THE CRITICAL REPUTATION OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

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PREFACE

Approximately three years ago I read an article in the New York Times Magazine which listed numerous library records and implied that Uncle Tom's Cabin was still quite popular among mature readers. Previously, my understanding had been that the novel was only an historical landmark and a children's classic. Since that time, I have wanted to ascertain the evaluations attributed to it by its many critics. In this research I have utilized all the available nineteenth century criticisms, but only the major ones from the twentieth century.

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to The Friends of the Detroit Public Library, Inc., and to the University of Oklahoma for the loan of material. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Alton P. Juhlin of the Special Services department of Oklahoma State University library for his assistance in making available much critical material. Also I wish to express my sincere thanks to my adviser, Dr. Cecil B. Williams, and to my second reader, Dr. Clinton Keeler, for their patience, genuine interest, and invaluable constructive criticism.

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CHAPTER I

THE AUTHOR AND THE PRESENT STATE OF SCHOLARSHIP ON UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Harriet Beecher Stowe's long life (1811-1896) was marked by the production of many books, several of which were widely read when they appeared but have long since been forgotten, or nearly so, with one notable exception. The most successful of them all, Uncle Tom's Cabin, has become a part of American culture which is at least vaguely known to every literate American.

A few years after the world first made the acquaintance of Uncle Tom's Cabin, at a time when the clouds hanging over the nation were blackest, President Lincoln met Mrs. Stowe for the first time. He is said to have remarked to her when he met her in the White House, "Is this the little woman who made this great war?"[1] Whether these words are actual or apocryphal, and whether or not they are just, it is certain that the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin caused a literary civil war.

The purpose of the present study is to make a detailed examination of the critical reputation of Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin as reflected by opinions in books, magazines, and other evidences of its popularity. Remarkably enough, in view of her reputation as the leading

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[1]Annie Fields, Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York, 1897), p. 130.

woman writer of her time, so far as I have been able to ascertain this is the first attempt to follow systematically the fortunes of the novel from the time of its publication to the present.

The plan for the study calls for reducing biographical and historical considerations to a minimum so that most of the available space can be devoted to a chronological investigation of criticism of Uncle Tom's Cabin. In this study, however, certain biographical influences are so important that they cannot be ignored. Accordingly, this chapter will briefly interpret Mrs. Stowe's life from her birth to the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1811-1852). It will show, at least in part, how a preacher's daughter and a professor's wife happened to become not only a writer, but also the particular kind of writer capable of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

The second chapter will present in chronological order the critical reputation of the novel in America from the date of its publication in 1852 to the author's death in 1896; the third, its reputation from 1896 to the present. Some attention will be given to criticism of dramatizations of Uncle Tom's Cabin, since the dramatic forms of the book figure importantly in its total reputation. The fourth chapter will be devoted to the reputation of the novel in foreign countries, and a final chapter will summarize the trends in the reputation of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Although little systematic criticism has been given Mrs. Stowe's work, the story of her life has been several times told at length, with incidental attention to her writing. When she burst upon the world as author of her historic novel, it seemed that she had come out of the unknown, but biographers immediately began to seek for the forces that had brought her to authorship. Permitted access to Mrs. Stowe's

materials so that she could prepare a "sketch," Florian Thayer McCray published in 1889 a full-length study which offered competition to Charles Edward Stowe's authorized work, Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, published the same year.[2] Since that time other life stories have appeared, the most satisfactory of which is Annie Fields' Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe (1897), the careful compilation of an old friend who was a famous publisher's wife and also a cultured woman of letters. The most recent biography is the authoritative Crusader in Crinoline (1941) written by Forrest Wilson.[3]

Tracing her parentage and her surroundings, Mr. Wilson related that Mrs. Stowe's personality and power were the fruit of rare conditions. Born in 1811 in a secluded New England county seat, the daughter of one of the most virile and independent of the Puritan clergy, the child of a sensitive and religious mother, she grew up under influences that nurtured all her gifts. Inheriting from both parents the qualities in which each was strongest, growing up in a home where an independent and free intellectual and religious atmosphere was encouraged and in a village where the best social and educational life was maintained, she drank in to the full the influences which shaped and controlled her life.[4]

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[2]Chester E. Jorgenson, compiler, Uncle Tom's Cabin as Book and Legend, Friends of the Detroit Public Library, Inc. (Detroit, 1952), p. 49.

[3]More recent studies of Mrs. Stowe have not been entirely biographical. A fictionalized account of her life, entitled Victorian Cinderella and prepared especially for children, appeared in 1947. That same year Harry Birdoff published The World's Greatest Hit, a useful guide to the fortunes of the dramatizations of the novel. The Rungless Ladder, written by C. H. Foster and published in 1954, is a study of Mrs. Stowe's writings as they were affected by New England Puritanism.

[4]Forrest Wilson, Crusader in Crinoline (New York, 1941), pp. 67-95.

