

THE AUTHOR OF «UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.»

IN any brief sketch of the personality and career of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, it is proper to regard her chiefly as the creator of «Uncle Tom's Cabin,» a novel which had its share in changing the Constitution of the United States, and which, as Emerson has it, «encircled the globe, and was the only book that found readers in the parlor, the nursery, and the kitchen of every household.»

Harriet Beecher came of a most distinguished American family, Lyman Beecher's name speaking for itself, while his first wife, Rosanna Foote, Harriet's mother, was a remarkable woman, of stock than which Connecticut can boast no better. That a girl thus born should have had a predisposition to books and, even more, to the things of the spirit was, one might say, foreordained, if there is aught in ancestry. Her home nurture and her educational advantages were such as to fit out a future writer of intense moral earnestness. Yet with these distinctly superior and cultivated antecedents went the New England plainness, the Puritan simplicity, even a touch of Spartan deprivation. Lyman Beecher, became a famous man, a shining light of the American pulpit; but he was a very poor and obscure one in 1811, when in the flower month of June, and in the beautiful old Connecticut hill-town of Litchfield, his sixth child, Harriet, was born.

The little daughter early showed her bookishness, and at the age of six was finding delight in the «Arabian Nights.» At ten she was fascinated with the more often dreaded task of theme-writing, and at twelve she produced a paper with the following title: «Can the Immortality of the Soul be Proved by the Light of Nature?»—a thesis gravely answered in the negative. Her schooling was obtained at the Litchfield Academy, and then at her sister Catherine's noted school at Hartford, where, at thirteen, we find her turning Ovid into English verse. Lyman Beecher's removal to Boston in 1826, ostensibly to combat the new heresy of Unitarianism, had the incidental advantage of offering to his family a wider and richer social life; and the same is true of the new experiences which came a few years later when he was called to the presidency of Lane Seminary near Cincinnati, in what then seemed the very West. Harriet taught for a while

in the seminary in Cincinnati of which Catherine, who had moved thither with her kith and kin, was the head. Playful fancy, quick sensibility, keen intelligence, and, underlying all, fullness of religious experience, characterized Harriet Beecher, when, in 1836, at the age of twenty-five, she was married to Professor Calvin Stowe, professor of Biblical Theology in the Lane Seminary. Mrs. Stowe was at that period of her life, and for years thereafter, a woman of delicate health, reminding one, indeed, of Mrs. Browning in smallness and fragility.

Two years before she had won a literary prize of fifty dollars, which turned her thought toward writing as a possible work. This tentative effort, a tale called «Uncle Lot» (a half prophecy in title), induced the embryo writer to devote her rather scant leisure time thereafter to her pen. Gradually, too, the great theme which was later to enlist all the sympathy of her woman's soul was suggested by local happenings. Antislavery agitations in Cincinnati during these years were stirring, and at times even spectacular. We get in letters a vivid picture of the mobbing of a newspaper office when Henry Ward Beecher was the editor of «The Journal,» and, with pistols in his pocket, fulminated against slavery. In 1839 a colored domestic was taken into the family, and it was found necessary to spirit her away some miles into the country, in order to prevent her recapture by her former Southern owner. But even when health permitted, home duties sadly interfered with literary work, of which little was accomplished. Yet there was small doubt in the Stowe household that she was called to literature, and when, in 1849, her husband accepted a professorship in Bowdoin College, Maine, and the family removed to New England, Mrs. Stowe knew herself to be ripe to write the epic of the slave. In 1850 she took a burning interest in the Fugitive Slave Law, and when the suggestion came from her brother's wife, Mrs. Edward Beecher, to make a story on slavery, she was ready for the task. It was a time of moment to the world when, in the little Brunswick parlor, the young wife and mother, after reading the letter, crushed it in her hand, rose from her chair, and exclaimed: «I will write something. I will if I live!» Never was fiction

