDEAS OF HARRIET BEECHER STOWE
REVOLUTIONIZED POPULAR THOUGHT
IN A CRITICAL PERIOD OF
AMERICAN HISTORY

BY
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INTRODUCTION

Reacting to oppression, and its consequent cruelty, Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1851 wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel was a reply to the evils of the slave system. For too long a time, an attitude of heartless submissiveness to slavery was noted in the United States. Sincere citizens of the North and the South alike saw its injustice. But either through the want of leadership, or through the fault of ignorance, these groups lacked the determination to make slavery an issue and to abolish the institution. The feeling and courage of a friend of humanity was needed. Mrs. Stowe assumed this role. With her, the harrowing scenes of cruelty amounted to disgrace; Christian charity and righteousness rose to honor and respect. Then, upon the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a new era of thought was ushered in; and its effects were soon felt not only in America but also in the Old World.

Mrs. Stowe was well prepared to serve the need of the hour. She had had an excellent home education. Early in childhood, she was trained in serious and logical thought. Reared in a family of ministers and political speakers, she learned to be observant of what pertains to the soul as well as of affairs in the current
trend of the times. By habits of meditation she became introspective. Hence observation and introspection, the two requisites of a student of psychology, were developed in Harriet at an early age. And if Harriet had the ambition to become the emancipator of the slave, she had abundant need of the art of the true psychologist. For was not her task to be the work of regeneration? Indeed! She was to be the interpreter of human feelings and emotions, the judge of the wicked, the comforter of the oppressed.

Certainly Mrs. Stowe knew that it was with a contentious, greedy mind that the economic masters of the Southern states viewed the possible liberation of the negro. She had, therefore, to consider their reaction when sketching the pictures destined to bring about the freedom of the slave. Well she realized that the acceptance of her ideas in the South, as well as in the North, meant a long step toward the reception of her appeal abroad and in the United States. The task that she had set herself to accomplish was not an easy one. Mrs. Stowe, early trained to maturity of judgment, knew that; but she was willing to undertake such a project.

It was her conviction of right and justice more than anything else that influenced her mind in behalf of the negro. She rose in religious fervor and thought above her task. She struck with fire and energy, with pathos and love. Because she knew the import of her
writing, she cast about for truthful, colorful material. Steeped in reading of all kinds about the system of slavery, she found it necessary to separate fact from fiction, the false from the true, because the one thing that Mrs. Stowe wished to depict was the truth about the slaves.

There was no intention on her part simply to attract the popular mind. The purpose of her book was rather the alleviation of suffering. While she hoped that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would, perhaps, bring some financial remuneration, that was only a secondary consideration. To know the truth and to express it effectively was her prime motive. Study and research were to implement her ideas concerning the fundamental rights of man. Well she realized that all the stories she had read or heard about the slaves were not wholly true. They could not be accepted in their entirety, nor would it be wise to reject them altogether. So Mrs. Stowe concluded that the best procedure would be to use her own experiences and the experiences of friends.

To be sure, Mrs. Stowe showed good judgment in recalling her own experiences and those of her friends. From the actual happenings of the moment she could draft her scenes for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Already many citizens were eye-witnesses to similar cruelties inflicted on the negro. The terms *slave-pens, bloodhounds, slave-whips* were used by every one in ordinary conversation. To
utilize her own observations and experiences, therefore, 
would be to represent scenes already etched in the minds 
of many citizens. As a result the details of her scenes 
took on the evidence of truth. They were the truth, for 

... some of the most harrowing incidents related 
in the story had from time to time come to Mrs. 
Stowe's knowledge in conversation with former 
slaves now free in Ohio.¹

It is well to remember, too, that Mrs. Stowe bore testi­
mony to the kindness of some slave-holders, as well as 
to the cruelties of others. She was in a position, 
therefore, to represent the slave question in a fair man­
ner. The stroke that she wished to drive home was that 
the evils of slavery were unbearable, and certainly un­
just, even under the toleration of a Christian master.

It is not difficult to note why the victims of 
the slave system considered their condition intolerable. 
The evils that the system propagated infringed upon their 
elemental natural rights. The divine spark within them 
told them that they were never made to be buffeted, 
slapped and kicked about by ruffians. Mrs. Stowe was 
the defender of the same idea. She believed, and rightly 
so, that every human being was endowed with God-given 
rights; that no man could deprive another of these, his 
inheritance. In contrast to this belief, advocates of 
slavery relegated to the negro a status of inferiority.

¹Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (New 
This theory had no foundation in science; the differences which exist among peoples of the earth are far less important than their similarities. Nevertheless, the master owned the slave as he possessed his horse or his dog. The slave, in other words, was due no better treatment than an animal. Sometimes he was accorded not even that. The negro could be used or abused. For the most part he was abused. As a consequence every opinion expressed contrary to the ideas of the slave master was sufficient reason to throw the latter into a fit of rage. Then it was that vengeance fell heavily on the poor oppressed unfortunate victims. These two attitudes toward the slave—that of kindness, and that of cruelty—depended on the pagan or Christian morality of the holder. Both attitudes found expression in Uncle Tom's Cabin and were well implemented. The cruelty of the one was harrowing; the kindness of the other, God-like.

While Mrs. Stowe was pondering, and recalling scenes for her book, politicians were jockeying for supremacy in the slave world. To them might was right. They jostled each other at the market places; they crowded the platforms. Without a single pang of sorrow, they rivaled one another in selling men and women to the highest bidder. All the time, master-holders and ruffians were forgetting that the mind of man was impressionable, that these scenes of horror were daily being registered by some individuals. People, here and there,
were moved by thoughts or feelings of revolt. Restlessness was taking hold of the nation.

All in all, the period was ripe for a change in thought. With a change in thought, there would be evoked a change in action. Mrs. Stowe grasped the psychology of the time. She sensed the crying need. There and then she determined to become an agitator for the liberty of the negro. She would avail herself of the opportunity that the uneasiness of the period afforded. This was her chance, she knew. To be sure, she would use it to revolutionize thought in America by creating,

... the story of a Judea located south of the Ohio river, with a whipping post for a cross, slave owners for Pharisees, preachers and politicians for hypocrites and Pilates, and a cotton plantation for the scene of the Passion Play.

Spiritualizing her idea of liberty for the slave, she could draw an analogy between the sufferings of Christ and the miseries of the negro. Christ was a sacrificial victim. "He was wounded for our iniquities and bruised for our sins." As the sacrifice of the Son of God was necessary to free humanity from the bondage of sin, so was the graphic description of the blood, the sweat, the wounds and the sorrows of "Uncle Tom" essential to free the negro from the shackles which bound his soul as well as his body.

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3Isaias 53: 5.
Mrs. Stowe did well to use Christ in Divine metaphor. She realized that the human being in the negro needed to be rediscovered. Not the man of whom people were long since conscious, but the rational colored man of whom some Americans knew very little. That discovery, Mrs. Stowe's religious training taught her, was conditioned upon knowing Him according to whose image and likeness man was made, for only when God is relevant does man begin to be free.4

And without doubt the writer pictured the whole man—not only the intellectual man, but the emotional man as well—man,

... endowed with instincts, feelings—man susceptible to purely emotional reactions of pity, anger, tenderness, horror, rage, fear, indignation, courage, vanity, envy, pride, generosity.5

By depicting him as a composite being, made up of body and soul, Mrs. Stowe raised the negro to a normal plane. She brought him to the minds of the people as a creature of God. He was a human being of divine origin, endowed with inalienable rights. Truly, then, he who would lay hands on one of God's creatures afflicted God Himself.

Her plan for execution was sublime. Its thought showed that this woman was a genius, not so much in literary excellence as in goodness, and in the transcription of the attributes of goodness.

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Is it surprising, then, that for the first time in the history of America, the people recognized the negro as a human being? They could not, thereafter, as Christians, evade the issue presented. Public conscience was awakened. The country was troubled. It tossed restlessly in its anguish. The Southern states as well as the Northern ones began to sense the attitude of rebellion. Magazines voiced replies. But all to no avail. The moment had arrived when America had to yield to world opinion concerning slavery, or else withstand the jeers of mankind. The Civil War was on. Lincoln said that Mrs. Stowe was the little lady who had caused it.

But Mrs. Stowe manifested no resentment toward slave holders. Far from it. She labored rather consciously to avoid any exposition of hate. She worked toward full human brotherhood—oneness of mankind. Love it was that prompted her to demand respect for the sanctity of every individual child of God. Love was Mrs. Stowe's existence. It embraced all mankind regardless of race or color. If it were limited, Uncle Tom's Cabin could not have been written. As a consequence, slavery would have lost a defender; the world, a beautiful memory of unselfish devotion and a life of consecration.

Without doubt Uncle Tom's Cabin was calculated to effect a change in popular thought. By giving the negro his right place in the human family, Mrs. Stowe elevated his position. Her exposition of the elemental
human-right idea gave a correct perspective to public conscience. Undoubtedly, it struck a basic idea. Elemental human rights belonged to the colored race long before slavery was established as an institution. Moreover, Mrs. Stowe's psychological approach won for her the minds and hearts of sincere peoples throughout the country. Her appreciation of religious values and their influences touched the higher nature of civilized groups everywhere. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exhibited master-touches. Its appeal was universal.

The purport of this paper, then, is to show that the mind of man can be influenced by the sincere representation of truth; that ignorance is sometimes the cause of folly; and, finally, that the exposition of elemental human rights vivified, shaped into form, popularized, can effectively revolutionize thought. Slavery, as a result of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, became not a question of nationalism nor sectionalism but an absorbing worldwide question of what really constituted the fundamental rights of oppressed peoples everywhere in all lands.
As ideas diffuse through the ages, strangely enough they become engulfed at times with subversive connotations. Just when ideas take on these extraneous additions, or to what extent they disemboby themselves of their rightful meanings, it is difficult to determine. The processes in both cases are gradual. Frequently, the evolution of an idea is so imperceptible that it can take root and change attitudes fundamentally before there is much outward manifestation of its force or growth. An idea or attitude that is wrong today appears subtly right tomorrow. In essentially moral matters, of course, this change is only apparent.

One may also ask, what are the influences that operate so successfully in affecting changes? Today the answer is found largely in public opinion; and so we investigate the influences that mold public opinion. Religious and political and educational forces play each a share in forming public sentiment. The stage and cinema and press, too, are active agents in coloring people's thought. The stage was especially effective in doing so during Harriet Beecher Stowe's day. And so it
is that ideas change. Today there is a belief generally current that the black men were always slaves. But anybody who has observed or read certainly knows that nothing could be further from the truth. Nor was the native land of the colored people a peculiarly slave region:

Africa was no more a slave hunting ground than Europe or Asia, and Greece and Rome had much larger numbers of white slaves than black.¹

There is no doubt that slavery always existed in one form or another. The idea of slavery as peculiar to Africa may have been associated with the movement of the black slaves to Egypt. Certainly bondage was not the real reason for the movement. There was another motive, and a more logical one. Early in the fifteenth century the principal line of Egyptian conquest and defense was in the direction of Central Africa. Hence the black man followed naturally the area of conquest, or was employed as an agent of defense. And when he took up his abode in Egypt, he was not maltreated. The Egyptian himself had a strain of negro blood. It is unlikely, therefore, that he would render subservient him who claimed the same racial ancestry. It is true, however,

... that Egypt enslaved all races of all colors, and if there were more black than others among the slaves, there were also more blacks among her nobles and her Pharaohs.²

²Ibid., p. 143.
The negro race can boast of its antiquity. Their concentration about the Mediterranean formed a part of the ancient world. It is to be noted that the comings and goings of the negro there caused no consternation, surprise, nor dislike. Freely he moved about and was regarded as a part of the local civilization. He was simply a fellow man. What was predicated of the white man was predicated of him. Hate and greed had not yet contributed their share in changing the mental picture of the black man. No dishonor was due him. He was associated in marriage with the political élite. History even proffers the information that Clitus, the brother-in-law of Alexander the Great, was black.

When Homer sings of a black man, he represents him as a reverend herald,

Of visage solemn, sad but sable hue, short, wooly curls, o'erfleeced his bending head, . . . Eurybiayes, in whose large soul alone, Ulysses viewed an image of his own. 3

Greece and Rome had their slaves; Saracens and Moors, theirs the white slave system. To these, color was not a symbol of slavery. Nor was it so considered in ancient or medieval times. The notion of slavery, as it existed among primitive peoples, was . . . a system whereby captives in war are put to tasks about the homes and in the fields thus

releasing the warriors for systematic fighting, and the women for leisure. ⁴

But it is not the purpose of the present writer to give a detailed account of the origin of slavery, nor explicitly to analyze its sources. Suffice it to say that the African, around whom this paper centers, came from a country that had long since been exploited by foreigners. In the seventh and eighth centuries the Mohammedans had established themselves in Western Asia and had begun to take over Northern Africa. They were tactful in their procedures, without a doubt. They purchased Africans who were already enslaved. For at this period, the seventh and eighth centuries, the sale of slaves was a common transaction throughout Europe and Asia. The chief object was to carry on the business of war. And let there be no mistake, war was the deliberate business of many, if not of all nations. Now, since the Mohammedans had cast a lustful eye on the slave in Africa, it was to be expected that in time their invasion of the country would establish the overthrow of the African race. It did so. Unhappily, the negro was deprived of his human status and cultural achievement by the ruthless invaders. The refinements of culture had long surrounded the African races because,

... scientists now claim that there once existed on the western coast of Africa a very

⁴Du Bois, op. cit., p. 143.
advanced people who influenced even the civilization of the Mediterranean world. 5

Time passed. More definitely, men began to evaluate life in terms of gold and landed property. The spirit of aggression was in the air. Consequently, in the fifteenth century the Mohammedans, whose thirst for power had passed far beyond the bounds of reason, committed to slavery peoples of all colors and races. The weak of Europe, Asia and Africa were under their heel. But Africa determined never to yield. She would fight tyranny. A noble conception this! And one not likely to arise from a race accustomed to subserviency. But the odds were against Africa. Her people, located in small states and communities, could not protect themselves effectively. They fell sorry victims to their ruthless invaders and conquerors.

It was unfortunate that the Africans themselves contributed to their own overthrow. Their mode of living was a hotbed for the development of the slave institution. At this time, early in the fifteenth century, the culture of the African was a small-town culture. For the most part it grew around the family and tribe. There was evidence of close association between members of the same families and tribes and their headsmen, as they were called. This type of organization readily

lent itself to the growth of domestic slavery. Love and loyalty bound the members of the service of headsmen, who were often relatives. Gradually ideas took root that these men could be used anywhere when needed. Indeed they were used for, "in times of war, where the members of the ward would not serve cordially under a stranger, they would in all cases face any danger with their own kinsman as their leaders."6

As a consequence human beings were rated the highest-priced commodity for commerce in Africa. Indeed they were regarded as profitable purchases not only for the elements of war and the arts of commerce, but also for the maintenance of convenience and domestic peace. People took them into their homes as servants. Daily their tasks became more menial. The black man was slowly but surely losing equality as to condition and circumstances.