Such was the force of her environment that at the age of twelve she had written a school composition on "The Immortality of the Soul," unknown to her father, who, after it was read in public, eagerly inquired who wrote it.[5] At least, so goes the story. But G. D. Eaton bluntly remarks that he doubts that Mrs. Stowe was the author of the composition. The excellence of the English used in the paper and the very close resemblance between the phrases used in the article and those habitually used by Lyman Beecher led him to believe Harriet's father actually wrote it.[6]

In any case, it must have been quite a training school in which Catherine, Edward, Harriet, Henry Ward, and Charles Beecher were pitted against Dr. Lyman Beecher in daily discussions that took up almost any subject. A little later this sensitive girl was transferred to Hartford to be both teacher and pupil in a school which Catherine had started for the education of young women. The fame of that school went far and wide, for it was one of the first efforts in New England to give girls a higher education. No pupil was more apt or got more out of the school than Harriet Beecher, and no teacher superior to Catherine could then have been found. This was long before Mary Lyon had begun her work at South Hadley; as an educator, Catherine Beecher was a pioneer.[7]

Under a home and school like these, Harriet Beecher grew to womanhood, gathering into her life the best that the country and the city had

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[5]Julius H. Ward, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," The Forum, XXI (1896), 727.

[6]G. D. Eaton, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," The American Mercury, X (1927), 451.

[7]Wilson, pp. 109-127.

to give. But another element entered her life. She had the free range in her girlhood of the homes of New England people, and, quick to note everything that went on and able to remember what was said, she caught the vernacular and made it her own, thus storing away in her memory unconsciously the materials which could be used in later years. All this time her mind and heart were reaching out freely into New England life and learning how to use what they came in contact with. She was simply following a natural growth, but her training was destined to bear the largest fruit in the near future. Poverty also came to her aid. She had a natural gift for writing, and it was to increase her resources that she began to contribute to the annuals and magazines of the era. Too young to enter upon any large work, she began to make sketches of what she had seen, and it was by the aid of these that she became known as one of the younger writers of her day. It was her struggle with poverty, a condition not improved by her marriage to Professor Stowe, that developed the impulse to write until it grew to be a passion and a source of power. It was also partially due to this fact that she began to write her masterpiece.[8]

In 1832 Dr. Beecher became President of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati and took his family to the Ohio city. This was the first actual meeting of the Beechers with American slavery. Harriet had only to cross the river into Kentucky to come into personal contact with the Negroes of the South. As early as 1833, there began in the North the stir of an effort for the freedom of the slave, and here on the borderland between North and South she was trained for the next seventeen

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[8]Ibid., pp. 210-236.

years to know and to feel what the institution meant. Long before the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted, she had assisted in the Underground Railroad by which slaves were helped to freedom, and in the school which her sister and she had established she had colored children as pupils. All the years of her earlier womanhood were spent in an atmosphere that was bristling with opposition to slavery and yet constantly permeated with its influence.[9] No training school could have been devised in which a sensitive and religious mind could have been better educated for a great achievement.

In 1836 Harriet Beecher was married, and for the next dozen years, while trying to drive poverty out of her own home, she found herself pondering the problem of slavery, an evil that was growing larger and larger. It was a time when throughout the North the clergy and the people were petitioning for the freedom of the slave, and moral sentiment which refused to be put down was growing stronger day by day. Garrison, Phillips, Whittier, Parker, Horace Mann, and countless others were arousing public feeling against slavery; and Webster, the pride of New England, was endeavoring to hold the Union together by conciliating the slave power. On each side the temper was up, and yet it seemed as if nothing could be done. A storm was brewing and the silence was profound. The lives of people were surcharged with feeling, and yet few persons spoke. Instead they thought. With many New England women at this particular period, when life was so retired and so cut off from outward sources of excitement, thinking grew to be a disease.[10]

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[9]Eaton, p. 453.

[10]Gamaliel Bradford, "Portraits of American Women," Atlantic Monthly, July, 1918, p. 87.

Into the very soul of a sensitive woman in Cincinnati had entered the sword of this controversy. "Thought, intense, emotional thought, has been my disease." She knew more at that time about slavery than any other American.[11] Mrs. Edward Beecher wrote to her later, "Now, Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is."[12] At this time, the Stowes had moved to Brunswick, in Maine, and when Mrs. Stowe had read these words, she rose from her chair, crushing the letter in her hand, and with an expression on her face that stamped itself on the mind of her child, said: "I will write something. I will if I live."[13] This was the origin of Uncle Tom's Cabin, but it was not the writing of the work. This was to become a task imposed by a sense of duty upon a woman who was struggling to help her husband make both ends meet, and who without assistance was trying to earn something with her pen and to take care of a family of young children. Like many writers, and some who have been the most successful, Mrs. Stowe was neither a great scholar nor a great reader of the writings of others. This was perhaps because her father objected to reading novels, until he came across those of Sir Walter Scott, which he forced his children to read.[14] She did not write because she read; she wrote because she thought and felt, and writing was to her the simplest medium for

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[11]Wilson, pp. 394-432.

