

MRS. STOWE AT EIGHTY-FIVE

By Richard Burton

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS
MADE EXPRESSLY FOR THIS ARTICLE



THE city of Hartford, Connecticut, has a name in our early Colonial history. One of the earliest experiments in local town government was made there. In later days the place has been known as the home of the gun and the bicycle. As a centre of insurance and banking, too, its fame has gone far and wide. But its chief glory, after all, is in its literary associations. From the days of Hooker and the "Hartford wits" the city has had a literary tradition; and in the present era, the fact that Charles Dudley Warner, Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe have long lived in the Connecticut capital has made it one of the interesting spots of our native evolution in letters.

But it is safe to say that nothing has contributed so much to the honor and repute of the city as the residence therein of Mrs. Stowe, whose masterpiece, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," had a direct effect in shaping United States history, and is, of all books written by Americans, the most renowned throughout the world. At the patriarchal age of eighty-five this woman, this great writer and famed American, is quietly spending the evening of her life in Hartford's literary corner. In the pleasant western part of the town, known as Asylum Hill, the most popular section for residences of the better sort, is situated Forest Street, short and beautifully tree-lined, running off south at right angles from the stately Farmington Avenue. A few steps down, the third house on the right is a pretty brick cottage of moderate size, painted gray, and attractive by reason of its well-kept lawn, its flower-beds and trees. Here Mrs. Stowe has lived with her two daughters for more than twenty years, moving thither in 1873 from a larger house near by, which she built and occupied until driven from it by the inroads of business. Forest Street is true to its name, for as one passes along it, great trees and ample grounds with no fences and a general effect of unspoiled Nature come into view. The contiguous estates of Charles Dudley Warner and his brother, George, embrace several acres of land; the picturesque houses stand far back from the sidewalk; squirrels play boldly up and down the chestnut boles, and the woodpecker and robin rejoice in the green herbage. The former's land touches that of Mark Twain, (Samuel L. Clemens), whose large, many-gabled house faces on Farmington Avenue, just around the corner.

Mrs. Stowe is thus surrounded by fellow-workers in the craft of letters, and, all her life a lover of the countryside, she is able, by taking a few steps, to get into an atmosphere of trees, birds and flowers, where one is leaf-sheltered and seems remote from city cares and distractions. For some years now entirely withdrawn from society, Mrs. Stowe is much afoot in the open air, her strength, for one of her years, being remarkable. In the summer time the slight, bent figure, with its white hair crowning the dark, wrinkled face, is a familiar sight to the neighbors, as she wanders under the boughs, gathering consolation from sun and shade and wind, or strays down the steep bank to where a little silvery stream winds its tortuous length behind the Clemens and Warner grounds. On such walks a trusty attendant is always by her side. It is likely that Mrs. Stowe's fondness for exercise and outdoor life has done much to sustain her bodily vigor to her present age. But she comes of a sturdy stock. Lyman Beecher, her father, the celebrated theologian, was nearly eighty when he died; her sister, Isabella Beecher Hooker, who, until the other day, lived near by on Forest Street, in another of the noted Hartford houses, is well beyond the Psalmist's allotment of years, and, indeed, almost all the many Beecher children—a family, perhaps, as distinguished in its members as any America can name—have been long lived.

MRS. STOWE'S working days have been long over. None of her conspicuous literary productions is associated with her present residence, and her condition requires that she be carefully guarded in every way by her family from the intrusion of strangers. Yet as she walks the street, always followed by a fat little pug, who is an autocrat in the house (it may be remarked that the Stowe family is devoted to dogs), one often sees lion-hunting visitors eager to catch a glimpse of the most noted literary woman of the land. Requests at the door for a sight of the mistress are not infrequent, while letters petitioning for autographs are, of course, legion. Occasionally still the latter favor is granted, or the authoress pens a bit of a note in acknowledgment of some courtesy. On New Year's Day last year I found on my study table a large portrait of Sir Walter Besant, on the back of which was written in a beautiful, bold chirography, "To Richard Burton, with New Year's

greetings, from his friend and neighbor, Harriet Beecher Stowe." At her eighty-fourth birthday (when, by-the-by, of the five hundred telegrams and messages declared, in a newspaper dispatch, to have been received from all parts of the world, all were apocryphal) the pupils of two of the city schools sent her roses to the number

in the minds of friends is the memory of this man, whose individuality was striking, as he sat on his porch, the stout figure clad in clerical dress, surmounted by a broad, white-bearded, German-looking face, upon the head a black skull cap—needing only the pipe to look the German professor to the life. If one steps indoors, noisily greeted by the aforesaid canine pet, there is found to the left a south-facing dining-room, and to the right of the hall a suite of two large, homelike rooms full of tokens of comfort and refinement—books, pictures, bric-à-brac. Several portraits of Henry Ward Beecher, Mrs. Stowe's brother, are noticeable. The apartments are light and cheerful. Many editions of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and others of the author's works are on the bookshelves, and the piano in the rear drawing-room calls to mind that Mrs. Stowe has ever been a lover of music, peculiarly fond, these latter days, of listening to sweet, simple church tunes and songs, dear and familiar in New England households. It was her custom for years, until very recently, to go daily to her sister's, Mrs. Hooker's, and the latter played such music for her caller's enjoyment. One of the numerous souvenirs which make Mrs. Stowe's house interesting is a beautiful gold bracelet so made that it resembles the shackle of a slave. An inscription reads: "We trust it is a memo-