While the black man was losing par in Africa, peoples of all countries, casting around for lucrative ways of gain, took advantage of the trend of the times. Nations were astir with the noise of exploitation; and there was an erroneous awakening to the idea that might is right. Moreover, the idea became contagious; and eventually Europeans cunningly bartered their ideals of right for a "mess" of pottagè. The black man became a chattel, a thing, a commodity. The slave trade was

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6 Du Bois, op. cit., p. 122.
For this venture the fields afar were inviting. As a matter of fact, they seemed to be beckoning. At least they lured European slave ships to the Far East and to Australia. The exploitation of man was the goal. There was no secret about the maneuvering. Neither the troubles of the waves nor the might of the storm could stay the desire for slave trade. All were interested. The ships were at times received at a foreign port with wild halloo.

All minds seemed to be akin. On one occasion European slave-traders traveled by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Prince Henry of Portugal learned of their arrival. Immediately he dispatched men, presumably distinguished for their business acumen and well versed in slave salesmanship, to trade gold dust for negro slaves. France was interested in African negotiations. In 1562 John Hawkins, England’s famous sea-captain, took slaves from Guinea to Santo Domingo. As a general rule, these traders and master-holders of the early fifteenth century disavowed their Christian duty as neighbors when they held trembling souls in lease.

This cursory glance at the history of slavery naturally leads the serious thinker to a consideration of the influences which operated so effectively after the fifteenth century to degrade man, to bring into sharp focus two distinct civilizations. For, as is
well known, there was no great difference between European civilization and that of Negroland before the fifteenth century. What, then, was the cause of the disparity in the civilizations during the four centuries following? It could not have been the lack of intellectual training. To be sure these were not the days of decadence in learning. Some universities were the crowning glory of the ages; and the fruit of their labors was abroad in the world. The era produced geniuses. There were Shakespeare, Raphael, Lincoln, Napoleon, Joan of Arc—all connoisseurs in their own fields: literature, painting, government, strategy, mysticism. Nor was the era one of low degree in religion. There were Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Saint Charles Borromeo, and Saint John Bosco—all social-minded, saintly. In industry the period was one of expansion and manifested adroitness in organization. Yet, strange to say, these four hundred years, from 1500 to 1900, despite learning and sanctity, were the nurseries of despicable institutions. They remain today an unforgettable blot in modern human history.

The cause of divergence in civilizations was not due to the lack of either learning or sanctity. To Du Bois, a set of historical circumstance accounts for the situation:

European civilization, cut off by physical barriers from further incursions of tartaric races, settled more and more to systematic industry and
to the domination of one religion; African culture and industry on the other hand were threatened by powerful barbarians from the west and central regions and by the Moors in the North, and Islam had only partially converted the leading peoples.

In the light of this theory it can readily be seen how African culture, not stabilized by either religion or economics, could fall easy prey to the demands for labor. So it did. Africans became slaves within a comparatively short time. They then belonged to masters. When subsequently the need of workmen arose in America, European exportation was restricted by religious affiliations and economic stability. Not so the African field. The negro had no religious ties. Deprived of a livelihood, he became an easy victim to the cunning and graft of money-mongers. From the sixteenth century on, frequent notices show that negroes were common in the New World. Trade monopolies were legally established, and grew gradually from the control of the Portuguese to the Dutch, French and English. In many places the crying demand for labor increased. On the continent of America it grew into astounding proportions.

Negro slaves were crossing the Atlantic at the rate of fifty to one hundred thousand a year. . . . Thus from 1450 to 1850 European civilization carried on a systematic trade in human beings in such tremendous proportions that the physical, economic and moral effects are still plainly to be remarked throughout the world.®

®Ibid., p. 149.

7Ibid., p. 144.
Negro slavery, however, was not introduced into the American colonies until 1619. At that time slavery was of a restricted form. The Virginian had imported the African negro, first from the West Indies and later by direct trade from Africa. It appears that this transaction was conducted more from the viewpoint of an experiment rather than any notion of slave usefulness. The few thousand slaves transported were assigned tasks in the tobacco and rice fields of the South. In the North they were employed as coachmen and butlers. For well-nigh a century little attempt was made to stimulate slave trade. In the eighteenth century, however, the attitude toward slavery suffered a marked change.

The manifest reason for this change was a clause in the treaty of Utrecht consigning to England a monopoly of the slave trade from Africa to the Spanish colonies in America. For the rum distilled in New England there arose a profitable market on the Guinea coast. There was plenty of sugar and molasses in the West Indies for the manufacture of rum. The black man by this time had lost all prestige. The idea of color had taken on a connotative meaning. Blackness and slavery became co-extensive terms. Accordingly, in the current transaction the African slaves were used as a medium of exchange. They were sold by their captive chiefs for rum, they were packed into their stifling holds of wooden vessels and brought through the equatorial seas to the West Indies with all the
horrors of the "Middle Passage." 9

Thenceforth slave importation increased rapidly. In some colonies the people became disconcerted because of the growth of the black element among them. By the middle of the eighteenth century there were more than half a million slaves in the colonies. Urged by humanitarian sentiments, the southern colonies, especially Virginia, passed laws restricting the importation of African negroes. Avaricious for economic gain, England vetoed the laws, and in 1774 Lord Darmouth voiced her attitude. Said he: "We cannot allow the colonies to check or discourage in any degree a traffic so beneficial to the nation." 10 The colonies acquiesced and apparently the slave market became a necessity, for "there was a slave market even in the District of Columbia itself, where Congress sat and northern members observed." 11

The ownership of a slave was as absolute as that of a horse or car. Like fancy stock, slaves passed from seller to purchaser. The sacredness of their persons and their rights were denied them. In consequence many people were shocked at the free and easy treatment of women. Very pretty light mulattoes, for instance, were

10Ibid., p. 311.
often advertised for sale and sold at auction. Right-minded men and women were shocked at seeing the auctioneers "take one of the prettiest of them by the chin, and open her mouth to see the state of her gums and teeth, with no more ceremony than if she had been a horse."12 Nor was it unusual to see dealers, like cattle buyers, riding through the country, with cash in hand, seeking negro sales. When their mission was successful, as frequently happened, they huddled their human possessions together in slave jails. There the unfortunates remained until there was a sufficient accumulation for sale, or perhaps for shipment. It is a fact of history that "in the year 1829 four hundred fifty-two slaves were deposited in the federal prison in Washington, to keep there safe until they could be shipped."13

Five years prior to the time that Harriet Beecher Stowe espoused the cause of the slave, Louisiana and Mississippi had the best slave markets. It was through these two states the negroes were transferred to Texas. Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas did not offer opportunity for exploitation. Without doubt it was the demand of the cotton-growing regions that commercialized the slave. Here in America it was the economic consideration that marked the black man for degradation and


13 Ibid., p. 129.
injustices. Every technological advance naturally affects the way people live; hence it was the thought that the negro could serve best in the cotton fields, that listed him in the books of law definitely property, as cattle or household furniture.

As the idea of slavery was popularized, and its advantages advertised, the political potentates became more interested. The price of slaves went up. Demand increased demand. Eventually the price of a slave was bound up with the price of cotton. Not only with the price of material goods was bondage associated, but with social prestige as well. Conditions were going from bad to worse, until finally Christian leaders stepped forward to decry a system so demoralizing to man. Conjointly, the platform and pen were used to abolish or to mitigate the evils of slavery. The pen seemed to be more effective in changing attitudes toward the slave.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, in particular, was successful in making the evils of slavery known. She impressed not only America but other nations as well that there were some men who could not realize the object of their creation because of bondage. Uncle Tom's Cabin went to press to alleviate the distress caused by this bondage. Correspondents were angry. But their alarm was only a tribute to the influence of Uncle Tom's Cabin and surely it was a force in turbulent times. If it were not the main cause of the Civil War, it certainly
was a major one. It blocked the Fugitive Slave Law.

We read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to learn how the pen of one woman proved stronger than the fugitive slave laws of the United States, how it helped to render of no avail the decrees of the courts, and to usher in a four years' war. 14

She achieved this result because her pictures, whether they were representative or not, were such as appealed to the most elemental principles of human nature. The framers of the Fugitive Slave Law had evidently never thought that a fugitive might be an unfortunate mother or a defenseless child. Eliza crossing the ice in desperate effort to save her child concretely established this idea in the minds of her readers.

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CHAPTER II

MRS. STOWE'S REACTION TO SLAVERY
IN THE UNITED STATES

In the mid-nineteenth century the question of
slavery grew hourly in intensity. Men were casting about
for workers to take over the burden of heavy labor in
congested Southern fields. Because they felt that the
system was destructive of social and religious prin-ciples, some Christian men publicly denounced the evils
of slavery. The sectional divergence between free and
slave states entered every phase of life. Law and poli-
tics, literature and social fellowship were in the con-
troversy. Leaders exhausted every device. They pleaded
and plotted to keep political feelings adjusted and un-
sectional. Certainly the times were in their hands.
They knew it. To engage any leaders but the most effi-
cient in logical thought and speech was to endanger an
important cause. Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Douglas, Seward,
and Chase, and all who spoke of slavery brought the in-
stitution into the public forum.

Even though these men were moved by a variance
of opinion, they accomplished something for the slave.
Through them, the abolition of slavery was emphasized.

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Evils were exposed. Cruel masters were brought into the light. They were made to feel that the ground was slipping from under them; and that the walls were cracking about them. Slowly but surely they were approaching a day of reckoning, even if the first light of that breaking day was as yet but a faint glimmer.

The noise of the platform, however, was not the only sound that could be heard pleading for or denying the rights of the negro. The characters of the pen, too, were clamoring and shouting for interpretation. The advantages and disadvantages of slavery were as effectively expressed in books and magazines as in public squares and platforms. Mrs. Stowe's version of slavery, in dramatized form, "was acted night after night before delighted audiences who would have mobbed an abolitionist orator."¹

The hand that rocks the cradle lent a pitying touch to the appeals that evoked merciful thought. Harriet Beecher Stowe's soul vibrated behind her printed page. She used her faculties in the order of their preeminence. She inscribed nothing contrary to the eternal principles of morality. Uncle Tom's Cabin struck home with an earnestness that made the world stare. By it she accomplished what noisy orators failed to accomplish. She attracted attention to the Fugitive Slave Law, passed in 1850, a law which Emerson said, "did much to unglue

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the eyes of men." Mrs. Stowe solicited opposition to the malicious tenet of this legislation. The Fugitive Slave Law failed of execution. To Harriet Beecher Stowe can be given the credit for the accomplishment.

It is, therefore, here pertinent to be curious about a woman of such political influences—curious about her forbears and girlhood. Without doubt, family influence and education left their traces on the mind and heart of Mrs. Stowe. From earliest childhood, she had acquired an intense longing for reading. This desire was never fully satiated in her youth. Children's books were few. She was forced, therefore, to read books far beyond her age and experience. These she found in her father's library. Fortunately, Reverend Dr. Lyman Beecher, a distinguished Calvinist minister, was possessed of a good library. Mrs. Stowe, in recalling her child life, describes this library as "a sheltered place high above the noise of the house, this room had to me the air of a refuge and a sanctuary," and adds:

> Its walls were set from floor to ceiling with the friendly, quiet faces of books, and there stood my father's great writing chair, on one arm of which lay open always his Crudence Concordance and his Bible. Here I loved to retreat and niche myself down in a quiet corner with my favorite books around me.  

Not only did Harriet Beecher employ her time

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advantageously as reader, but she also profited by listen-
ing and observing. She absorbed knowledge readily. Her youthful mind was awakened by suggestions projected even in classroom discussions and recitations. She was, too, a keen observer of persons and their capabilities. Her teacher, Mr. John Brace, she tells us, taught composition better than any teacher she had known because of "the constant excitement in which he kept the minds of his pupils, the wide and various regions of thought into which he led them." Thus was Harriet Beecher Stowe prepared for future authorship. The urge she had for writing, therefore, found its genesis in classroom dis-
cussions. As a result of Mr. Brace's tutorship, she was able to produce essays in her tenth year. The school, furthermore, afforded recognition of her works. On the occasion of a public exhibition, for instance, her essay was one of three read for the visitors present. This incident was not particularly outstanding; nevertheless, it manifested her leanings toward literary pursuits—it mirrored the trend of her mind.

While the school was engaged in sharpening the mental faculties of Harriet Beecher, the home was build-
ing her religious character. As a matter of fact, the two aspects of her life were developed co-equally. At home prayer was a part of the daily routine. Family prayers were recited after breakfast every morning and

\[4\text{Ibid., p. 14.}\]
again before the family retired for the night. Harriet Beecher was impressionable. She never forgot these private devotions. Frequently, too, she listened attentively to philosophical and theological discussions, and betimes clarified her thoughts in debate with her father. Her mind was shrewd; her memory, retentive. So her home was calculated to give her an appreciation of faith in God, and charity toward all men. From this perspective, she developed a standard of thought and conduct that differed from the thought and conduct of many persons throughout the country. Her standard of living was regulated by the light which she received from her knowledge of the Bible. Mr. Beecher was a great lover of the Bible, and he saw to it, as did many fathers in that day, that the children read Biblical passages frequently. Harriet Beecher, in consequence, not only read the Bible but she committed to memory long chapters and many hymns. This training perhaps overdeveloped her sensitive nature and intensified her emotions. Yet we find, "in the dramatic biography of Mrs. Stowe no emphasis placed on the springboard of Harriet's life which was Christ . . . the intense spirituality which guided her life is veiled."5

Mrs. Stowe was not a religious fanatic at any period of her life. Without doubt she was a sensitive woman, but sane and practical. She was serious-minded

even as a child. At the age of twelve, she showed her introspective nature. It apparently manifested itself in a twofold manner, as we perceive in the following comment:

... Her favorite books as a child were Cotton Mather's *Magnolia* and Baxter's *Saint's Rest*. Her affectionate intimacy with the Bible is patent in all she wrote.6

With a background like this, it is not to be thought strange that Harriet Beecher Stowe became keenly aware of slave conditions about her. With her intellectual and moral training, she could not be blind to them. Herself a member of a large family of eleven children, she had developed a spirit of generosity and love and sacrifice. As a mother of seven children, she was dignified, resourceful, practical, but not wealthy. Thus she lived "cooking, writing, nursing, laughing."7

Harriet Beecher's parents savored of the old stock. Her father, as already stated, was a Calvinist divine; her mother, Roxanna Foote, whom Dr. Lyman Beecher married in 1799, was a cultured lady. "Mrs. Beecher added to everything else a love of painting, and finished twenty-four fine miniatures upon ivory."8 Both parents were religious people. As a matter of fact, the

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6Ibid., pp. 77-78.


father's religion was so deep-rooted that he deprecated the birth of a daughter—Harriet. "Wisht it had been a boy. . . . In the Beecher family boys meant future preachers."9 His disappointment, however, was never openly manifested in the family circle.