[12]Fields, p. 130.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Eaton, p. 449.

expressing thought and feeling. She created her work from what she saw in life, not from what she found in books.[15]

The duties of home were great, but the duty of the hour was supreme. It was inevitable that the contact of Mrs. Stowe's heart with slavery should bring into her consciousness a vivid and moving sense of injustice and should also evoke in some form a passionate protest. For some time all that Mrs. Stowe had was simply a propagandist's determination to make a whole nation feel the injustice of a social institution. But some months before her purpose crystallized she had met in Boston a colored preacher called "Father" Henson who, despite the fact that he had been miserably oppressed by his masters, was capable of great forgiveness.[16] With "Father" Henson as a model for her hero, she rose to the demands made upon her and began to write Uncle Tom's Cabin.

How she wrote the story is not definitely known, for Mrs. Stowe herself gave contrasting accounts. According to the lengthy statement which she wrote as an introduction to the edition copyrighted in 1878, she had long seen the slave trade from her home in Cincinnati, had visited Kentucky, and had observed the separation of a man and his wife.[17] During many years the material for her book had been accumulating, but a feeling of the helplessness of protest long held her from her work. Finally, "pondering the subject,"[18] she determined to act. In an anti-slavery magazine she read an account of a slave's flight over an icy

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[15]Bradford, p. 87.

[16]G. B. Munson, Twelve Decisive Battles of the Mind (New York, 1942), pp. 119-140.

[17]Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin (Boston, 1878), p. viii.

[18]Ibid., p. ii.

river, which she accepted as a salient point in her story, but the first part written was the death of Uncle Tom, a scene which appeared to her, almost as a vision, while she was sitting at the communion table in the church at Brunswick, Maine. She read it to her two little sons, since her husband was away, and the lads responded by weeping, sobbing, and crying out against slavery. She continued to work on other parts of the novel, feverishly, in the full swing of inspiration, feeling that the story was leading her rather than she telling it, until finally, as she wrote out the death of Uncle Tom, "it seemed as if the whole vital force had left her."[19] She could never decide when or how she had composed the death of Uncle Tom. In the narrative summarized above she called it both the first and the last part of the book to be set down,[20] but Mrs. Stowe was incapable of realizing the discrepancy.[21]

According to another of her accounts, the sketch of Tom's death was written at an Andover, Massachusetts, boardinghouse. While her husband slept on a couch in the room, she dashed off nine foolscap sheets. In his enthusiasm, having been awakened to hear the results of his wife's inspiration, he immediately mailed the manuscript to the publisher without revision. When Mrs. Fields had established the Professor's absence from Andover until after the publication of the book, Mrs. Stowe flatly declined to accept that absence as suggesting a discrepancy in her story.[22]

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[19]Ibid., p. xiii.

[20]Ibid., pp. xi, xiii.

[21]Fields, p. 165.

[22]Ibid., pp. 164, 165.

It is both natural and characteristic that although Mrs. Stowe was at times inclined to grant God the complete credit for Uncle Tom's Cabin,[23] she should at others have considered that she also had some share in its success. Thus in 1853 she stated that the book had been written in her heart's blood, against the great obstacle of poor health.[24] Upon another occasion she wrote, in 1870, that she had been driven to write it, like her other books, "by the necessity of making some income for family expenses."[25] Her visionary theory also went by the boards in a communication (1863) to the Duchess of Argyle in which she asserted that she had learned about southern life from letters "showing a state of society perfectly inconceivable."[26]

Whatever may be the facts concerning its origin, when two or three chapters of the novel were written, she wrote to her friend, Dr. Bailey, the editor of the National Era, that she was planning a story which could run through several numbers of the Era. The story was at once accepted for publication, and thereafter weekly installments were sent regularly.[27] She could not stop as it went on, even when she wanted to, and it mastered her so completely that she had strength for it when she could do nothing else.[28] She wrote to Dr. Bailey and asked what he

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[23]Florian Thayer McCray, The Life Work of the Author of Uncle Tom's Cabin (New York, 1889), p. 66.

[24]Fields, p. 171.

[25]Ibid., p. 327.

[26]Ibid., p. 271.

[27]Charles Dudley Warner, "The Story of Uncle Tom's Cabin," Atlantic Monthly, September, 1896, p. 313.