: Herby with meanness she came forward
 & delivered her basket. — it was of pale might as
 •Lepre note you said but affecting anger he said
 What you say best! short again! stand aside
 you'd catch it pretty soon
 The man gave a groan & utter despair
 & sat down on a board

FROM THE MANUSCRIPT OF "UNCLE TOM'S CABIN," OWNED BY MISS E. T. STOWE.

born more directly and honestly of ethical interest and indignation. It was, as her son says, the cry of a woman's heart, not of her head at all. The supereminent merits, the artistic defects, of the work are thus explained. There was behind it an American mother sensitive to liberty, with memories of Bunker Hill and Concord in her mind, who had loved and lost children of her own, and who came of a stock dedicate by principle and practice to the pursuit of righteousness. These are things to consider in any estimate of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," whether as a work of art or as a power in the world.

It has been emphasized of late that in 1849 a certain colored man was brought a number of times to the Stowe house at Walnut Hill, Cincinnati, where he told his piteous story of escape, capture, and cruel privation, and this man is pointed to as the prototype of the hero in the great novel. The "original" Uncle Tom and the "original" Topsy seem to some to be of supreme importance. Concerning this Uncle Tom of Walnut Hill, it is sufficient to say that while no doubt such a man appeared there, talked with the mistress, and moved her to pity for his misfortunes, his story is by no means that of the character immortalized by the writer. The simple truth is that this incident, like many another, acted as a suggestion to Mrs. Stowe, as she brooded over her work; it is a misconception of her methods of literary labor (and, indeed, of almost all such labor which proves potent) to imagine that her Uncle Tom was starkly taken from life. In the same way, discussion has arisen concerning Lewis Clark of Lexington, Ky., a venerable colored man, describing himself as the original study for George Harris in the tale. That Mrs. Stowe did make use of one Lewis Clark in limning the character of Harris may be ascertained by any one who reads her "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," a book written explicitly to show the sources whence she drew the data for her fiction. The only question is, then, whether the Clark spoken of in the "Key" is the Kentucky Clark, with whom an alleged interview has recently been published. It is not only possible, but probable, that they are one and the same. A brother of the original Lewis, a well-known character in Boston, employed in the office of the assistant treasurer, affirms stoutly that his kinsman is alive in Lexington. The whole matter is one of the difference between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and would have no interest were it not that a letter from one of Mrs. Stowe's daughters, which

has been printed, has been interpreted to deny the existence of such an impostor as Lewis Clark of Lexington. In fact, the letter did nothing of the kind; it only declared that a rumor about a certain Lewis Clark, printed in a periodical in 1891, was untrue, so far as it had any connection with Mrs. Stowe.

It may be repeated that the whole ques-

tribute something to its columns. This periodical was in those days of much literary merit, Whittier being a corresponding editor, and Mrs. Southworth, Alice and Phœbe Cary, and Grace Greenwood, among its contributors. Mrs. Stowe began upon the story, writing first the scene on the Legree plantation where Uncle Tom is so brutally misused. She then penned the opening chapters, and



DRAWN BY CHARLES HERBERT WOODBURY.

THE HOUSE AT BRUNSWICK, MAINE, WHERE «UNCLE TOM'S CABIN» WAS WRITTEN.

tion as to the prototypes of the book is hardly worth mooting. It was the frequent assertion of the author in her prime that the character of Uncle Tom was drawn from no particular person, and she is perfectly frank in the «Key» in stating her sources and suggestions when any exist. This is in no way incompatible with the concessions first made. The fiction was essentially a product both of the outer experiences and the inward life of the writer; its types, figures, and scenes came of the creative imagination, differing from the raw material offered by objective facts, because of the selective instinct and transmuting touch of the born story-teller. Mrs. Stowe threw off the book in a moral white heat,—an improviser like Walter Scott, Dumas the elder, and George Sand,—and the magical influence of her first novel is largely explained in this way.