At an early age Harriet Beecher fell under the influence of her aunt, Mary Foote Hubbard. Forrest Wilson tells us that "Mary was Roxanna's pretty sister, who, though evanescent, fills a niche in the corridor of Harriet's life."10 Mary, the most literary of the Foote sisters, was the poetess of the family, and probably the one who suffered most from slave ideas and ideals. She was wedded to a man of ignoble and degraded character, who took her as a young bride to Jamaica, where a sad disillusionment met her, for,

In her new home she found a family of mulatto children fathered by the bridegroom. . . . It was a dreadful shock for the New England bride, whose horror was not mitigated by Hubbard's bewilderment at her attitude.11

With such emphasis had Harriet Beecher's aunt Esther repeated this story over and over that it left a permanent impress on Harriet's soul. She could not forget her aunt, Mary Foote Hubbard, and the suffering that had been hers because of prevailing false notions on slavery.

10 Ibid., p. 37.
11 Ibid., p. 38.
When still very young, Harriet's mother died. The father remarried. Too young for logical reasoning, the girl showed that she resented this step. Indeed, she was not slow to show her attitude, for, speaking of her step-mother, she said, "because you have come and married my pa, when I am big enough I mean to go and marry your pa." But childlike, the resentment was of passing, short duration. Harriet gradually grew to like her step-mother, and the step-mother in turn thought that Harriet was as lovely a child as she had ever seen—amiable, affectionate, and very bright.

When Harriet was ten or eleven years of age, she went to Litchfield Academy. The teachers there won her love and confidence. Mrs. Stowe says of this period that

... much of the training and inspiration of my early days consisted not in the things I was supposed to be studying but hearing while seated unnoticed at my desk, the conversation of Mr. Brace with the older classes. There from hour to hour, I listened with eager eyes to historical criticism and discussions, or to recitations in such works as "Paley's Moral Philosophy," "Blair's Rhetoric," "Allison's On Taste," all full of most awakening suggestion to my thoughts.\(^\text{13}\)

Notwithstanding occasional bright spots, Harriet's girlhood continued to be tumultuous. Catherine Beecher, Harriet's sister, began teaching soon after the death of her mother. Circumstances threw Harriet's lot in with hers. In 1823 Catherine opened an academy at Hartford;

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 46.

\(^{13}\)Fields, _op. cit._, p. 20.
and Harriet at thirteen joined the school as a pupil. Catherine took Harriet's interests to heart and guided her in the school she had founded. In terms of present day training, however, she was not the recipient of much education; but she was always a thinker and a good scholar.

In the meantime, Mr. Beecher was offered a position in Cincinnati, as head of the theological seminary. Because of his straightened circumstances, the offer pleased him. Harriet went with her father to Cincinnati.

There she was to live for the next eighteen years—the remainder of her youth . . . Here she experienced some of her sharpest griefs, and the worst of her tribulations. Here she married, buried one of her children . . . began her professional career.  

Harriet Beecher first became acquainted with her husband, Calvin E. Stowe, through his first wife, Eliza Tyler. Harriet was of about the same age as Eliza, and they were very close friends. Eliza died. The news of her death brought a true sorrow to Harriet. "There were not many women of her character and tastes anywhere, but Cincinnati was robbed of its dearest joy to Harriet when Eliza Tyler died." Mr. Calvin E. Stowe was plunged into the deepest woe over his wife's death; so Harriet endeavored to soothe this sad and solitary man. Sympathy

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14 Wilson, op. cit., p. 107.

15 Fields, op. cit., p. 90.
developed into love, and at the end of two years Harriet became his wife—in the year 1836.

Reverend Calvin E. Stowe was her father's colleague in Lane Theological Seminary. In the next sixteen years Harriet combines authorship and motherhood; by 1848 she had become the mother of six children, the oldest only eleven. Her married life brought many difficulties. At times Mr. Stowe was unable to meet the demands and needs of his family; and "merely to begin to hold up the Stowes' end and to escape from pity, Harriet had to earn money. Necessity drove her to her desk." 16

And the agitated times supplied a subject:

The hearts of men were aflame at the Fugitive Slave Law which was then being debated and finally passed by the Congress of that year. The conversation turned upon this topic, and heartrending scenes were described by families broken up, men frozen by flight in winter through rivers and pathless forests on their way to Canada. 17

With a dual motive, Mrs. Stowe investigated the National Era, an anti-slavery magazine at Washington. She was offered a position as contributor, and accepted. With that acceptance Mrs. Stowe projected her personality into the public current issues. From now on her time was divided between her home, which she never compromised, and the press. The Fugitive Slave Law had aroused her anger. Scenes conceived in a moment of emotion she passionately

16 Wilson, op. cit., p. 246.
17 Fields, op. cit., p. 130.
wrote down. The incident of a mother crossing the Ohio River on the ice, of which incident she had read in her local paper, she would use to prove that the natural law takes precedence over a civil law. Senators, she thought, must be made to feel "the magic of the real presence of distress--the imploring eye, the frail, trembling human hand, the despairing appeal of helpless agony." Mrs. Stowe knew that Senators are but men like other men. Therefore, she planned to put a representative of the law, Senator Bird, in a situation that would lead to a decision between the safety of a mother and her child or the Fugitive Slave Law. Mrs. Stowe thus could establish concretely her idea of an elemental human right by having Senator Bird drive the mother and child to safety--thus defeating his own law.

The story began its appearance in the National Era, on June 5, 1851, and was not concluded until April of the next year. It attracted the widest attention, and the National Era somehow got into the hands of men, women and children everywhere, so that when the book appeared in 1852 its great success was not alone confined to this country.

The story ran in three Paris newspapers at once, was promptly dramatized, and has held the stage in France ever since. . . . Uncle Tom's Cabin, more than any other cause, held the English working men in sympathy with the North in the English cotton

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18Halleck, op. cit., p. 104.
Millions of copies of her book were sold; so money was soon forthcoming. She traveled abroad. Her fame, as author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, preceded her. Everywhere she was welcomed and feted. But she never lost her simple religious sweetness, the sincerity, the truth, the honesty that made her a power at a time when puissant force was needed. Without noise of words, without confusion of thought, without heat of argument, she made a universal appeal that perpetrated a civil war. She showed people slavery in the human terms of raped girls. In her book, Mrs. Stowe has a beautiful and refined quadroon girl tell the story. Cassy is her name. She says to Tom:

I've been in this place five years, body and soul, under this man's foot. ... Here you are, on a lone plantation, ten miles from any other. ... Wasn't I a woman delicately raised? ... And now he's got a new one.20

There was really nothing to protect the slave in the slavery institution but the character of the slave owner. Cassy may have had many a counterpart in the history of the institution. Mrs. Stowe made that plainly to be seen. She told the story of slavery, also, in the human terms of wanton wrong regarding the sacredness of family ties—children torn from their parents—wives from their

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20 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. 402.
husbands--sisters from their brothers--to be sold at a
public auction. Mrs. Stowe too presented an honest, up-
right, noble character, Uncle Tom, inhumanly treated by
Simon Legree--a degraded immoral man. These situations
concretely show how a government, divorced from reason and
natural right, can beget the most degrading type of evil.

In her picture of slavery, however, Mrs. Stowe
did not forget the many kind masters and the well-treated
bondsmen found in the slavery system. Far more than half
of her book is devoted to this class. She was honest in
her acknowledgments that many a slaveholder was doing his
best to overcome its evils. The tragedy of Uncle Tom is
stressed by the kind but careless good intentions of the
Shelbys and of St. Clare.

Through her characters--Uncle Tom, Chloe, Sam and
Andy, Miss Ophelia and Simon Legree, Mrs. St. Clare and
Cassy, little Eva and Topsy--Mrs. Stowe embodied the vast
and portentous system of slavery. Her influence on the
thought of the age was immediate, both in this country
and in Europe, because Mrs. Stowe "happened to have just
the tone of mind and the level of culture which were
fitted for a popular appeal, and she employed them to the
utmost effect." 21 Thus to Mrs. Stowe, as to Lincoln,
goes the honor of binding human souls together in the
bond of sacred brotherhood.

21 Percy H. Boynton, American Literature (New
CHAPTER III

THE GENESIS OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Harriet Beecher Stowe, in charity and faith, rose above the prevailing sentiments of her time. Born and reared in an atmosphere of religious thought, this woman had a mind attuned to definite Christian principles. She was not as a reed shaken by the wind. Definitely, she knew whither she was going and whence she had come. She was calm, thoughtful, deliberate. Her charity embraced not only the white race but also the poor unfortunate colored people. "Do good to all men" was the clear and Christian note that she struck. Indeed, hers was the highest type of virtue. A philosophy that was Christian because it was "really as well as ideally true to human nature and nobly true."\(^1\) Therefore, Mrs. Stowe's thoughts and emotions, crystallizing and focusing on Christian charity, began to blossom into a book which so impressed Dean Howells that he said, "This is one of the great novels of the world, and of all time."\(^2\) And Tolstoy, in far-off Russia, was so impressed that, "when he came to write 'What Is Art?' he

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\(^1\) William Dean Howells, "My Favorite Novelist," Munsey Magazine, XVII (April, 1897), 22.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 22.
took Uncle Tom's Cabin as an example of the highest type. Considering, then, Mrs. Stowe's high principles of Christian charity, should we wonder that to her the negro was not a chattel—a thing? A human being she recognized him to be. But she realized also how he was treated by slaveholders. To them the negro was property-inanimate, if you will, for he was buffeted, kicked and maltreated as if he were no more than a piece of furniture, or a garden implement.

The attitude manifested toward the slave by many people of the South, as well as by some holders of the North, was un-Christian. "Barbarous" would be a term more nearly expressive of the cruelties imposed upon him. Because of her innate refinement and sensitiveness to principles of right and wrong, Mrs. Stowe was deeply touched at the ignominy inflicted on negroes. It was to be expected, also, that there would be developed within her impressions, lasting ones, of what she had seen and the pity she had felt. For was she not, too, a creature of emotion and feeling? More than that, was she not possessed of keen mental faculties? In terms of psychology, she reacted as an intelligent human being should react. To her the evils of slavery were both repulsive and un-American.

Surely they could not be otherwise. Harriet's

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mother, a woman of fine moral cast, trained her family to uprightness. The doctrine of the hereafter was well rooted in her life. She believed in the soul's life after death. Certainly, then, she made sure that the same idea would find honorable place in the minds of her children. And it did, for belief was antecedent to the act. Harriet Stowe's mother died when she was only four years old, but the family carefully projected the mother's ideals into Harriet's life. In this way Harriet was imbued with noble sentiments and ethical behavior. Her conduct smacked not of the veneer that the social elite may take on to grace an occasion. On the contrary, her way was the simple, sincere way—begotten of culture and innate refinement. It was her mother's home-training coming to the front. Harriet had often remarked that her mother's memory and example had more influence on her than had the living example and presence of many mothers.

The father, a minister, likewise had no small part in Harriet's mental and moral development. As a consequence his enthusiasms became hers. By him she had been indoctrinated with ideas of pity and mercy for the unfortunate slave. Daily prayers, morning and evening, were recited in this clergyman's home; and, wrote Mrs. Stowe:

When I was a child, one of the strongest and deepest impressions on my mind was that made by my
father's sermons and prayers, and the anguish of his soul for the poor slave of that time.4

Mr. Beecher, like his famous daughter, had developed an awareness for the miseries of the colored race. Their burdens weighed on his very soul. Time and time again he voluntarily made passionate appeals in their behalf. He prayed aloud night and morning for Africa. He prayed that in time Christ would deliver this poor, oppressed country.

All these home associations had had their effect on Harriet Beecher Stowe. She absorbed, as it were, the pity created by the sympathetic atmosphere of her father's discourses. There were planted in her mind and heart thoughts, ideas and ideals that would eventually grow into a declaration of human rights—a declaration calculated to revolutionize thoughts concerning slavery and in many cases to institute reformation in individual lives. The child had become an enemy of slavery for all time. Uncle Tom's Cabin was in the making.

As Harriet grew older, the necessities of life threw her into closer contact with slaves and their problems. Then it was that she realized to its full extent how much the treatment of the slave depended upon the moral fibre of the holder. For him there was no law to regulate conduct toward the slave. The courts were not interested; and the man himself did not provide unto

4 Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. xviii.
himself a law. Nature, as usual, abhorred restraint. As a result, the negro could be used or abused according to the dictates of the master's passions or whims. Mrs. Stowe realized that conditions such as these required fullest publicity, in order to awaken people everywhere to the necessity of political as well as moral reform. When, therefore, Mrs. Stowe eventually permitted these realities to take shape, they exerted an immense influence on American thought, because the essence of what she said about slavery was the truth. It was enough for the public to know that one Simon Legree could exist and did actually exist within the American system of slavery. The thought or the idea that such an institution harboring such a rascal was a possibility irked some people into action. They wrote to Mrs. Stowe, stating that her picture of slavery was an exaggeration.Replying to correspondents from different sections of the country, she wrote "that the separate incidents that compose the narrative are, to a very great extent, authentic, occurring, many of them, either under her own observation or that of her personal friends."  

Certainly it was a happy occasion when the truth about slavery could be forthcoming. In the short history of the United States, repeated injuries had been imposed on the negro for the sole purpose of greed and personal aggrandizement. Already cumulative injustices had

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5*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. 520.
written shame on the character of the American people. Mrs. Stowe felt the disgrace. Her loyalty to her country prompted the feeling. That loyalty was homebred. It had been fostered through years; for, truly, with Harriet next to God was country. So at a future date, that loyalty was calculated to rally to the cause of American dignity. It was native. Truly, patriotic sentiment, wholesome dignity and devoted loyalty were needed to touch off the spirit of Uncle Tom's Cabin. These requisites were embodied among other potentialities in the mind of Harriet Beecher Stowe. For, indeed, she was a great storehouse of thoughts, feelings and emotions.

Mrs. Stowe was very human, full of those qualities that are the common heritage of man; therefore, she could be and was a colossal force in bringing about a change of thought concerning the negro. She was not a Scott, a Dickens, a Hawthorne, a Zola, nor a Tolstoy. Yet none of these "have sensibly influenced a great moral movement, or have disturbed whole communities by the dread of a social revolution."6

Betimnes, Mrs. Stowe kept herself well informed about the existing differences between the North and the South. There were differences naturally because the standards of right and wrong, binding alike on ruler and

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ruled, were based on wrong principles regarding natural law and God as its author. Most of the differences or opinions and queries centered around slavery as an institution. And of course, slavery as an organized system in turn revolved about elemental human rights. Each side, North and South, analyzed the situation more in the terms of its own interests and past experiences. Slavery to the Southerner was a necessary institution for economic reasons; the Northerner, in general objected to this interpretation. To him the negro was a human being, although it can be said that there were some prominent citizens of the North who defended the slave trade and even participated in it. Had not Daniel Webster, America's foremost citizen and one of her greatest orators, upheld the Fugitive Slave Law? He said:

"No man is at liberty to set up or affect to set up his own conscience above the law."  

Mrs. Stowe's reaction to that Law was manifested in her determination, "to translate into concrete form certain phases of the institution of slavery which had been merely an abstraction to the North."  