[28]Ward, p. 729.

thought about skipping several prospective chapters and closing the story with Uncle Tom's martyrdom and a chapter telling what happened to everybody. The editor passed the problem on in a guarded query in the Era addressed to the readers of the serial. The response was immediate and overwhelming: the readers wanted all of the story, no less. This is perhaps the unique example in literary history of the readers themselves making a major decision with respect to the composition of a novel.[29]

Before its serialization was finished, it attracted the attention of Mr. John P. Jewett, a young and then unknown publisher, who offered to issue it in book form. On March 20, 1852, the obscure Boston publishing house brought out in two volumes the novel which within a month of its publication achieved a national reputation.[30] It was a bold step in 1852 to publish such a story as Uncle Tom's Cabin. Less than two years before, Daniel Webster in his famous Seventh of March Speech had attempted a compromise, and the North felt that the slave power had triumphed. But Mrs. Stowe's publisher had the courage of youth behind him, and the work was brought out with little expectation of success. What it did is now well known. It signalized and helped bring about the parting of the ways between the North and the South. For the first time many Americans were aware of the abuses of the slavery system, and the novel's fairness to the South gained it a reading even there. It went beyond America, beyond the English race, wherever people read and think, and it caused the whole world to demand that the American slave

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[29]Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 116.

[30]Warner, p. 314.

should be free. Men saw that the end had come, and although it was to be a dozen years before Lincoln penned his famous document of Emancipation, the portent of the event was in Uncle Tom's Cabin.[31]

To Mrs. Stowe the interest raised by this work was in large measure a surprise. While no one should underestimate the great services of men like Garrison and Phillips and Parker and Sumner, who cast their fortunes into the effort to free the slaves, all their efforts proved small in comparison with the stir and power that were in Uncle Tom's Cabin.[32] Nowhere else in human history has a work devoted to a great cause had such an instantaneous effect. Mrs. Stowe, who had hoped that the sale of her story might relieve her poverty, within four months from the time of its publication found herself in receipt of ten thousand dollars and the most famous woman living.[33] Jewett, her publisher and a vigorous anti-slave man, recalled in an article printed in 1883 that he probably could have bought the rights to Uncle Tom's Cabin for twenty-five or fifty dollars.[34] Four months after the publication of the book Professor Stowe was in the publisher's office, and Mr. Jewett asked him how much he expected to receive. "I hope," said Professor Stowe, with a whimsical smile, "that it will be enough to buy my wife a silk dress."[35] Jewett described Stowe's surprise when he made his first royalty payment for

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[31]Ward, p. 731.

[32]Wilson, p. 190.

[33]Ward, p. 732.

[34]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," The Manhattan, January, 1883, p. 31.

[35]Ibid.

ten thousand dollars, but, "When I gave them a second check,...I found they needed no further instruction."[36]

In all, Mrs. Stowe received for Uncle Tom's Cabin only about forty thousand dollars, but had she been able to avail herself of English and other foreign copyrights she might have become one of the richest women living. The right of dramatization alone would have brought her a fortune.[37]

Harriet Beecher Stowe, then, had finally grown into a creative writer displaying powers which she herself seems to have imperfectly understood. Her statement that she had not written it herself but had merely taken it in dictation from God seems to have satisfied her in her old age.[38] Actually, into Uncle Tom's Cabin Mrs. Stowe was able to pour her whole life up to the time of writing it, everything she had learned about writing and everything she had learned about living. It was a wonderful summary of her past life, completely dwarfing anything she had done before, yet growing inevitably from her experiences. She was the only literary lady of her generation whose life had provided such a severe apprenticeship. Personal and social forces worked with equal power, and it fell to the lot of Mrs. Stowe to write the novel which stirred the whole country and gave her a world-wide reputation.

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[36]Ibid.

[37]Warner, p. 316.

[38]Fields, p. 377.

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN CRITICISM OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN DURING THE AUTHOR'S LIFETIME, 1852-1896

Success made Mrs. Stowe a celebrity, justified her life, gave her a career. For the moment, however, it also created for her the new problem of facing public criticism.[1] As the sales records indicated, the simple reading public, through their laughter and tears, had established Uncle Tom's Cabin as a classic. But the novel was also the atomic bomb of its day, for although the question of slavery had agitated and divided the nation since the early years of the nineteenth century, it had been a matter for statesmen and politicians to discuss and for newspapers to wrangle about. It remained for Uncle Tom's Cabin to carry it into the very homes of the people, generally rousing those in the North to indignation and stirring the South to resentment.[2]

Actually the author had designed it as a work of pacification. She did not expect that the abolitionists would be satisfied with the story, but she confidently believed that it would be favorably received in the South. She was relying on the fact that two of Uncle Tom's three masters were men of good character, amiable, kind, and generous; and on her

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[1]This included one libel suit, settled out of court. The correspondence on the charge was printed in the National Era, June 24, and October 14, 21, and 28, 1852.

[2]Arthur Bartlett Maurice, "Famous Novels and their Contemporary Critics," Bookman, March, 1930, p. 23.

purpose, which she believed would be apparent, to show that the fault was not with the Southern people but with the system.[3] A friend who lived in the South and had seen the manuscript wrote her: "Your book is going to be the great pacificator; it will unite North and South."[4] Great was Mrs. Stowe's surprise when the South protested furiously against the book while most of the abolitionists received her with open arms.