MRS. STOWE'S HOME IN HARTFORD



MRS. STOWE GOING FOR A WALK

rial of a chain that is soon to be broken." Upon the links are graven the dates of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in English territory. This bracelet was presented to Mrs. Stowe, when in Europe in 1853, by the Duchess of Sutherland, one of her warmest English admirers and friends. A dozen years later Mrs. Stowe had these words engraved upon the clasp: "Constitutional Amendment (forever abolishing slavery in the United States)." Such an ornament rarely takes on such a noble significance.

THE Stowe family lives much up-stairs, where is the special sitting-room of the mistress—not, however, closely associated with her literary labor, which was well nigh ended when she came into this home. The Southern property of Mrs. Stowe at Mandarin, Florida, whither she went for the winter months during many years, reluctantly giving up the habit because of her husband's delicate health, is still owned by the family, and includes a flourishing orange grove which has proved remunerative. In 1893 the copyright on "Uncle Tom's Cabin" expired, and the inevitable curtailment of income must have seriously embarrassed her had it not been that her affairs have been carefully managed by her son, the Rev. Charles E. Stowe, of Simsbury, Connecticut (who is also the author of an excellent biography of his mother), so that a comfortable competence is assured. It is likely, too, that the new uniform Riverside Edition of her works, enriched with much fresh material and valuable illustrative features, which her publishers announce for early appearance, will make a welcome financial return. Her modest way of living implies the fact that the rewards of distinguished success in literature are other than monetary. Such success is not to be measured by tangible things. The aims and ambitions of those who seek to do work with the pen worthy to live, and helpful to their fellow-men, are not those of mere practical pursuits. How can be estimated in dollars the deep moral glow of satisfaction experienced by Mrs. Stowe on the day when the Emancipation Proclamation was given to the world?



THE AUTHOR OF "UNCLE TOM'S CABIN" AS SHE IS TO-DAY
[Reproduced from a photograph taken at a special sitting for this article]

of her years, and the children were delighted to get, in Mrs. Stowe's own hand, letters of grateful thanks. To such effort, however, she is, for the most part, unequal. Professor Calvin Stowe, her husband, well known as philologist and theologian, died a dozen years ago. Vivid

thousand copies. The shy, retiring wife of the country professor, familiar with all the exigencies of small means, found her royalties in the short space of four months yielding her ten thousand dollars. But it must not be forgotten, in the overwhelming dominance of "Uncle

*Trust in the Lord
And do good*
Harriet Beecher Stowe

March 24 1896

HER FAVORITE MOTTO

[Written by Mrs. Stowe, over her autograph, on the date given, for the JOURNAL]

Tom," that Mrs. Stowe has written other powerful and charming novels: that other graphic Southern sketch, "Dred," and the admirable New England tales, "The Minister's Wooing," "The Pearl of Orr's Island" and "Old Town Folks," not so much read nowadays. perhaps, in part, because of the advent of a new, younger school of writers, who depict the character types and social customs of our rural communities down East. They richly repay attention, nevertheless, and, it must be remembered, were, at the time they were created, almost alone in a field since overworked. But, after all, it is natural that in the hearts of the American people Harriet Beecher Stowe should be enshrined as the maker of the mighty drama of slave days in the South, and—more than the story-writer—should go down in our annals as an historic figure in the most tremendous crisis of our national fate.

IT is in such peaceful surroundings, under such favoring conditions, that this famous and noble woman is now passing the remainder of her earthly days. On the fourteenth of the present month (June) the eighty-fifth milestone will be reached, finding the wayfarer in a good degree of health and comfort. Roses, the regnant flower of June, will make her dwelling sweet; loving tidings of remembrance will come from near and far. Mrs. Stowe can rest from her labors in the comforting sense of the beneficent use of a great gift. Throughout her long life her favorite motto, often spoken and written, and deeply felt, has been: "Trust in the Lord, and do good." The passing of such a life when the hour comes, a life so long spared, can have little of sorrow. Most of her kin, the majority of her friends, and all her literary contemporaries have gone. Father, mother, husband, several children, countless folk in this and other lands who were intimates in more active years, and the great New England literary group with whom she is naturally to be associated—Longfellow, Emerson, Whittier, Lowell, and finally, her good friend, Dr. Holmes, the "last leaf upon the tree"—all these and others yet again await her. One feels that whether here, tenderly cared for by her own, or there, with the companions of her main strength and mightiest work, all is well with America's foremost and beloved woman of letters.