Notwithstanding Webster's attitude and the attitude of other citizens the trend of the North was that

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8 Halleck, op. cit., p. 104.
of freedom for the negro. Harriet's awareness of the
national crime of slavery recognized the danger to the
country. America was divided against itself. As a con-
sequence, it occurred to Mrs. Stowe that if something
could not be done soon, a country divided against it-
self would surely fall. "Liberty and Union, now and
forever, one and inseparable,"9 was being heralded or
voiced throughout the land. Mrs. Stowe knew well that
a country divided could not stand. Then it was that she
felt her potency, her power. At least she could speak
as a Christian in favor of the slave.

This reaching back into her life, this intro-
spective characteristic that she so heartily developed,
led her to wonder concerning the why of slavery. Surely
Christian people should know the evils of the institu-
tion, she thought. If they did, then it should have
long since been abolished. But the institution, con-
trary to what should have been expected, was flourishing.
Even the "slave codes were more severe in 1860 than in
1830; the national fugitive-slave act was more drastic;
the law of the territories was more favorable to slavery;
the square miles open to slavery had doubled in the
thirty years; the number of slaves had increased from
two millions to nearly four millions."10 Only a few men

9Daniel Webster, "Second Speech on Foot's Reso-
lution" (January 26, 1830), III, 342. Quoted by John
Bartlett in Familiar Quotations (New York: Blue Ribbon
Books, Inc.), p. 533.
here and there raised a finger in denunciation of servitude. All discussion of the subject was being hushed because it endangered the National Union. This from humane and Christian people astonished and distressed Mrs. Stowe. She, therefore, concluded that the Christian world must be ignorant of the nature of slavery, since the oppressed had such a scarcity of defenders. If they did not demand the liberty for the slave, she thought it was because,—"Men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, the question could never be opened for discussion."

Thereupon, reason was establishing a motive for the writing of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. There was a purpose evident. The dissemination of knowledge of the evils of the system was an urgent need. Now there was coming into notice at this present moment, a definite will-force on the part of the writer to do a service for the alleviation of the suffering. The determination, however, was as yet just initiated. More knowledge was required to convince her that ignorance was an issue in the abolition of slavery. When finally she discovered that the institution was kept alive partly because of ignorance, her will to accomplish became more pronounced.

But because of the exigencies of home and family, Mrs. Stowe deferred writing for the moment. Fortunately, however, the need for remunerative work kept her with

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*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, p. 523.
pen in hand. Finances were low in her household. She was helping to eke out a livelihood. She succeeded. More than that—she kept herself well-equipped in the handling of material and in its faithful transcription. What seemed to be just another task, turned out to be a golden opportunity. Practice developed in her a writing-readiness. A good habit, it was, and well calculated to do praiseworthy work in defense of the colored race at a later date. But meanwhile, as she pondered in her mind further matter for magazine articles, it occurred to her that she might try some sketches for the alleviation of the slave. As a matter of fact, she had almost determined to do this when a letter arrived from her sister-in-law. She, too, was alive to the grievous injustices to which the colored people were being subjected. Her soul was disturbed. Many a time she had been an eye-witness to harrowing scenes. But she was helpless. Writing was not her field. Knowing Mrs. Stowe's ability, she addressed her in a friendly manner: "If I could pen as you can, I would write something that would make the whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is." Mrs. Stowe crushed the letter in her hand. The act was a sign for the thing signified. There and then she determined that she would inscribe something to right a grievous wrong. The thoughts, feelings and emotions, pent up for years, loosed themselves and surged to the

12Charles Edward Stowe, op. cit., p. 145.
surface. They clamored for expression. They would take no denial. In that occasion was found the genesis of the story of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

But it was not to the letter alone, however, that Uncle Tom's Cabin owed its origin. Other issues were involved. Not the least among these was the conviction or feeling that she was the instrument by which the book was to be written. It was this conviction that eventually forced her to a conclusion. As a consequence of its persuasive influence, she consecrated her life to the task.

And now, since emotion, intellect and will were united in a common effort to produce a book for the propagation of the truth about the evils of slavery, Mrs. Stowe began to cast around for the selection of her material. Without doubt she had an abundance of first-hand scenes at her immediate disposition. As a matter of fact, she possessed the accumulation of years. But assuredly some observations were bound to be more vivid than others. Reaching back into her consciousness, therefore, she selected material that stood out in her mind as having the potentiality of effectiveness in changing thought or attitude. Naturally, what appealed or horrified her should also appeal or be repulsive to others with the same outlook in life. She resolved, then, to translate into writing her emotional promptings. She planned to pen them along the line in which she wished attitudes to be built or to be broken. Psychology was
now coming to her assistance.

Time and time again, Harriet was disturbed emotionally. She was depressed. But there was always something in Mrs. Stowe, a spiritual spark perhaps, that turned her face toward the sunlight and led her forward. She had good reason to be depressed, for,

As the wife of a professor in Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, a way-station to freedom just across the slave border, she had ample opportunity to learn the horrors of slavery.13

In this city she had lived for eighteen years of her married life. Cincinnati was the hub of commercial activities—and also the haven of the refugee slave. It was there that she personally learned much about the misery of the oppressed. Yet not the misery alone, but also the nature of the negro. Bleeding, sore humanity in the persons of colored runaways found protection in her home. The escaped found refuge and a mother's heart. There is something in the human heart that senses the treachery of a foe, and there is a touch of the divine that marks the nearness of a friend. Some people like to call this power of discernment intuition. No matter what it is termed, the negro knew that Mrs. Stowe was his friend; and Mrs. Stowe knew the value of the individual negro soul. Therefore, many were the outpourings of those broken hearts to the little woman who had time to listen.

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13Woodson, op. cit., p. 351.
Not only had she time to listen, but time also to feed, to clothe, and to advise as well. So let it be clearly understood, that the sorrows and bitterness of these unfortunate creatures found a responsive echo in Mrs. Stowe's soul. She truly pitied them; she helped them. Each individual whom she succored left an indelible impress on her mind. She could not efface the picture. Nor did she want to efface it. For was she not foreordained "to surpass every other anti-slavery champion in fanning into a flame the sentiment against enslaving human beings"?\(^{14}\)

Indeed, she had no intention of forgetting her associations with refugees in Cincinnati. On the contrary, she desired to retain them, to rebuild them in a fashion that would revolutionize attitudes about slavery. Consequently, characteristics, notes and scenes evoked from reality began to evolve and to take form in the most stirring book ever written--the Bible alone excepted.

The publication of her book was a world event. Van Wyck Brooks suggests the drama of its impact when he tells us that it appeared in thirty-seven languages. . . . That Uncle Tom's Cabin rose all over Europe as restaurants, creameries, and bazaars.\(^{15}\)

How stirring the book was can be gleaned from a remark by a local constable, after he had read installments of

\(^{14}\)Halleck, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 103.

\(^{15}\)Brown, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
it in The Era: "I ain't sayin' it's convinced me, but it's shook me up considerable."\(^{16}\) It was not the literary excellence of the book that concerned Mrs. Stowe, although that too might have entered her mind, since a remunerative work would be very acceptable at this particular time for her family requisitionings. Yet the family budget was a secondary consideration.

Here the reader of Uncle Tom's Cabin may wonder how Mrs. Stowe created scenes so productive of sympathetic reaction. For it was known that she was calm and self-possessed even when in actual contact with the suffering of slaves. There was very little external manifestation of emotion—no outward sign that current incidents were taking root in her fertile mind, nor that events were stirring in her pitying heart. No doubt, she was too touched by the apprehension of misery to express her feelings. The thought alone confounded her. Miss Dutton, a friend who visited Mrs. Stowe in Ohio, remarked that "Harriet did not seem to notice anything in particular that happened, but sat much of her leisure time as abstracted in thought."\(^{17}\) Yet, continues Miss Dutton:

... afterwards, in reading Uncle Tom's Cabin I recognized scene after scene of that visit portrayed with the most minute fidelity, and knew


\(^{17}\)Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. xviii.
at once where the material of that portion of the story (the Shelby plantation) had been garnered.  

Evidently, then, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had its source in all the important events of Mrs. Stowe's life. The scenes to which she had been an eyewitness were written on her soul and mind. Too deep was the imprint for outward show. They were the wet and woof of which the great story was later to be woven. As yet they were not for human eyes. But they were, nevertheless, the scenes which developed in Mrs. Stowe the psychological traits so evident in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Indeed, it can be said that parts of the pictures for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were fabricated in her own system, as in a factory. The book later presented those pictures in a complete, satisfying whole.

The event that drove Mrs. Stowe finally to her task of reconstruction of experienced material for a story was the indifference of the Christian world—the free North. The pulpits which denounced the evils of slavery were not many; the voices raised in denunciation of slave crimes were sadly wanting. Over and above the manifestation of the lack of interest in the negro was the fact that slavery was guaranteed constitutionally right:

> The institution of Southern slavery is recognized and protected by the federal constitution, upon

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which this Union was established, and which holds it together.\textsuperscript{19}

Since this was so, opposition was not advocated. More than that, earnest Christian people thought that it was their plain duty to put down anti-slavery propaganda. To go further, some thought it contrary to conscience to refuse to help slaveholders to recover fugitives in Northern states.

Such reasonings manifested clearly and without doubt the need for the clarification of ethical attitudes toward slaves and their masters. Thus one can perceive the theme of this great story, \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin}, taking on perspective. Unconsciously or not, Mrs. Stowe was limiting her experiences. She was sifting her mind and laying aside colorful bits of information. With a keen discernment for values, she concentrated on typical scenes—calculated to arouse pity for the slave, on the one hand; anger for the evils of the slave system, on the other hand.

Mrs. Stowe encountered little trouble in making her selection for type portrayals. As has been said before, vast was her store of knowledge and personal contact with the negroes. She knew many noble colored men and women. As a matter of fact, the impression she maintained of a colored preacher, who was a faithful husband and social worker, occurred to her as a pattern for

\textsuperscript{19}Brown, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
Uncle Tom. He had bought his freedom, and he told Mrs. Stowe that in his youth he "had been permanently crippled by a flogging at the hands of a brutal Maryland Master." Mrs. Stowe endowed him with strength of will; she elevated him in situations ennobling his character. It is here noteworthy to observe that the death scene of Uncle Tom presented itself, "as a tangible vision in her mind while sitting at the communion-table in the little church at Brunswick." So vivid was the picture that she hastened home to commit it to memory. Mrs. Stowe's brother Charles had met an overseer on a New Orleans boat. From the description Charles gave of him, Mrs. Stowe fashioned Simon Legree—"the arch-villain of American Literature." The name Simon Legree was an inspiration. Topsy was taken from a pupil Mrs. Stowe had in her Sunday school class, in Cincinnati. Her real name was Celeste, "a small black limb of Satan," whom Mrs. Stowe had tried in vain to Christianize.

Characters, scenes, conversations and incidents that had for many years been pent up in Mrs. Stowe's own mind clamored for expression. They would have no setting aside. From thence on, "the story can less be said to

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20 Forrest Wilson, "The Book That Brewed a War," Readers Digest, XXXVIII (May, 1941), 103-07.
21 Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. xxxv.
23 Ibid., p. 105.
have been composed by her than imposed upon her."\(^{24}\)

The first salient point of the story was secured from the anti-slavery magazine edited by Mrs. Dr. Bailey of Washington. The incident was a true sketch told by an eyewitness. The account, as has been stated before, was that of a mother and child crossing the Ohio River while escaping from Kentucky.

From all her selections Mrs. Stowe endeavored to accumulate incidents that would faithfully present the institution of slavery. Without doubt she had prepared herself well. She sought information from reliable sources to authenticate what she planned to depict:

She had visited Kentucky, had formed the acquaintance of the people who were just, upright and generous and yet slaveholders. She had heard their views. . . . She felt that justice required their difficulties should be recognized and their virtues acknowledged.\(^{25}\)

Mrs. Stowe's procedure to secure personal interviews gave to her work the tone of authority. No doubt, it was at this time that she fully realized that self-interest and ambition were at the root of much of the injustice. The man of the South gained prestige by being a slaveholder because "adherence to slavery was not due to his profit, so much as to social and political prestige of the slaveholder."\(^{26}\)

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\(^{24}\) *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. xxxv.


Since the expression of truth about slavery was the purpose of the book, an investigation of reports was necessary. There would be no careless picturing. Existing kindness and justice were to be relegated to their proper places; cruelty and wickedness, to theirs. In this method of logical attack can be found another germ of the genesis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Mrs. Stowe, from early childhood, had been trained to moral rectitude. Misrepresentation, therefore, was out of question in the development of the story. Truth was always truth to Mrs. Stowe.

As a matter of fact, not only was truth always truth, but falsehood was definitely repulsive to the author. So when she finally determined on the faithful transcription of her impressions of slavery, she found in her own spiritual and physical constitution ideas that were yielding and amplifying. To be sure, occasional incidents fired her to undertake purposeful writing. There was the letter, from her sister-in-law, which brought her hesitant will to full determination. There was the long-time memory of what happened to her aunt, Mary Hubbard, in Jamaica. Likewise, there was the conviction or feeling that she was destined by higher powers to come to the alleviation of the negro as Joan of Arc had been foreordained to free the French people from English shackles. Therefore, by both inward and outward compulsion, Harriet Beecher Stowe had been forced to the
conclusion that a book should be written. It was written. Elemental ideas began to take body. In the personality of Mrs. Stowe was found the genesis of a story destined for great events. Uncle Tom's Cabin was calculated to revolutionize thought, for:

Man's mind moves slowly, over a period of years and his laws and customs change with his thinking. It is not war and not the atomic bomb that has changed the world; it is man's mind, making use of these terrible tools that has changed it.27

Mrs. Stowe's mind fashioned Uncle Tom's Cabin—her carrier or vehicle of elemental ideas. In this form they circled the globe and echoed back a success. The thinking world was startled. Uncle Tom's Cabin was Mrs. Stowe's implement of destruction. It served well its purpose in that age—the middle-half of the nineteenth century. After the publication of the book, chattel slavery in the United States came to an end; a contemporary critic appropriately observes:

Uncle Tom's Cabin was the atomic bomb of its day. When it exploded, slavery was obsolete. It opened more eyes and touched more hearts, than any corrective work yet written on the subject.28


CHAPTER IV

THE ELEMENTAL IDEAS OF UNCLE TOM’S CABIN
ARE THE NATURAL RIGHTS OF MAN

It is fair to think that any power or agency calculated to change opinions deeply rooted in minds and hearts should do so by a reversion to elemental ideas. These are the stuff of which serious thought is fabricated. They also constitute the material that has to be sifted for the presentation of reasons sufficiently logical to warrant a change of ideas. Furthermore, it is pertinent to think that there is, according to psychology, an opportune time to elicit attitude changes.

At certain moments in the world’s history, says Charles Péguy, certain very simple ideas "enter in" and become part of the consciousness of the age.1

If ever before such a time seemed at hand, it was about the middle of the nineteenth century. Already revolutionary ideas had gripped nations and peoples. Resistance to any type of oppression was already becoming more evident. The air was charged with freedom:

In the Providence of God, the hour appears at hand when this idea is "entering in," and is assuming a

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body. Thus does the Creator work His own revolution.2

Mrs. Stowe availed herself of the restlessness of the times. Indeed, she manifested ingenuity by wielding a master-stroke at the propitious moment for the abolition of slavery. Minds were now fertile--ready for the planting of new ideas--or rather, prepared for the recapturing and for the cultivating of time-honored ideals. For time-honored ideals are elemental things; they smack of the ages.