Beginning promptly with the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852, a spate of critical material appeared in the contemporary newspapers and magazines. The controversial subject treated in the novel evoked many and varied responses which ranged from adulation to condemnation. Within two years, however, the critics apparently turned their efforts to other interests, for between 1854 and the year of Mrs. Stowe's death, in 1896, the reviews were relatively few. But if the storm abated sooner than might have been expected, it was forceful while it lasted.

Evidence indicates that commendatory articles contemporary with the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin outnumbered uncomplimentary ones almost two to one. Those hostile to the author seem to have had more survival value, however, and as a result, many more reviews condemning Mrs. Stowe are now available.

On whether the novel was an accurate, conservative description of existing conditions in the slave-holding states and thus "a triumph of reality," or, on the other hand, "a monstrous distortion inspired by

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[3]Forrest Wilson, Crusader in Crinoline (Philadelphia, 1941), p. 176.

[4]"Building Uncle Tom's Cabin," Bookman, XXXIII (1911), 347.

abolitionist fanaticism," there was no agreement. But few, if any, of those who read it as it appeared serially in the National Era, or when it was first published in book form, was it judged without passion. To some it seemed "infamous," to others "inspired." There has probably never been another book which called out so many diverse opinions. Those who discussed it in print were in no mood to do so with restraint and judgment. The novel, the literary work, was lost sight of in the cause it championed, and many a critic found in it the reason for an article designed to set forth the writer's own personal beliefs and prejudices. Hence, in its relation to contemporary criticism, Uncle Tom's Cabin occupies a unique place among the famous works of fiction. Since the novel as a social document commanded more early attention than as a novel, it seems logical to examine purely political opinions first.

Although not all of the Northern press was sympathetic with Mrs. Stowe, she was generally highly commended there, and most critics who welcomed Uncle Tom's Cabin as a tool which would aid the abolitionist cause wrote their commendations with restraint. An editorial in the June 16, 1852, New York Evening Post was inspired by her determination to cause the slave to be freed. In the article entitled, "We Must Judge by What We Are Compelled to See," the reviewer stated that it was a mistake to affirm that only the worst features of slavery were pictured by Mrs. Stowe.

> On the contrary, she sets before her readers a picture, honourable not to the institution but to many who live under it, of a planter's family, the slaves of which are treated with exemplary kindness and unvarying humanity.[5]

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[5]Quoted in Maurice, p. 25.

Also characteristic of the general good will in the Northern states toward the novel are two reviews appearing in Littell's Living Age during the year of the novel's publication. The first of these described the work as "free of bigotry and fanaticism";[6] the second called it the result of the perfected craft of the advocate.[7] Mrs. Stowe was pictured as a clever woman who neither preached nor philosophized, but who "assailed" the heart of the reader. "She cannot hold the scales of justice with a steady hand, however," noted the reviewer, who regretted that the author injured the abolition cause by implying that Africans are superior to whites.[8] But the Boston Morning Post expressed itself in another tone, its editor stating that no one could justly doubt the author's intentions to deal justly with both the slave and the slave-holder.[9] And a correspondent for the St. Louis Western Journal and Civilian stated that without doubt the monstrous evil depicted in the novel actually existed.[10] It may be that Charles Briggs was candid and disinterested when he observed that "Mrs. Stowe's book gives a much more agreeable picture of Southern life than any of the works ... which profess to give the right side of the tapestry."[11]

Other well known judges also voiced opinions as to the merits of the book from a social and moral standpoint. "Ten thousand thanks for thy immortal book," cried John Greenleaf Whittier, who related that his

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[6]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Littell's Living Age, July 10, 1852, p. 61.

[7]Ibid., October 16, 1852, pp. 97-111.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Quoted in Maurice, p. 25.

[10]Western Journal and Civilian, November, 1852, p. 133.

[11]Charles F. Briggs, "Uncle Tomitudes," Putnam's Magazine, December, 1853, p. 97.

friend had been reading the novel to twenty young ladies, daughters of Louisiana slaveholders, and that they, with one accord, pronounced it true.[12] Longfellow felt that it was one of the greatest triumphs recorded in literary history, to say nothing of the higher triumph of its moral effect.[13] "Never," he said, "was there such a literary coup-de-main as this."[14] From Thomas Wentworth Higginson came the following:

> To have written at once the most powerful of contemporary fictions and the most efficient of anti-slavery tracts is a double triumph in literature and philanthropy, to which this country has heretofore seen no parallel.[15]

While the Northern public was generally pleased with Mrs. Stowe's masterpiece, some critics there bitterly attacked the novel. In fact, the first attack on its veracity came from the North. Mrs. Stowe had recognized that she could not pin the sin of slavery on the South alone, for there was plenty of Northern money invested in the cotton business, which lived by slavery. The spokesman for that money was the New York Journal of Commerce, which at the end of May fired the first big gun against Uncle Tom's Cabin. Editors throughout the country quickly picked up the challenge and the great newspaper debate began.[16]

That the Journal of Commerce would condemn the novel was expected, but it is curious to note the small impression the book apparently made

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[12]Stowe, p. 161.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Samuel Longfellow, Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New York, 1891), II, 249.