Thus instigated by her kinsfolk to write on a subject her soul was full of, an additional incentive came in the shape of a letter from Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the Washington «National Era,» requesting her to con-

sent them to Dr. Bailey, writing instalment after instalment at Brunswick, as the successive parts appeared—a dangerous method of procedure, but in this case not seeming to injure the quality or power of the tale. The story was published serially from June, 1851, to April, 1852. The account of its instant and immense success reads almost like a fairy-tale. The shy, modest wife of the country professor awoke, like Byron, to find herself famous: the days of poverty were over; in four months her royalties were ten thousand dollars; within a year three hundred thousand copies were sold in the United States alone, while in England forty editions appeared within the same time. Thus was the most widely sought book of modern times, within the domain of literature, started on its course of unprecedented popularity. It was dramatized the same year of its publication, and the foreign translations also began at once, extending to twenty lands, beginning with France. Nor was «Uncle Tom's Cabin» merely a popular success. Letters received by the author from the leading

writers of America and England added welcome critical appreciation. One or two such may be cited. Longfellow wrote: «I congratulate you most cordially upon the immense success and influence of (Uncle Tom's Cabin.) It is one of the greatest triumphs recorded in literary history, to say nothing of the higher triumph of its moral effect.» Perhaps no criticism ever received by Mrs. Stowe was keener, more authoritative, and kinder than that of Mr. Lowell, in a letter written mainly in reference to another story,—«The Minister's Wooing,»—but touching on the earlier book. «From long habit,» he says, «and from the tendency of my studies, I cannot help looking at things from an æsthetic point of view, and what I valued in (Uncle Tom's Cabin) was the genius and not the moral. That is saying a good deal, for I never use the word *genius* at haphazard and always (perhaps too) sparingly.» This dictum from a truly great critic may be taken as an antidote by those who in their zeal for pointing out technical defects in the novel fail to see its very palpable merits—the vivid realization of scene and character, and the dramatic instinct for story-telling. Needless to say that the effect of the story upon public

thought both here and abroad was electric; the air was surcharged with feeling, and ready to become impassioned. Call «Uncle Tom's Cabin» special pleading or no, as we will, after its reading the Missouri Compromise was felt to be a monstrous, an impossible thing.

At the age of forty-one, then, Harriet Beecher Stowe found herself a writer of transatlantic reputation, whose every future book would be an event in the literary world. Her first novel was written at forty, when she was a mature woman, acquainted with grief, and had lived widely and well in the best sense. It may be recalled that George Eliot (between whom and Mrs. Stowe a sincere friendship was destined to spring up) wrote her «Scenes of Clerical Life» at thirty-seven—another example of a comparatively late turning to fiction by a writer of power. Henceforth Mrs. Stowe's experiences were to be broader, richer, more varied. In 1852 she went to Europe for the first of her three foreign trips, which extended her horizon in all ways, and brought her precious friends among the chosen of England and elsewhere. Her travel was almost a royal progress in respect to the attention paid her by the pop-



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

MRS. STOWE'S HOUSE AT MANDARIN, FLORIDA, 1878.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.



DRAWN BY ALBERT ABENSCHEN.

AFTER A PHOTOGRAPH BY HASTINGS, BOSTON.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, 1888.

ulace, while affectionate ties were formed with the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, Charles Kingsley, Lady Byron, John Ruskin, George Eliot, the Brownings, and many more. Throughout her wanderings, and in her contact with all classes in her own country, Mrs. Stowe remained what she always was—the simple, unpretending American woman, who regarded her gift as a trust from God, and was weighed down with a sense of its responsibility. Naturally of a retiring, even shrinking, disposition, she steadily preferred the quiet of the home-circle to all else the world could offer. A letter in which she describes her personal appearance is an index of her modest estimate of herself in

general: «I am a little bit of a woman, rather more than forty, as withered and dry as a pinch of snuff; never very well worth looking at in my best days, and now a decidedly used-up article.» For many years her work in the United States was not only that of a *littérateur*, but of lecturer and propagandist as well, until the war with its wiping off of the blot of slavery gave her liberty to rest from her labors in that hard-fought field. The long crescendo of work in this kind found its climax in the publication in the «Atlantic,» in 1863, of the reply which she wrote in response to the address to the women of America by the sister-women of Great Britain and Ireland, signed, it will be

remembered, by a shining list of great names. In her own person in that pronouncement she stood for and summed up the womanhood of her nation.