Interracial justice is a simple idea. It asserts an elementary natural truth, and proclaims a basic Christian dogma. The revolution it seeks to effect is a return to justice, law and order in the relations to men.3

Mrs. Stowe was deeply engaged in just those elemental notions--liberty and equality, justice and order--which are of the ages and beyond. Mrs. Stowe was interested in these natural rights especially because of their restrictions. Only too well she knew that for the negro elemental ideas were non-existent. He was the property of the white man, and "the basis of slavery was the conviction that the negro was put into the world for the benefit of the white man."4

For too long he had bent under the yoke of tyranny. Liberty was denied him; equality was not for him.

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2Ibid., p. 290.
3Ibid., p. 290.
4Hart, op. cit., p. 311.
To be sure, he revolted with thoughts and feelings and agitations. The outraged man within him was crying out against intolerant behavior. Well-wishers were exasperated but prudently disguised their feelings lest suspicion fall heavily upon them and they be acclaimed friends of the slaves. To be accounted that was to lose face with the masters and the press; and, of course, their less than Christian principles could not bear the imputation of slave sympathy. Minority groups therefore lacked the support, the competence, to put down the crime perpetrators. The slaveholders wielded the power and held high the lash. Cringing servility was theirs because of the crack of the whip. Subservient drudges labed in the mire of immorality because curses and beatings rent the miasmatic atmosphere of parts of the South. And, to repeat, there were few to protest. But surely many could sorrowfully beat their breasts, like those of old, when He whom they crucified looked down pityingly upon them and said, "Father, forgive them." They as well as these did not know what they were doing.

Mrs. Stowe possessed the daring to oppose the evil attitudes of her age. Moreover, she had the temerity to remove the mighty from their thrones and to exalt those of humbler degree. With her, slavery as an institution surrendered to attack; liberty, as a God-given right, rose to recognition—and the people's eyes were opened. They saw a transfiguration of the human
being. Ardently they perceived other men as men endowed with inalienable rights. Because Mrs. Stowe knew the importance of the message her book was to carry, she studied correct fundamental principles. She observed the negro; she analyzed peoples as a whole, and individuals in particular. Like Abraham Lincoln, she breathed the air of the common man. She was for the people and of the people. "The color of the ground was in her, the red earth; the smack and tang of elemental things."5

The task of revolutionizing thought, and betimes actions, was not an easy one. Mrs. Stowe knew that; but she rose above her task, its labors and its worries. She had ideals—many of them. By far not the least of these was the God-given freedom for the individual. She knew there could be no appeasement. Her idea of brotherhood was a force as dynamic for good as is the force of the atomic bomb for destruction. She was turning out a masterpiece destined to upset the world.

Not only ideals inspired Mrs. Stowe to work for the negro's freedom. Examples also served her purpose. George Washington, who showed in his life and conduct that he was cognizant of the fact that life and liberty had the seal of divine creation, had hoped for the general emancipation of slaves. When his anticipations

were not fulfilled, he established an exalted precedent by setting free all his own slaves. By this act he succeeded in giving distinctness, completeness and evidence to the nation that liberty and equality were of the individual and that they were to be respected by fellow creatures. A similar case could be made for Thomas Jefferson.

It was a fact, though, that notwithstanding examples and ideals Americans had forgotten the principles of the Declaration of Independence. So far as the negro was concerned, there was no such thing as liberty or property. All his belongings and resources were referred to the master. Such a condition was very bad. But much worse was the status that cramped the soul of the negro in the manner of bestial natures. The Fugitive Slave Law denied to him the opportunity to achieve the object of his creation—an object so beautifully expressed in the Offertory of the Mass:

O God, who in a wonderful manner didst create and ennoble human nature, and still more wonderfully hast renewed it.⁶

There was some reason for the deformity of mental conception concerning basic principles. Most of the founders of the Republic thought that slavery was a dying institution. As a consequence, all the provisions of the Constitution touching slavery visualize gradual freedom

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for the slave as an inevitable result of the growth of democracy. But the Founding Fathers were somewhat short-sighted in their calculations. For the lust of power ingrained in human nature, they did not allow. Passions, through which men evolve into curious mixtures of moral and mental states, were not reckoned with. They were not provided for. Means for their appeasement were not patterned in the carefully signed parchments of freedom for the individual. Accordingly, negligible samplings of slavery in the beginning, like a knife, whetted the desire for more slaves, more power, more social prestige. Democracy was on the march, and slavery and slave encumbrances trooped close behind.

Certainly the venture in democratic government did not allay the pending danger of slavery. But what it failed to do the Declaration of Independence should have done. It did not. "Jefferson was disturbed at the anomaly of a declaration of rights for humanity and men chained and enslaved. In the anguish of his mind, he cried out: "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just and that His Justice cannot sleep forever.""

Seventy-five years followed the ratification of the Constitution before the humanity of the negro was officially recognized. During this period the negro lost the sense and responsibility of his dignity as a human being. In some cases, he lost his self-respect, because

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7Charles Edward Stowe, op. cit., p. 141.
he was denied human rights, which "are conditioned by our ideas on man himself, his nature, destiny, and obligations."8

The slave, it could easily be seen, had intelligence and free will. To deny this truth did not subtract one iota from the slave's natural endowment. Mrs. Stowe pointed out in her characterizations that George Harris was far superior to his master in intellect and Uncle Tom was able to choose between good and evil. He chose death at the hand of Simon Legree rather than betray his fellow man. Uncle Tom's courage gives the present era a key to the establishment of peace. No nation should be permitted to destroy, repeal and make ineffective the principles of equality, justice, democracy for which people fought and sacrificed.

The slave was powerless to ward off blows directed at him; he stooped to receive them. Many times, too, he bent morally because he was driven to despair. But justice and charity were not dead in the hearts of all men. Truth crushed to the earth rose again. Leaders came forward in the defense of right. These, however,--ill-instructed in the principles of inherent rights of man--had confused ideas. For them nationalism took precedence over slavery. The latter was transferred to a secondary place, soon to be forgotten. Hence the

8La Farge, op. cit., p. 75.
efforts of well-meaning anti-slavery workers availed naught for the cause of the slave institution.

It was then that Harriet Beecher Stowe fearlessly addressed the age. Undaunted, she came forward, an advocate of human-rights ideas. She told the truth about slavery to the citizens of her age—and her age understood her. It did not despise her. On the contrary, it praised and loved her name. She criticized the age by developing the idea of the nature of human rights, which "originate from man's nature, as a being endowed with intelligence and free will: and from man's destiny, by which an obligation is laid on him to employ the intelligence and free will in the service of God and the perfection of his nature." Mrs. Stowe's criticisms were acceptable. "Sometimes simple answers solve complex problems." The age read Uncle Tom's Cabin with an avidity that was astounding; and when Uncle Tom's Cabin was called by critics the most remarkable book of all time, the Bible excepted, they did not refer to its literary excellence, but to the nature of the principles it involved, and to the psychology that gripped and would not let go.

The secret which made the book a power was not far reaching. The story was founded on truth, not

9 Ibid., p. 78.

merely on an ideal conception—something above and beyond attainment. Its principles not only were within the reach of the oppressed—they could be attained. They were practical; they were just. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are the elemental notes of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They are the natural-rights ideas—ideas according to God's distinct pattern, not designs according to man's selfish nature.

Life is a fundamental notion. Men of all ages have loved it. They have gone in search of it. They have drunk it to its lees. They have lived it to its glorification. So when Mrs. Stowe presented the colored man or woman holding tenaciously to life, love and happiness, she touched a note common to humanity. It savored of the past. It had the color of the present. It could be foreseen in the future. It could be particularized here and now in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. If life were dear to the reader and his loved ones, it was just as dear to the slave and his loved ones. But slavery denied life and love and happiness. It drove human beings to desperate straits in order to protect their lives and their children's lives and the happiness of both. Every reader can visualize Eliza escaping to Ohio. She seems frenzied, as she fled with her child from the anger and inhuman rage of the slave master. Only the desperate could accomplish her feat. Only a God-implanted idea of a definite right to life and love could
impel a defenseless woman to brook the hazards of an icy river to escape the clutching hand of an evil pursuer. Eliza jumped to the water's edge. . . . Nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted over the turbid current by the shore on the raft of ice beyond . . . the huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight came on it . . . With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and another . . . Her shoes are gone, her stockings cut from her feet, while blood marked every step . . . She saw nothing, felt nothing . . . till she saw the Ohio side.

Maternal love has a touch of the past. It rang true in the days of the Colosseum, when children were wrested from their parents and flung to the beasts or were tortured. It rang true in Biblical history, when the brokenhearted mother pleaded that her child be not severed in two. It rings true today when a war-torn world takes sons and daughters beyond the sunset and the clouds "to strive to seek, to find and not to yield."

Men too were stripped of life and happiness by slavery. To them the deprivation of their rights was more galling than to women. The latter were more submissive. Men felt the sting of subjection; it was in their blood. They reasoned that God intended that they should be the masters of themselves, and of their destinies. The conversation of George Harris, the part-white slave, with his wife carries this very implication:

11 Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. 75.
My master! and who made him my master? . . .
What right has he to me? I'm a man as much as he is. I'm a better man than he is . . . What right has he to make a dray horse out of me? 12

Mrs. Stowe repeated that same idea over and over. Like Cato, she knew the psychological value of the repetition of an idea. Cato repeated and repeated: "Destroy Carthage! Destroy Carthage!" and Carthage was destroyed.

So Mrs. Stowe repeated and repeated the idea that the slave was as much a man as his master. She did not get away from it. And, let there be no mistake, she wanted the nature of man--his divine origin--known, felt and respected. At the sale of Topsy, St. Clare remarked to Miss Ophelia: "There now she's yours, body and soul." 15

Miss Ophelia, with a deft cleverness, drove home the falsity of St. Clare's ideas: "No more mine now than she ever was. . . . Nobody but God has a right to give her to me." 14

The right to life is inherent. Love follows life just as surely as day follows night, or spring comes after the winter. And freedom, too, is life--freedom to love and to hold. And freedom from want, and freedom from fear, and freedom to worship--all are fundamental rights which God meant them to be. Uncle Tom's Cabin sponsored them all. It distributed ideas promiscuously

12 Ibid., p. 19.
13 Ibid., p. 363.
14 Ibid., p. 364.
concerning them—such as the necessity of natural rights and their lack of recognition in a tyrannical world. The negro, as well as the white, must of necessity at times express the cravings of his natural rights. Certainly, the expression of religious longings were needed in time of sorrow, then as now. "And Tom sat down by the light of the fire, and drew out his Bible, for he had need of comfort." When Simon Legree tried to shame Uncle Tom for reading his Bible, Mrs. Stowe cleverly pictured him in sleep. Little Eva was reading to him passages from the Bible. No master-slave could touch the province of his mind. There he was free to think of his God, as his Friend and Protector.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One Israel, the Savior.\(^{16}\)

It is to be noted with emphasis that even the kindness and thoughtfulness of good masters could not in any way take the place of God-given rights. Mrs. Stowe was clear on this issue. She showed that St. Clare was a generous, a loving master to Uncle Tom. He treated him as a member of the family. Moreover, he provided for his every need. When planning to give him his freedom, St. Clare nonchalantly remarked to Uncle Tom that for

\(^{15}\text{Ibid., p. 413.}\)

\(^{16}\text{Ibid., p. 415.}\)
his own sake it would be better for him to remain a slave than to be free because he had everything that he needed. Tom unhesitatingly answered:

No, indeed, Mas'r St. Clare . . . No indeed. . . Mas'rs been good, but I'd rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything and have 'em mine, than have the best and have 'em any man's else. I had so, Mas'r; I think it's natur, Mas'r. 17

Who can challenge this philosophy of Uncle Tom's?

It was nature that called for freedom, for ownership. It was the spirit in human nature. For freedom is rooted nowhere but in the spirit. Animals are not free; neither are inanimate objects. Freedom to possess and to use possessions for a definite purpose are qualities essentially human. To deprive man of the right to or ownership of private property is to deprive him of the guarantee of human liberty.

The right to private property is therefore grounded on the nature of man. The state does not give us a right to it. . . Man has the right prior to any State and the State cannot destroy the right without destroying the nature of man. 18

Again, who could question Uncle Tom's philosophy when he cried out in rebellion because his dignity as man was outraged by cruel slaveholders? "My soul an't yours, Mas'r! You haven't bought it,—Ye can't buy it. It's been bought and paid for by One that is able to

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17Ibid., p. 360.
18Sheen, op. cit., p. 37.
keep it;—no master, you can't harm me." Certainly that thought is profoundly Catholic. It came from out the depth of Tom's sufferings as he gazed earnestly toward Heaven, while blood, sweat and tears mingled and flowed down his cheeks.

A more beautiful, complete or finished portraiture of a Christian, was never drawn. From the days of the Apostle Paul to our own, it has not been exceeded in accurate delineation of all essential features—the weaknesses incident to his degraded state mingle with, and even add a charm to the expression of his piety. The portrait is that of a slave, refined and elevated, but still a slave.20

The immortality of the soul is a fundamental tenet of the Church. Slavery did not take it into account. But Mrs. Stowe did so in her representation of the dignity of human nature:

Some of the scenes in the closing life of Tom remind us of the graphic power, and full-toned expressiveness, of Bunyan. We know nothing which exceeds them...the spirit of heaven amidst the suffering and cruelties of earth.21

Mrs. Stowe, moreover, demonstrated that she knew not only the philosophy of human nature in its essentially equal characters, but also in its inequalities. And it was not for the inequalities that she manifestly intended to develop a hatred. Rather, it was the unjust

19Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. 423.


21Ibid., p. 738.
inequalities—the inequalities that did not rest on spiritual superiority—that she attempted to denounce with expressed vengeance. Again, George, the part-white slave, condemned his master on this very principle. He knew his master was not superior to him on any account.

I know more about business than he does, I am a better manager than he is, I can read better than he can; I can write a better hand. I've learned it in spite of him.22

In Uncle Tom's Cabin Mrs. Stowe also explicates the spiritual necessity of honoring the dignity of man. Her awareness of the spiritual values in freedom as a whole is evident. This is particularly true of her appreciation of ownership—and its moral influence on lives. When George came to the home of a Quaker, immediately he sensed the home atmosphere—its sacredness and its hospitality. He felt a soul-touch—something that elevated his mind and heart. What was it that affected him?

Merely the spirit of a real home,—

... a word that George had never yet known a meaning for; and a belief in God, and trust in His Providence began to encircle his heart, as with a golden cloud of protection and confidence... pining, atheistic doubts, and fierce despair melted away before the light of a living Gospel, breathed in living faces, preached by a thousand unconscious acts of love and good will.23

These ideas, to which Mrs. Stowe gave expression in Uncle

22Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. 19.
23Ibid., p. 166.
Tom's Cabin, are not unlike the sentiments of Nicholas Roosevelt in his A New Birth of Freedom, and quoted by Fulton Sheen in his book Freedom Under God:

Ownership of a home stimulates all the constructive forces in man's moral nature. It furnishes the roots without which no family can attain its full spiritual development.  