[15]Charles Edward Stowe, Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York, 1889), p. 162.

[16]Wilson, p. 297.

in the office of the Liberator, the professed organ of the New England abolitionists. In its column its editor, William Lloyd Garrison, had been thundering out his weekly diatribe against the slaveholding states. A great part of the paper was given over to clippings inimical to the South, of a nature to disturb both Northern and Southern readers.[17] Yet in the Liberator the review of Uncle Tom's Cabin, which appeared in the issue for March 26, 1852, was not only unenthusiastic; it was actually unsympathetic. Mrs. Stowe and her book were roundly scored for what the reviewer called "her objectionable sentiments respecting African colonization."[18]

A severe tone of Northern disfavor ran through the review of the New York Courier and Inquirer for October 21, 1852. According to it, the novel conveyed erroneous impressions and introduced false conclusions.

> It not only is untrue, but it is untruthful...It is not, as it purports to be, a picture of slavery as it is...It is not one individual against whom Mrs. Stowe has borne false witness; she has slandered hundreds of her own countrymen.[19]

The Literary World, a Northern pro-slavery press, regretted the novel's great success and was bitter in its first attack on the novel. The editor found the book "neither fish nor flesh, nor yet good red herring." He further stated that as a political disquisition, an ethnological essay, or a novel, it was equally unsatisfactory, but conceded that perhaps it was suitable for a "manual for runaways."[20] The following month the same critic reported that the "Uncle Tom

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[17]Maurice, p. 24.

[18]Quoted in Maurice, p. 26.

[19]Ibid.

[20]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Literary World, X (November, 1852), 291.

epidemic still rages with unabated virulence," and that the prevailing affection was universal.

> No country is safe from its attack...no age or sex is spared; no condition is exempt....Its influence is bad. The social evils of slavery have been exaggerated and presented in a form calculated to excite an inconsiderate popular feeling.[21]

Early in the spring of the following year, 1853, George Graham wrote a signed rejoinder to readers who had objected to his earlier criticism of Mrs. Stowe. He believed the book gave an unfair and untrue picture of Southern life. "It is a BAD BOOK," he wrote, "which is badly constructed, badly timed, and made up for a bad purpose."[22]

The Democratic Review suggested that it was impossible to account for the extraordinary sale of the novel on the basis of mere literary merit.

> The unparalleled popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin in the United States and Europe...can only be accounted for by the simple fact that it was susceptible of being made a tool of abolition in one quarter and in the other a political instrument for undermining the influence of republican institutions.[23]

One of the most important of the early articles was Sidney G. Fisher's review of Uncle Tom's Cabin in October, 1853, which accepted the doctrine that the Negro was "naturally the servant of the white man," found emancipation therefore impossible, and proposed legal remedies for abuses of slaves.[24] This article was representative of Northern opinions which refused to see Negro slavery as a national problem.

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[21] Ibid., (December, 1852), 355.

[22] George R. Graham, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Graham's, XLII (1853), 366.

[23] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Democratic Review, XXXII (1853), 200.

[24] Sidney G. Fisher, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," North American Review, October, 1853, p. 477.

In an article in the New York Quarterly Review the writer found that Mrs. Stowe permitted her "crucible of imagination" to shape the exception into the rule. She achieved at best an unstable fusion of caricature and truth, and the only just motive the reviewer would ascribe to her was a desire to present vividly the need of reform in legislation.[25]

If her object was to impress the public with the evils of the institution, it was quite needless; if to excite indignation against slaveholders, it was unchristian; if to awaken sympathy for the blacks, it was injudicious.[26]

But of all the vast amount of comment in the Northern periodicals which the book called forth, one of the most delightful as well as the most inept was that of an anonymous and poetical "Lady in New York," The Patent Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Mrs. Stowe in England, printed at New York in 1853. This extraordinary jingle inspired by Mrs. Stowe's book and her trip to Europe, tempts quotation at length, since it combines practically all of the respectable prejudices against Mrs. Stowe:

> While some will find, in "Uncle Tom,"
> A subject good to build upon;
> But show an "Uncle Tom," and then,
> I will believe that one has been;
> A case like "Uncle Tom's"--might be--
> But when a thing like that I see,
> Or appertaining thereunto,
> Then I'll believe as many do,
> That owning and protecting slave
> Is greatest sin this side of grave.[27]

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[25]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," New York Quarterly Review, I (1853), 470-478.