«Dred,» intended by the writer to be in some sort a complement to the earlier novel, appeared in 1856, and one hundred thousand copies were sold in England within four weeks. Harriet Martineau thought it superior to «Uncle Tom,» and the work certainly contains some vivid scenes, and, moreover, has the merit of depicting the normal social conditions in the South during slavery days. Then two years later came «The Minister's Wooing,» which most critics will agree with Mr. Lowell in considering her best work, technically viewed. «The Minister's Wooing,» «The Pearl of Orr's Island,» and «Old Town Folks,» produced during the fourteen years between 1855 and 1869, although by no means on a level of workmanship, constitute pioneer fiction in an important field, fruitfully developed in later days by Mrs. Cooke, Miss Jewett, Miss Wilkins, and others. These tales are no slight part of the author's literary creation, and historically are of significance in the evolution of American story-making. Half a dozen books were written by Mrs. Stowe after 1869, the last so late as 1881. But it is best to regard her major activity as closed with the year 1870.

In 1863 the family moved from Andover, Mass., with whose seminary Professor Stowe had long been connected, to Hartford, Conn. It was natural that Mrs. Stowe should come to the Connecticut city where she had studied as a school-girl, and where her sister

Isabella Beecher Hooker was living. In the course of a decade the growth of manufacturing interests had so encroached upon her property that the place was disposed of, and the Stowes moved a short distance to Forest street, and bought a cottage, the houses of Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner being hard by. Here she lived for more than twenty-two years. In the old days active with her pen, and often seen in the society of the little city, for the last dozen years she had been in entire seclusion from social duties and pleasures, and incapacitated from literary labor. Her last public appearance as a woman of letters was on June 14, 1882, on the occasion of a garden party, given by her publishers at Newtonville, Mass., in honor of her seventieth birthday. In 1865 Mrs. Stowe purchased and fitted up an attractive Southern home in Mandarin, Fla., and thither she repaired for twenty years, giving up the wonted south-faring in 1885 because of her husband's failing health.

Mrs. Stowe's experiences were exceptional, her achievements conspicuous. The ethical was dominant in her career—the world of spirits, ideas, ideals, and aspirations was the world of her chief interest. In the making of her mightiest book she regarded herself as a medium—in the noble sense of that much misused word. «Are you not thankful, Mrs. Stowe,» said a neighbor of late, «that you wrote (Uncle Tom's Cabin?)» With a flash of the old fire she replied, «I did not write that book: God put a pen into my hand; he wrote it.»

Richard Burton.



DRAWN BY W. H. DRAKE.

BRACELET MADE IN IMITATION OF THE MANACLES OF A SLAVE.

Presented to Mrs. Stowe by Harriet Elizabeth Georgiana, second Duchess of Sutherland, in 1853, at a reception at Stafford House, London. The links bear, with certain antislavery dates, the following inscription: «562848, March 19, 1853» (the date and number of signatures to the address by the women of England to the women of America). The sheets of this address were sent to all the English colonies, and wherever British residents could be found. It was presented to Mrs. Stowe by the Duchess of Sutherland, and is now bound in twenty-four large volumes.



DRAWN BY GEORGE RICHMOND, LONDON.

REPRODUCED FROM THE STEEL ENGRAVING BY FRANCIS HOLL.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE, 1853



ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE, AFTER A DAGUERRETYPE, 1852.

OWNED BY MRS. HENRY WARD BEECHER.

Truly Yours
Harriet Beecher Stowe