Because Mrs. Stowe tried to bring the colored man into his own, to justify his cause, she touched a note common to all humanity. Freedom to life, to love, and to happiness is as old as man himself. It is a foretaste of heaven. Its origin is not of the earth, earthy. Therefore the book Uncle Tom's Cabin reached out with loud clamoring for a reading public; and the public was there to respond. Uncle Tom's Cabin was read and re-read with enthusiasm. Because of its elevated tone, it was effective in promulgating elemental ideas and re-instating them once more in the category of essentials for the progress of human life and the blessings of Divine Providence. Thus Mrs. Stowe brought her message of human rights before an awakening world and taught "lessons from which the most unreflecting must find it difficult to escape."  

24 Sheen, op. cit., p. 47. 

CHAPTER V

HOW MRS. STOWE POPULARIZED

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Mrs. Stowe's picture of slavery has been popularly accepted by mankind, and no such portrait of the same human fibre is likely to be produced in the future. Perhaps Uncle Tom's Cabin, which was published in book form in 1852, lacks literary subtlety. This, however, has been to its advantage. Its simple structure was more appropriate for the direct message it contained. Had the picture been couched in more literary terms, the chances are that Mrs. Stowe's message would never have reached the proportions it did. Her purpose was not to produce a literary masterpiece but to show American slavery as it was. This she did; and S. Warren has likened the disclosure to "the sudden flash of the policeman's lantern on a scene of secret midnight crime."1

Mrs. Stowe painted so vividly her picture of a human condition hidden from world observation that it both startled and focused the eyes of the thinking world on chattel slavery. "The binding, passionate, highly

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personalized emotion of the book seemed to envelop some­
thing elementary in the temper of the time."^2

Because of its popularity, the book was calcu­
lated to be of tremendous influence in the mid-nineteenth
century. "There has never been anything like it within
the same time."^3 The sale of the book vastly surpassed
that of any other book, the Bible again excepted, in any
age or in any country.

Wherever we go, we see it. With whomsoever we con­
verse, we hear of it. Talk of what we may, the
conversation reverts to it. It is everywhere, and
on every person's lips,—on the steamboat, and on
the railway carriage, in the drawing-room, the
nursery, and the kitchen; the library of the stu­
dious, and the waiting room of the physician. It
has found its way to the extremes of society.^4

_Uncle Tom's Cabin_ was read with moistened eyes
and deep were the effects of its passionate cry. "When
Mrs. Stowe's children wept at her reading of the death
scenes, they were the first of thousands of readers to
feel through this book the blight of slavery."^5 The
children of affluence as well as the sons of poverty
have wept over its scenes of injustice. Indeed, Uncle
Tom has had many sympathizers in the palaces and the
mansions, as well as in the cottages and huts, because

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^2Constance Mayfield Rourke, _Trumpets of Jubilee_

^3Anonymous, "Uncle Tom's Cabin and Its Opponents,"
_op. cit._, p. 720.


^5Stanley Thomas Williams, _The American Spirit in
Uncle Tom's Cabin "has chained thousands to its perusal, regardless of fatigue or health--has broken up the monotony of human feeling, and given birth to emotions more deep and powerful than the heart of man often encounters." Earl Carlisle remarked, "Few are the societies in which it has not for some time past formed the staple topic of conversation." In most cases the reading of Uncle Tom's Cabin leaves the impression and force of a great passion, manifested in "the violent outburst of tears which it has excited in some of the loftiest regions of our social life, and in the obscure cottages and hard-working and unpolished labourers and miners."

The book had such a hold on the public that it even overshadowed some of the great writers of the day. "The works of Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Dickens, our two most popular writers of fiction, widely as they have circulated, were unknown for many years, compared with Uncle Tom's Cabin."

A book with such wide circulation and such an effect cannot be treated lightly. Mrs. Stowe had created a protest--though she was almost unknown and unpracticed--"which was to shake and shatter a national

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7 Ibid., p. 720.

8 Ibid., p. 720.

9 Ibid., p. 719.
apathy and to spread with reverberations around the world."\textsuperscript{10} Such an effect is a most significant fact because it implies universality and depth of appeal.

That slaveholders should writhe under such an exposure is only a natural reaction. They did. The human condition which slavery implied was now being exhibited before multitudes, and in such a manner that the abolition movement was gaining momentum almost hourly.

Outraged humanity cries shame on the abettors of such a system, and leaves them no alternative but to abandon its atrocities, or to write themselves outcasts from the virtuous and true-hearted of their race.\textsuperscript{11}

Other facts besides those mentioned—sales and effect—testify that \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin} had a marvelous popularity. "Various artists have been employed to exhibit to the eye its most striking scenes; the harmonies of song have been used to convey its sentiments to the heart."\textsuperscript{12} Moreover stage producers were in 1852 "rivaling each other in their efforts to invest it with dramatic interest."\textsuperscript{13}

What psychology did Mrs. Stowe employ that contributed so successfully in winning a place for \textit{Uncle}

\textsuperscript{10} Rourke, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{11} Anonymous, "Uncle Tom's Cabin and Its Opponents," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 721.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 721.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 721.
Tom's Cabin in the reading schedules of so many people? She approached the institution of slavery in a more psychological manner than did any writer or leader of the day. Most abolition leaders and writers "had confined themselves to unqualified abuse of the institution of slavery and those connected with it." Mrs. Stowe avoided that attitude. Through contact with slaveholders she had learned that most of them were pre-eminently fine Christian people who would not tolerate slavery if they could once see the sin or evil in it. However, they were too close, Mrs. Stowe thought, to the institution to see the injustice that resulted from it. She therefore reasoned that perhaps a dramatized story would focus their minds, or would throw a spotlight, on the injustice done to the slave. She thought she could nationalize the crime and not place the responsibility of it on the shoulders of the individual slaveholder. She did nationalize the crime.

So adroitly did she weave her picture that readers could not help but admire the "skill with which the significant wrongs of slavery are distinguished and softened." Were Mrs. Stowe to portray slavery as it appeared to her, the book would be too dreadful to read.

14Lyman Beecher Stowe, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," The Saturday Review of Literature, III (December 12, 1925), 422.

Her appeal to the public was made "through emotional suggestion, rather than by mortid exhibitions of horror; how much it gains by this reserve need not be pointed out." She pictured the slave-owner as being engulfed by the system; her purpose was to attack slavery not the slaveholder.

Mrs. Stowe had the wisdom to see in the institution a national rather than a sectional wrong. Much of the power of Uncle Tom's Cabin lay in this broad viewpoint. Mrs. Stowe showed much wisdom in not attacking the South. With this same wisdom she made her kindest and best characters—St. Clare, the Shelbys—Southerners. Her worst character—Legree—she made a Northerner. Miss Ophelia she uses to picture the New Englander's lack of practical charity in its missionary zeal. "Miss Ophelia, full of compassion for the heathen as long as they remained afar off, could have been met in any missionary society." When Miss Ophelia was introduced to Topsy "she approached her new subject very much as a person might be supposed to approach a black spider, supposing them to have benevolent designs toward it."

16Ibid., p. 289.
17Ibid., p. 289.
19Uncle Tom's Cabin, p. 281.
It is interesting to note the psychological methods employed by Mrs. Stowe in the development of her characters. When the natural rights of man are violated, the ordinary reaction is revolt. When the deprivation of those elemental rights is accompanied by brutal treatment, and self-evident injustices and cruelties, the public sentiment of Christianized humanity shudders not only at the sight, but also at the thought. Harriet pictured her characters with mighty truth; she drove home the lesson of injustice with great force. Deftly she endowed her characters with traits and virtues that were apropos with their state of servitude. Had the character and personality of Uncle Tom "been other than she had represented, had he been less docile or trustworthy, had his master been other than human, or his mistress less solicitous for the welfare of all about her, his sale would not have taught the moral it now enforces."

Slavery subjected its victims to the disruption of family ties, whether the victims had been trustworthy or not. They had to endure terrible miseries not "as the penalty of their misconduct, but as the consequence of pecuniary embarrassment on the part of the proprietors." In other words, the tendency of slavery was to disrupt moral order. Mrs. Stowe graphically illustrates

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21 Ibid., p. 726.
that in Uncle Tom’s pattern. "The petted slave of today
may be seized to-morrow in payment of his master’s debts,
or be sold by that master under pressure from which he
would gladly escape." Mr. Shelby said to his wife in
reference to the sale of Uncle Tom and Eliza’s boy:
"There is no choice between selling these two and selling
everything. Either they must go or all must go." The
system had trapped the kindly Shelbys. They were not to
blame. "Never in cold blood would they have sold a wom­
an’s child away from her, not a trusted man-servant,
'down the river'; but their debts had delivered them into
the hands of the slave-trader."24

Mrs. Stowe displayed great talent and skill in
her delineation of character. "Her portraits are indi­
vidualized." Class features, to be sure, are in evi­
dence; but the peculiarities of the individual may be
traced so that the reader sees the concrete man, woman
or child move and act each part. Her characters, as a
consequence, are "pervaded by a deeper more thrilling
sympathy than would otherwise be the case."26

A less observant writer, or one with less power

22 I b i d ., p. 726.
23 U n c e l T o m ’ s C a b i n , p. 41.
24 G i l b e r t s o n , op. cit., p. 148.
25 A n o n y m o u s , "U n c e l T o m ’ s C a b i n and Its Oppo­
nents," op. cit., p. 726.
26 I b i d ., p. 726.
than Mrs. Stowe, could not have thus pictured her characters. There is clear evidence "that she paints from nature and that her mastery, both of pencil and of paint, is perfect." George Sand once remarked: "If our art has not scope enough to include a book of this kind, we had better stretch the terms of our art a little."  

Mrs. Stowe's characters are alive; and with the touch of an artist she uses them to expose the evil of the slave system. In the three slave-traders--Haley, Tom Loker and Marks--we see qualities that are strongly discriminating; yet the qualities of each trader brings out the demon aspect of the slave institution. Marks was the mousing man. Every organ and lineament of Tom Loker expressed brutal and unhesitating violence; while Haley had coarse common features with a swaggering air of pretension that marks the low man. Each one of the three converses in a language appropriate to his personality. Here Mrs. Stowe's skill is visible in depicting the worst aspect of slavery through the dialogues and sketches of this type of character. Mrs. Stowe definitely wanted her readers to know that traders in human life were of a low stamp. These traders feared neither the Devil nor damnation, and Mrs. Stowe apologizes to her Christian readers for introducing them to their

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27 Ibid., p. 728.

society. But, she adds, "the catching business is rising to the dignity of a lawful and patriotic profession . . . the trader and catcher may yet be among our aristocracy." Mrs. Stowe well knew that this reference to "our aristocracy" would win American sympathy; therefore she was only cleverly "voicing the genteel American's fear and hatred of the ubiquitous, successful vulgarian." 

Mrs. Stowe was fair in not presenting all the slaveholders as selfish and cruel; she was fair too in not representing all the negroes as perfect. Her characters "for good or evil are the products and results of the system; and yet they have and they give the illusion of volition." In these respects also she is as true to nature as in the representation of character or in the management of her dialogues.

Uncle Tom and Eliza are outstanding in character and personality while Black Sam is full of selfishness and cunning, as shown on the occasion of the sale of Uncle Tom. He saw in the sale an opportunity for his own advancement, and Black Sam soliloquizes, "It's an ill wind blows nowhere. Now, dar, Tom's down,—wal, course der's room for some nigger to be up,—and why

30 Gilbertson, op. cit., p. 148.
31 Perry, op. cit., p. 223.
not dis nigger? —dat's de idee."

Certainly, Mrs. Stowe did ready justice to the individual while at the same time she was thoroughly exposing the institution of slavery.

In attacking the system itself, in showing how it trapped the slave owner as well as the slave, she dared to point out that slave owners were no worse than other people . . . some showed less racial antipathy and more Christian charity than many of the northerners who condemned them.33

The favorable reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* proves that Mrs. Stowe employed the proper approach to the exposure of evil in the slave system. "As a literary phenomenon, the circulation of Mrs. Stowe's work is unprecedented."34

Further analysis of this question, the achievement that Mrs. Stowe had in the acceptance of her elemental ideas, leads to an investigation of the principles of psychology employed. For Mrs. Stowe was an adept, practical psychologist.

It is granted by all real thinkers that he who would contribute to humanity's uplift must himself be a giant in moral courage. Men and women who have cut new paths through ethical jungles and blazed new trails in the realms of thought are those who do not count the

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32 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. 53.
price in labor or in sacrifice. To be sure, their strength of will was necessary to success. Discouragement could find no room in their inn—nor could ignorance. Thus Mrs. Stowe, trained by nature and grace according to high moral principles, and possessed of a strong will, deliberately undertook to popularize *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Through circumstances, training and choice she became an expert in one problem—the negro problem.

This woman was the apostle of the "under-man." She reached out to him everywhere; her ideas flew in winged words, even into far-away dialects—Wallachian, Siamese, Hindu. Therefore, European society realized the extensive influence of Mrs. Stowe. S. Warren in 1853 remarked, "a condition of humanity hidden from European observation has attracted and fixed upon it the startled eyes of thinking Europe—of a free Christian people." 35

The world understood the ideas contained in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and so was able to weep with Tom and laugh with Topsy. Mrs. Stowe's talents, character and knowledge secured for her respect and confidence. In the eyes of all who knew her, she was the symbol of holiness and charity. Her family, too, was outstanding in political and religious affairs. Happily her ancestry and home established for her a prestige guaranteed to

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make her opinions and her ideas, the opinions and ideas of the day. They were accepted with a finality not generally conceded to writers of current affairs. "Millions upon millions have read her story, both for its interest and because of its place in American history." When her word was questioned it was more of a recognition of merit than of blame. Her opponents found fault with her exposition of the truth. Their criticism, of course, was only, "the perfect tribute to the power possessed by Uncle Tom's Cabin." 

But there was something more than ancestry and home-training in the popularization of Mrs. Stowe's philosophy. Her knowledge of human nature, its leanings and its emotions; her sympathy and love; her feelings of a mother's heart—all contributed to the popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin; but what really . . . set people at each other's throats were the individual horrors that had haunted the mind of Mrs. Stowe herself: Slave traders and blood hounds pursuing Eliza; the woman whose child had been stolen, drowning herself in the Mississippi; old Prue dying in the cellar where "the flies had got to her"; Rosa sent to the public whipping-house; Cassy's tale of atrocities; Emmeline and Lucy and Uncle Tom in the hands of Legree. 

These horrors still attract humanity "with its strange passion for the things that it fears and hates, its inexplicable delight in destroying the things that it

36 Boynton, op. cit., p. 296.
38 Gilbertson, op. cit., p. 163.
loves." Surely, the fact that Uncle Tom's Cabin is still being staged shows that there is an inexplicable fascination about these horrors. "The Englishman and Italian who in the twentieth century attend performances of Uncle Tom's Cabin do not do so on account of any interest in American social history."