[26]Ibid., p. 476.

[27]The Patent Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Mrs. Stowe in England (New York, 1853), p. 12.

That the lady was grimly determined never to be forced to any such admission is clear from a later quatrain:

> If subject--"Uncle Tom" I mean--
> They think a great and mighty theme--
> Just stay at home--our land's bereft!
> There's not an "Uncle Tom" here left![28]

Having to her own mind satisfactorily disclosed Mrs. Stowe's utter ignorance of the Southern slaves, the lady proceeded to the minor suspicions forced upon her by Uncle Tom's Cabin. These included a doubt of Mrs. Stowe's motives, and a question of her patriotism since she attacked the institutions of her native land but felt free to "hobnob" with foreigners. The "Lady in New York" concluded her poem by expressing doubts of the perfect breeding of the publicly crusading lady from New England.[29]

Probably the cleverest bit of comment was Thompson's epigram in his "Editor's Table":

> When Latin I studied, My Ainsworth in hand,
> I answered my teacher that "sto" meant "to stand;"
> But if asked I should now give another reply,
> For Stowe means, beyond any cavil, "to lie."[30]

In the South there was a reaction yet more violent. The adverse feeling aroused is shown in the contemporary periodicals in that quarter, in which the comment ranged from abuse and threats to parody and banter. The Southern Literary Messenger, published in Richmond, was probably the leading literary periodical of the South. That magazine, in a

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[28]Ibid., p. 16.

[29]Ibid.

[30]John Reuben Thompson, "Editor's Table," Literary World, XIX (1853), 61.

prompt review, condemned Mrs. Stowe as a diabolic Northerner who didn't know that woman's right is only the right to maternity. It further stated that she libeled and vilified, was insensitive and ignorant in not knowing that her ideas might have to be intimidated with bayonets, and that although a "cross between Joan of Arc and a fish-wife," since she was so devoted to her Bible, she should read Exodus XII--"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."[31]

The New Orleans Weekly Picayune accused Mrs. Stowe of having a greater love for money than for truth. "The dollars...had more attraction for her than the love of truth or the natural feminine instincts for peace."[32]

When the South Carolina poet William J. Grayson denounced Mrs. Stowe late in 1852 with one of the many "anti-Tom" poems which appeared, there was more than a question of propriety in lines like these:

> A moral scavenger, with greedy eye. . .
> On fields where vice eludes the light of day,
> She hunts up crimes as beagles hunt their prey;
> Gleans every dirty nook--the felon's jail
> And hangman's mem'ry, for detraction's tale,
> Snuffs up pollution with a pious air,
> Collects a rumor here, a slander there;
> With hatred's ardor gathers Newgate spoils,
> And trades for gold the garbage of her toils.[33]

A Southern review of Mrs. Stowe's work early in 1853 condemned the book in vigorous terms. The author found it difficult to disprove "slanders thus impudently uttered and obstinately persevered in" because

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[31]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Literary Messenger, XVIII (1852), 630.

[32]Quoted in Maurice, p. 24.

[33]William J. Grayson, "The Hireling and the Slave," as quoted in Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), II, 107.

the novel was written without knowledge of the facts of slavery. One should not criticize the system, he said,

> ...unless those who are to judge the question have some little insight into the facts of the case, and could know something of our habits and our laws, thus being enabled to judge of the respected worth of the testimony brought before them. So far from this being the case in the present questions, not only is our cause prejudged, but our very accusers assume to be our judges...They make the assertion, they swear to its truth, they pronounce sentence, and then at once judge, jury, witness, and plaintiff, they set up the most lamentable wailing over the horrible creations of their own fancy.[34]

The reviewer attempted to invalidate Mrs. Stowe's testimony by stating that she "probably" had never been in the South, and that she was ignorant of the South's manners and feelings.

Mrs. Stowe was the recipient of much more violent abuse than this. According to the National Era of May 12, 1853, Richmond papers had described her as a coarse, ugly, ill-natured, ill-mannered old woman, and many papers had denounced her as a libeler of her country and charged her with visiting England to be feasted, flattered, and given alms.[35]

It is well known that in response to these and other attacks upon the veracity of the book, Mrs. Stowe published A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, ostensibly presenting the facts and documents upon which the story was founded. This brought about a general castigation from the Southern Literary Messenger, in which Mrs. Stowe was not only condemned as a disseminator of incendiary falsehoods, but as an immoral writer.[36]

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[34]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Quarterly Review, January, 1853, p. 81.

[35]Quoted in Maurice, p. 25.

[36]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Literary Messenger, XVIII (June, 1853), 721.