Mrs. Stowe capitalized on these incidents of horror. And why? Because Mrs. Stowe, the practical psychologist, knew what would be a challenge to all humanity. She collected material such as would make a universal appeal. And the incident of a mother's flight across the Ohio to save her child and the sale of Uncle Tom furnish illustrations of the dexterity Mrs. Stowe used in combining "her materials so as to accomplish her purpose." 

Mrs. Stowe went a step further in popularizing Uncle Tom's Cabin; she made a studied psychological appeal for the acceptance of the book. Well Mrs. Stowe knew that the book, to be effective, should be welcomed not only in America but also in England and Europe. Therefore, she tactfully contacted outstanding men in England and France. For them to espouse the cause that she was pleading was her ardent desire; and the cause,
the abolition of slavery, was the cause of all humanity. Consequently she sent a copy of her book "to Charles Dickens, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Lord Carlisle, Charles Kingsley, and the Prince Consort." These men were outstanding in government or letters; and all of them had the betterment of the slave at heart. By eliciting their interest, the lady saw to it that the abolition movement was assured of a following and the book of an extensive circulation. Mrs. Stowe knew just what to say, with poise and address, to these potentates of state and letters. To his Royal Highness, Prince Albert, she wrote:

Ignorant of the forms of diplomatic address, and the etiquette of rank, may she be pardoned for speaking with the republican simplicity of her own country, as to one who possesses a nobility higher than that of rank or station.

This simple narrative is an honest attempt to enlist the sympathies both of England and America in the sufferings of an oppressed race, to whom in less enlightened days both England and America were unjust.

The wrong on England's part has been atoned in a manner worthy of herself. . . . The author is encouraged by the thought that beneath the royal insignia of England throbs that woman's and mother's heart. May she ask that he who is nearest to her would present to her notice this simple story.

When an appeal takes on a form such as this it cannot be denied. A bit of flattery is as welcome to men of high estate as to those of humble birth. At times they

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42 Gilbertson, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

43 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. xli.
respond to it with even more enthusiasm than do the latter.

To Charles Dickens she wrote:

The Author of the following sketches offers them to your notice as the first writer in our day who turned the attention of the high to the joys and sorrows of the lowly. In searching out and embellishing the forlorn, the despised, the lonely, the neglected and forgotten lies the true mission which you have performed for the world.

... If I may hope to do only something like the same, for a class equally ignored and despised by the fastidious and refined of my country, I shall be happy. 44

He replied and stated that her book was worthy of any head and any heart that ever inspired a book, and he praised the admirable power with which it was executed.

Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote that her fame in Italy had thrown all other writers into the shade. He did not know of any place where Uncle Tom's Cabin (transformed into Il Zio Tom) could not be found.

Lord Carlisle wrote Mrs. Stowe that he thought it very important that she had brought to her portraiture of slavery great power of language, a play of humor, a force of pathos, and a truth in the delineation of character that accredited itself instantaneously and irresistibly.

Mrs. Stowe did not fail to win the sympathy and good wishes of the literary elect, and the powers of state. Her psychological tactics were successful. All to whom she wrote responded in a most heartening manner.

44 Ibid., p. xli.
and with crisp comment. Charles Kingsley's reply reveals more than the others why the story was so effective, so popular. It was because its characters represented actual human beings as created by God. Their story was personal. And it was true and real. It could be applicable to any one. Kingsley stated that he could not refrain from transcribing a few lines which he received from a good critic concerning the story:

To my mind it is the greatest novel ever written, and though it will seem strange, it reminded me in a lower sphere more of Shakespeare than any modern I have ever read; not in the style, nor in the humor, nor in the pathos, though Eva set me a crying worse than Cordelia did at sixteen, but in the many-sidedness, and above all, in that marvelous clearness of insight and outlook, which makes it seemingly impossible for her to see any one of her characters without showing him or her at once as a distinct man or woman different from all others.\footnote{Kingsley, quoted by Gilbertson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 161.}

Whatever Mrs. Stowe's merit or demerit as a novelist may have been, there is one thing certain—she was as cruel an enemy of slavery as the world has known. By the time Mrs. Stowe had received a reply from the distinguished persons to whom she had written, eight power presses in Boston were running night and day; over three hundred thousand, within a year. While in London, Sampson, Low and Company reported eighteen different houses supplying the demand and forty editions. ... over a million and a half copies had been sold in Great Britain and her colonies.\footnote{Gilbertson, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 161-62.}

Apart from Mrs. Stowe's ability to find markets
for her book, and her tact in reaching men of power, other factors aided in the popularization of Uncle Tom's Cabin. The style was dramatic and readily presented itself for production. Through the stage, Mrs. Stowe diffused the light of wisdom over the masses. Entertainment and instruction were the twin fruits of the dramatic representation of Uncle Tom's Cabin. "A company of actors was playing George L. Aiken's version to crowded houses in New York, during the winter of 1853-54, eighteen times a week, the company eating its meals in costume behind the scenes."47

Audiences enjoyed the story because Mrs. Stowe showed, along with her ideas, the perception and separate cases to which they related. Then she left it to the understanding of the audience to form a proper conception impromptu. In this procedure, to be sure democratic enough, audiences were not forced to judgments. They were left free to enjoy "the antics of Sam and Andy and Topsy, the primness of Miss Ophelia; or moved to 'delighted tears' by little Eva and Uncle Tom; or beguiled into romantic reverie by Augustine St. Clare."48

In the Saturday Review of Literature, October 6, 1945, John Mason Brown, commenting on the dramatic production of Uncle Tom's Cabin, wrote that no play ever

47Ibid., p. 162.

48Ibid., p. 164.
toured so continually nor had any play been seen by so many millions. According to his verdict, for years the sun never set on Uncle Tom's Cabin.

To sum up, then, Uncle Tom's Cabin was popularized by the authority and the personality of the author, by her psychology of approach to the political and literary elect of the nation, by her nationalizing the crime, by her skillful delineation of character, by the conduct of her dialogues, and by her stirring of the emotions as well as the reason. And since truth is contagious, Uncle Tom's Cabin became known in almost every continent. The drama of its impact is suggested with the report that it was translated into "French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Danish, Dutch, Flemish, Polish, Portuguese, Bohemian, Hungarian, Servian, Armenian, Illyrian, Romaic, Welsh, Wallachian, Finnish, and Siamese"; that Thomas B. Macaulay, the dominant symbol of Victorianism, himself a busy author, took time to review the book. George Sand and Heine, too, vouchsafed the same courtesy. While all over Europe, like the growth of mushrooms overnight, arose Uncle Tom's Cabins as restaurants and creameries and bazaars. Indeed, true to the aim of literature, Uncle Tom's Cabin was solving one of life's problems. A single idea taking root in the mind of Harriet Beecher Stowe set the world afire with the thought of freedom. It was her privilege, as

49 Itid., p. 162.
compensation, to perceive a new idea dawn upon her age before the common mass of world thinkers. Her idea of life, liberty and happiness prevailed—for she, wise with the wisdom of ages, patterned her idea on the Divine plan. It was God's idea that man should enjoy the fruits of his labor and these fruits must be made to serve man and not to enslave him. Lincoln said it in this way: "In the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he (the negro) is my equal . . . and the equal of every living man." 50

Thus Mrs. Stowe served humanity through the instrumentality of Christ's law; and he who advocates that law will surely serve humanity best. Christ reverenced human nature wherever it was to be found—whether in persons degraded or sinful, noble or virtuous, black or white. Mrs. Stowe was motivated and inspired by that same love—Christ's love for humanity—hence her book contained the essentials of that love which reached out and embraced all mankind. Hers was a universal Charity—the life tone of gentleness, unselfishness, tenderness, courage, truth and benevolence—which raised her above the crowd and made her appeal for humanity universally effective and popular.

CHAPTER VI

ELEMENTAL IDEAS IN UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

REVOLUTIONIZED THOUGHT

"The figment of an idea may be more revolutionary than the fission of an atom"¹ is a statement which is rather startling in view of the fact that the release of atomic energy has recently stunned a wondering world. Mankind, frightened, stood aghast at the miracle of nature's powers. Even then mankind knew little of the real strength of the bomb. By its effects only did it secure a faint estimate of the limitless energy that science has harnessed. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, crumbled to the dirt, remained ghostly spectres to the destructive forces loosed upon Japanese territory. The impact of the discovery of the bomb struck warring nations with fear. In a few days, a stricken people of a stricken country capitulated. The Japanese mind concerning the conduct and outcome of the war was changed. People looked on! And people wondered at the infinite capacity for taking pains. They marvelled, too, at the infinite patience required

¹General David Sarnoff, "Science In Democracy," Congressional Record, XCI (October 15, 1945), A 4658.
to shiver the atom. They applauded the success that revolutionized attitudes toward the late war, and all wars to come.

Nations paused and began to think in their hearts of the revolutionary effects of the bomb. They agreed that conferences henceforth must dwell more worthily on the business of peace rather than on the strategy of war. Radios heralded the remarks that peoples must control belligerent ideas and manifestations. Newspaper headlines tried to fortify the anxious minds everywhere. Wars must cease—the atomic bomb can wipe out civilization. And the world settled back to deliberate thought. It was sobered. It faced, then, at that moment, its most terrible foe—its own unreasonatleness. Imagine a man of divine origin thinking seriously that he and his fellow-men must go underground to protect themselves from their own folly. That is the type of thought that began to crystallize after the disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; therefore:

The chief effect of the two atomic bombs was not on the two Japanese cities which they destroyed, but on the human mind.  

The bomb forced men to think in terms of safety. Why? Because a little atom was used to uphold democracy, to crush enemies and to destroy false philosophies of life. The mind of man could see projecting into the future a

\[2\text{Ibid., A 4659.}\]
crisis that unnerved him, as it had unnerved Abraham Lincoln when he trembled for the safety of his country. Man realizes now that this is the time for clear thinking and action—for heroes who will mold our world future—heroes who have vital sparks of leadership in them—men like Washington, Lincoln, Hamilton, Jefferson and Saint Francis of Assissi, and women like Saint Teresa of Avila and Florence Nightingale. We are at the crossroads in world history when simple ideas may "enter in" and take possession of the minds of this age—the middle-half of the twentieth century. Charles Péguy has said:

> The greatest revolutions have been made not by extraordinary ideas . . . simple ideas float about like dream phantoms. When they take root, or assume a body, you have a revolution.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that the world will emerge from its attitude of silent contemplation a changed world with a different outlook toward war. To be sure, it must be given time for adjustment—time for settling—like the tumbled earth after a terrific earthquake. But settle it must—and that in one of two ways. It must decide definitely to continue building mightier armaments, to be hurled at the weightier battlements of the foe in more demoniac fury than of old; or, it must disclaim the right to wage war and therefore lay the foundation of

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3 Charles Péguy, quoted by La Farge, op. cit., p. 290.
peace and justice according to the eternal principles of morality. Either decision will, for the democracies, involve a revolutionary change. On the one hand, it will necessitate a far-flung battle line for offensive and defensive action; on the other, it will force men to see their own iniquity and as a consequence cause them to revert to God, to His law, to His love. For when "man presumed to tap the reservoir of God's power it became incumbent upon him to bring the power of conscience among men and nations to a stage of development comparable to that of his intellect."

Whatever decision will be the outcome of consultation and conference among the intelligentsia of a world-state, the atomic bomb will have played a significant role in shaping that decision. But, on second thought, was it really the bomb that caused the mental upheavals? The sleepless nights? The anxious days? That can scarcely be said. Since it was inanimate, it could not of itself design or take form. Back of the bomb was an idea that nature's forces could be unconfined, uncritted, and unconfined. It was a figment of an idea that visioned the bomb. It was the growth of an idea that saw it produced. It is the effect of the idea that is changing the minds of civilization.

General David Sarnoff, president of the Radio Corporation

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4Jerry Voorhis, "On the Atomic Bomb," Congressional Record, XCI (November 2, 1945), A 5015.
of America, therefore spoke the truth when he said that an idea was more powerful than the fission of a bomb.

And surely the import of an idea was recently evidenced also in the life and conduct of Adolf Hitler. Possessed of a single frenzied idea, that the German nation was a composite of supermen with superminds and superphysiques, he revolutionized the whole nation and brought it into sharp focus with his ideology. The youth was fed with the patula of hero ideas; the manhood, with the honor and glory of military intrigue and victory; the elders, with what is ordinarily considered the crown of old age, the nobly won laurels of their youth and manhood. The Hitler ideology gripped the nation as no idea ever did. Its echoes rolled from soul to soul. It grew, too, but not forever. Fortunately the sweat and blood of world heroes were able to strangle, perhaps for all time, the idea that energized within the mind of one man and threw the world into chaos and the throes of an atrocious war. But did Hitler's idea revolutionize thought outside Germany? To be sure, it did. It lured the United States out of its policy of isolationism. It started world organization of governments. It instituted an international tribunal for the maintenance of peace and justice. It bound all men closer together, if not around the feet of God, as it should, then at least in external policy and conduct. More understanding seems to be abroad among more people than was evident
prior to the second world war.

Another example of the significance of an idea may be evidenced in the ideology of Napoleon Bonaparte. It was an idea in the mind of a little corporal that produced Napoleon's empire. One day he walked into the French Chamber of Deputies and cried: "Follow me. I am destiny. I am the divinity of the day." France, and all Europe controlled by France, listened to the French Corporal; and in consequence they were without representative government until the fall of the Napoleonic dynasty.

Oliver Cromwell likewise had an idea which deprived England for a time of representative government. He pointed his sword to the mace lying upon the table in the House of Commons and shouted, "Take away this bauble." It was carried away and so was England's civil and religious liberty. It was an idea too in the minds of some great men--George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John and Samuel Adams, Alexander Hamilton, Robert Morris, James Otis, Patrick Henry and others--that gave us the priceless nation we call America. America is primarily the offspring of an idea; had the idea of despotism won out, America would have ceased

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5Napoleon Bonaparte, quoted by Hon. Clarence Cannon in Congressional Record, XCII (March 25, 1946), A 1716.

6Oliver Cromwell, quoted in Congressional Record, ibid., A 1716.
To understand, then, the revolutionary reactions of different periods in human affairs, it is necessary to get behind men and grasp their ideas. For, to be sure, ideas have a history of their own—an ancestry and a posterity. Education and environment, political and religious affiliations, are the agencies that ordinarily awaken ideas. Press and tradition render them fertile. Popularity energizes them and gives them circulation. Hence it is that the ancestry and background of an individual are closely associated with the ancestry of an idea. Emerson, in his essay on Self-Reliance, says:

Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age. ... A man, Caesar, is born and for ages after we have the Roman Empire. Christ is born and millions of minds so grow and cleave to His genius that he is confounded with virtue and the possible of man. An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.  

Certainly this is true in the life of Harriet Beecher Stowe. The relation between her ideas and background is positive. The two are associated in her life as evidently as in any public character. And the revolutionary force of her elemental ideas, or the natural rights of man, was as breath-taking as the atomic bomb, though not as immediately explosive and effective. The figment of an idea that took hold of her was that man had God-given inalienable rights. Logically developed,

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the idea presented injustice in the deprivation of those rights. Finally, the atrocity of a tribunal justifying, by illegal procedure, unjust laws was the ultimate completion of the idea. The Fugitive Slave Law gave the final impetus to the idea that man was destined to be free. To repeat, it was in repudiation of this latter law that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was written.

The book was successful in blocking the Fugitive Slave Law. John Greenleaf Whittier, commenting on its results, wrote:

What a glorious work Harriet Beecher Stowe has wrought. Thanks for the Fugitive Slave Law! Better would it be for slavery if that law had never been enacted; for it gave occasion for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Mrs. Stowe's work affected the imagination and feelings of her readers so much that people clamored for the book. It was suited to the common mind, teaching by actual scenes and events the true state of the slave. It is reasonable to think that at first the readers did not know what it was in the book that moved them. They perhaps discussed the contents inadequately. As time progressed, however, --it can be presumed--a general agitation and action of mind upon mind was observed. Interpretations never detected before were now noticed in relations between masters and slaves. Judgments were

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8John Greenleaf Whittier, quoted by Boynton, *op. cit.*., p. 299.
passed. Evidence of cruel treatments was brought to light. After a short time, certain viewpoints were observed, and ideas of slavery exchanged.

Well Mrs. Stowe knew that this process of mind working upon mind was necessary before her ideas could take root and grow—a mass consciousness of the slavery evil must find lodgment in the public mind. The idea that a slave is not chattel had to be imbibed, discussed, reasoned, repeated and meditated upon before it could help to catapult the American nation into freedom and equality for the slave. The colossal circulation of Uncle Tom's Cabin made it possible to lodge the idea in the public mind—the idea was actually projected around the world—not because the book was spectacularly advertised or pushed, but because people wanted to read it. The book moved them to tears—stirred their hearts—the cry of the bloodhounds and the crack of the pursuer's whip accomplished this. Emotions play a large part in the molding of history, and undoubtedly the emotions aroused by Uncle Tom's Cabin caused much social and political upheaval: "the groundwork for political upheaval has nearly always been laid by men of the pen."9

It was Thomas Paine who contributed the most important planks to the American "Declaration of Independence" . . . Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot were writing the French "Declaration of

9Thomas Matthews Pearce, Christopher Marlowe—Figure of the Renaissance, University of New Mexico Bulletin (New Mexico: University Press, 1934), p. vi.
the Rights of Man" years before that famous docu-
ment was penned. Marx, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy were shap­ing the thoughts of modern Russia long before the Revolution of 1917.10

It should be realized, furthermore, that Uncle Tom's Cabin not only revolutionized mental states but also brought a change of heart. And why? Because the book did not so evidently present a political upheaval, or an economic one, as a moral revolution. It was an upward shove given to the current practices regarding the negro. It was rooted in ethical ideas bearing out ethical relations. That was just what the times seemed to need. Its appeal, therefore, was to the individual life of each person. Many colored persons and fugitive slaves remarked that they had noticed a change of attitude toward them since Uncle Tom's Cabin had been published. They seemed to meet friends everywhere. Everybody was trying to be kind to them.

The idea of the natural law found in Uncle Tom's Cabin was having a bearing in everyday life, as it should. Mrs. Stowe made it very clear that the slave could not morally be deprived of his rights—a slave, because he is a human being, possesses rights of which no other man can deprive him. Uncle Tom's Cabin, moreover, aroused men of other nations against subjection of human beings.

An Englishman's soul swells at the bare idea of

10 Ibid., p. vi.
such submission to the tyrannous will of man
over his fellowman.\(^{11}\)

Mrs. Stowe had the genius to make many a "soul
swell," not only in England but in all lands. Her spark
of genius reached into the very core of men's souls, be-
cause--

There are, indeed, scenes and touches in this
book which no living writer, that we know of,
can surpass, and perhaps none even equal.\(^{12}\)

Yet, when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was dramatized in New York
ninety-three years ago, C. W. Taylor, a writer then for
the *Herald Tribune*, described it as a "firebrand of the
most dangerous character to the peace of the whole coun-
try."\(^{13}\) He wrote: "It is a sad blunder; for when our
stage shall become the deliberate agent in the cause of
abolitionism, with the sanction of the public, and their
approbation, the peace and harmony of this Union will
soon be ended."\(^{14}\) Thus some of the writers of the day--
1853--sought to undo the influence of a work that was un-
dermining ideas regarding the so-called benefits derived
from the social institution of slavery.

"We must love the slaveholder and the slave,
never forgetting that both are our brethren"\(^{15}\) was the


\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 395.

\(^{13}\)C. W. Taylor, quoted by John Mason Brown in

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 24.

\(^{15}\)Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 421.
idea or implement which Mrs. Stowe used in opposing her accusers. Certainly her approach to the question of the day could hardly have been made more gently or peacefully. However, the atomic bomb, with all its weird connotations, did not produce any more of a social upheaval than did this story of love. Almost immediately the South tried to prevent the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Love of Neighbor was not the Southern, nor was it the Northern, idea or remedy for the problem confronting them—though the origin of love is God. Thus their attitude was similar to that of the child pictured in Lewis Ayer Smith's poetic question:

... 'What must I do to be saved?' And his God replies, saying, 'I gave you the answer one thousand nine hundred and forty-five years ago.' But the baby, clutching his bomb, mutters 'It is easier to kill than to love.'

Mrs. Stowe's spark of genius, therefore, was the kind which instinctively spoke or directed itself to the emotions of love. Thus she was able to awaken the fiercest passions which can agitate and rend the human breast." Men in every walk of life and men of every temperament have read this touching story with eyes flooding with tears and hearts wrenching with pain. And the story "has acted like a charm on the old and young, and its impression remains in a thousand cases

\[16\] Lewis Ayer Smith, "The Answer," Congressional Record, XGII (February 14, 1946), A 777.

\[17\] Warren, op. cit., p. 395.
with the permanence and force of a master passion."\(^{18}\)

The restless tide of emotion her book had produced brought to Mrs. Stowe many letters compounded of severe criticism and approbation. A book cannot be wholly bad and at the same time wholly good. The controversy began; and Mrs. Stowe became a writer of international importance. The controversy merely paid high tribute to the revolutionary force of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

> Not only had her book been universally read but it had been taken so seriously as to become a great political and moral force in the world.\(^ {19}\)

Mrs. Stowe had many friends among slaveholders, and these became "so impressed by the evils of the system that they actually liberated their slaves at great personal sacrifice."\(^ {20}\) The ideas in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* turned back the current idea of the times and directed its thought into channels of truth--back toward the Christian concept of justice and equality. Through the influence of this book the public saw that slavery was an inhuman institution; and the public began asking, "Can nothing be done to banish this accursed thing from


off the face of the earth?"21 Uncle Tom's Cabin, undoubtedly, "hastened the over-throw of slavery."22 Christian statesmen and enlightened politicians could not conscientiously tolerate the system and be Christian. Sir John Bowring, a great English scholar and scientist of that period, remarked to a friend after reading Uncle Tom's Cabin:

Now—Now—your country may be proud! It has produced an author whose book, in its moral effects, may be said to be next only to the Bible. ... You have not read it? Why, Uncle Tom's Cabin is the death blow to slavery.23

Mrs. Stowe was deluged with letters. A few type examples will show how influential and revolutionary were the elemental ideas embodied in her book. On August 12, 1852, the Reverend Charles Kingsley, in the midst of much anxiety and ill-health, sent thanks to Mrs. Stowe, saying, "Your book will do more to take away the reproach from your great and growing nation than many platform agitations and speechifying."24 A letter dated January 4, 1853, came from Frederick Bremer of Stockholm complimenting Mrs. Stowe in this manner:


22Williams, op. cit., p. 212.


The woman, the mother, has raised her voice out of the very soil of the new world in behalf of the wronged ones, and her voice vibrates still through two continents, opening all hearts and minds to the light of truth.25

A specific example of the manner in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* influenced an individual slaveholder is learned from a letter to Mrs. Stowe from Mrs. Leonowens. The latter was formerly an English governess in the family of the King of Siam:

The following is the fact, the result of the translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, into the Siamese language by my friend, Sonn Klean, a lady of high rank at the court of Siam. . . . She would read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* over and over though she knew all the characters by heart and spoke of them as if she had known them all her life. On the third of January, 1867, she voluntarily liberated all her slaves, men, women, and children one hundred and thirty in all, saying, "I am wishful to be good like Harriet Beecher Stowe, and never again to buy human bodies, but only let them go free once more."26

It is to be well noted that the elemental ideas in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only revolutionized thought with reference to the bondage system, and human degradation in general, but also stirred dormant minds and hearts to ideas of reformation in their own lives—in their faith. When *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was translated into the Armenian language, the effect was that many heathen negroes embraced the teachings of Christianity because the negro prayers and exhortations in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* affected them as

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25Letters from Frederick Bremer, quoted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Introduction, p. xlviii.

26Letter from Mrs. Leonowens, quoted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Introduction, p. lx.
they had never been affected before. A letter was received from Poland, written by Mr. Mueller concerning the service that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had rendered in his country, Poland. It was the custom, he wrote, for many persons to sneer at faith. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* dispelled that delusion and they now see faith as something high and noble. Uncle Tom convinced them that there are higher aims than the gratification of appetite and desires.

Religious thought received renewed vigor from Mrs. Stowe's exposition of elemental ideas that man may worship his God as he pleased. Because of the reverence of Uncle Tom for the Bible, workingmen in England were inspired to present one of their speakers with a Bible. This was done on the occasion of a lecture to them on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. France, too, was awakened to a thought of the Scriptures by the story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. There was a demand for the Bible which had given Uncle Tom so much consolation—hence this led to a greater sale of Scriptures.

Certainly it must not be overlooked that it was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that sent Heine, the atheist, back to the Bible. It was the elemental idea, the inalienable right to the freedom of worship exercised by Uncle Tom, that made him a living force in the conversion of souls to Christianity. Heine himself, speaking on his return to the Bible and its consolations, said that:
... the reawakening of my religious life I owe to the Holy Book of the Bible. Astounding! that after I have whirled about all my life over all the dance-floors of philosophy, and yielded myself to all the orgies of the intellect, and paid my address to all possible systems without satisfaction... I now find myself on the same standpoint where poor Uncle Tom stands, on that of the Bible... I, who used to make citations from Homer, now begin to quote the Bible as Uncle Tom does. Vermische Schriften, p. 77. 27

Thus Heine, touching the vital point of Catholicity in the book, shows "that the soul of the lowest and weakest, by the aid of the religion of Christ, can become strong." 28

Without doubt these type examples express the revolutionizing power of Uncle Tom's Cabin. So, in recapitulating, it can be claimed that thought, awakened and strengthened, found release in action. By brewing a civil war, Harriet Beecher Stowe accomplished the purpose of her story—the abolition of slavery. By concentrating on the dignity of man, she imbued her book with elemental ideas. These elemental ideas are no other than the people's divine rights' ideas—they are the spiritual rights of man. Her explication of these rights were given in the light of reason supported by Biblical allusions, authority, erudition. No one can mistake her attitude. Her arguments for the abolition of slavery are so sound, so appealing, that to deny them were to

27 Heinrich Heine, quoted in Uncle Tom's Cabin, Introduction, p. lx.
28 Ibid., p. lx.
deny the very existence of truth. She showed that many people did not have a healthy human instinct relative to rights, that some had a perverted notion of them. Because she was conscious of this attitude which caused some to forget that other people too have rights that must be respected, she struck at the roots of chattel slavery.

Her pronouncements concerning the sacred rights of the human being rang true to the healthy human instinct of all conscious of the divine origin of rights. The words of Alexander Hamilton, for instance, in his defense of the rights of the human being on one occasion are perfectly consonant with Mrs. Stowe's ideas, and amply express her belief.

The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the Divinity itself and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.  

Uncle Tom's Cabin has outlived the genius that gave it form and shape. Because it embodied truth—so far as that truth reflected the splendor of God in man—it has remained an outstanding contribution to humanity's uplift. America is better because of the book. It dignified the colored man, it pointed the finger of shame at his tyrant master. No doubt but its form was

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29 Alexander Hamilton, quoted by Halleck, op. cit., p. 50.
inadequate; its style, puerile. Neither style nor form worked up to its towering thought. Nor did they stamp the story with revolutionary notions. It was the living soul that was breathed into the story that gave it life, and love, and permanency. It was the genius for goodness—the Charity of Christ—in Harriet Beecher Stowe that made *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a puissant force in revolutionizing thought, not only in America, but on the continent as well.
EPILOGUE

Your ideal of love, Mrs. Stowe, is not a mushroom growth of a yesterday morning. Its roots strike deep into the past. Its ordinances, whether they are gladly obeyed or savagely resisted, are calculated to govern alike natural and supernatural relationships. Loyal to true womanhood and loyal to the land that gave you birth, you have helped by the writing of Uncle Tom's Cabin to convince mankind that naught but love can conquer hate.

It can be said that the extraordinary popularity that Uncle Tom's Cabin enjoyed overshadowed your life and your accomplishments. But you in your thought of the downtrodden and beaten slave were willing to submit to self-effacement if only you could make brotherly love co-extensive with the human race specifically in America. You achieved a major success in just that. Certainly you well cultivated the ground in preparation for the Emancipation Proclamation. And your labor was rewarded. The official issuance of that document January 1, 1863, was sincerely received. You witnessed its acknowledgment. Personally present in the gallery of the Boston Music Hall, you saw a heartening response to your appeal for justice and charity, when the huge
audience "rose as one man and turning towards you, cheered frantically for many minutes."¹

And the love of fellowman that you have consistently explicated in Uncle Tom's Cabin is old as man himself. True, it was new-born on Calvary's Heights. Since then, because of the supreme sacrifice of the God-man, it has never lost the touch of the Divine. In character, it is universal; in scope, all embracing. It is the same love that urges the missionary to go forth to sacrifice his life if necessary for his fellowman. Such love captures the heart of the human race. And he who possesses it can never hate a part of mankind.

You, therefore, who implemented your story of slavery with love of fellowman employed the most powerful weapon available--more powerful by far than the atom. For there is no force sufficiently potent to control the atom but only love.

And it was love, too, that made of you--you a frail, gentle woman--a force so great that all other forces melted away as snow melts before the trilliance of the midday sun. In the critical period of American history you engaged many men to see the negro in the light of his Divine origin, not in his physical accidents of color or birth. And the sturdiness of your principles clamors for permanence. So much so that

¹Lyman Beecher Stowe, op. cit., p. 207.
many of those who come after you and who follow your light—which still shines—will be inspired to submit to the all-embracing charity of Christ, a charity which excludes no one from the fellowship of its love, for

In Christ there is no east or west,  
In Him no south or north;  
But one great fellowship of love,  
Throughout the whole wide earth.²

²John Oxenham, quoted in Congressional Record, XCII (February, 1946), A 955.
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