...success /of Uncle Tom's Cabin/ has been attained by...its unblushing falsehoods...its chief passport to popular acceptance...Are scenes of license and impurity, and ideas of loathesome depravity and habitual prostitution to be made the cherished topics of the female pen, and the familiar staple of domestic consideration for promiscuous conversation? ...It is sufficiently disgraceful that a woman should be the instrument of dissemination of the vile stream of contagion...let us hope that women, and especially Southern women, will not be found pouring /sic/ over its pages.[37]

Critical to Mrs. Stowe's faith in the education and Christianization of the slave, Mr. A. Beatty, in an article in the Western Journal and Civilian, observed that it took Miss Ophelia years to educate Topsy, only one of the seven hundred slaves belonging to St. Clare. Beatty had greater faith in voluntary emancipation with an exodus to Liberia.[38]

The Southern Press complained that the work was a caricature of slavery. "It selects the most odious features of slavery, the escape and pursuit of fugitive slaves, the sale and separation of domestic slaves..."[39]

Two years after the novel's first publication, in 1854, a reviewer for The Freewill Baptist Quarterly called the novel "an apotheosis to the rights which make men free."[40] In comparing Mrs. Stowe with Sir Walter Scott, the reviewer remarked that "Even the Wizard of the North never so held a world spell-bound--never spoke to so many hearts, or excited in each such wondrous enthusiasm."[41] In a later review of

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[37] Ibid.

[38] A. Beatty, "The Evils of Slavery," Western Journal and Civilian, X (1853), 319-328.

[39] Quoted in Maurice, p. 24.

[40] "Uncle Tom's Cabin, Slavery, and the North American Review," The Freewill Baptist Quarterly, II (1854), 23.

[41] Ibid.

Sunny Memories, the reviewer imaged Uncle Tom's Cabin as a "polished blade of truth" which "seldom gleams in the land of fiction."[42]

Obviously, most of the foregoing contemporary criticisms of Uncle Tom's Cabin were more political and personal than literary. Some early literary evaluations were made, however. John Greenleaf Whittier was one of the earliest to give a literary opinion. He had earlier expressed his admiration of the novel to Mrs. Stowe. In August of 1852, he reviewed The White Slave: or Memoirs of a Fugitive, one of the many "anti-Tom" books. In his review he expressed his fear that the work at hand would be "a weak imitation of the highly successful and powerful romance of Harriet Beecher Stowe," and he was by no means willing to have that "marvelous picture" copied. Convinced that the new author was no copyist, Whittier commended the book, but hastened to add that it lacked the "admirable painting of character, the mingled pathos and drollery of that remarkable book" and that in pure "raciness, sprightliness and picturesque effect," Uncle Tom's Cabin had greatly the advantage.[43]

In November, Emerson entered in his Journals his comment that:

> It is the distinction of Uncle Tom's Cabin that it is read equally in the parlour and the kitchen and the nursery of every house. What the lady read in the drawing room in a few hours is retailed to her in the kitchen by the cook and the chambermaid, week by week; they master one scene and character after another.[44]

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[42]Ibid.

[43]Edwin Cody and Harry Clark, Whittier on Writers and Writing (New York, 1950), p. 79.

[44]Bliss Perry, ed., The Heart of Emerson's Journals (New York, 1909), p. 346.

Whittier and Longfellow were not the first to express evaluations of the work as a novel. Littell's Living Age in July had described the story as a plausible work of art written in an evenly balanced masculine style, which was alive with particularized characters and natural dialogue.[45] Three months later a reviewer for the same magazine was more effusive in his remarks. Having called Uncle Tom's Cabin "striking" and "meritorious," he concluded that it was impossible not to feel respect for the novel. But he noted a fault in the construction of her story, about which there is so much discussion at present. He described the novel as being a "series of detached scenes" rather than a compact whole, with the reader interested in the fate of two heroes whose streams of adventure never blend. The scene closes upon Uncle Tom to open upon George Harris and it closes upon George Harris to open upon Uncle Tom. But basically his comments were quite favorable. He said Mrs. Stowe had great skill in character delineation, her hand being vigorous and firm, that her mastery over human feeling was unquestionable, and that her humorous effects were unimpeachable. He welcomed it as the best that had been contributed to what would hereinafter form a large part of the reading of the world, the literature of America. Recognizing it as being genuinely American, he stated that the "great and sacred feelings common to humanity are uttered in that kind of English which is spoken only in America," not founded upon reminiscences of Addison and Goldsmith. He closed his article by asserting that while it is easy to find fault in the book, still, regarded purely as a novel,

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[45] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Littell's Living Age, July 10, 1852, pp. 61, 62.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a work of the very highest literary merit, and he predicted that by writing the story, Mrs. Stowe had assured for herself a permanent position in the front rank of the writers of America.[46]

An article in the St. Louis Western Journal and Civilian conceded that "with all its faults" Uncle Tom's Cabin was no ordinary book. The reviewer regarded the romance as successful in characterization, with dramatic situations and nimble dialogues, but naively sentimental and unrivaled in untruths. The characters, he said, were either all noble or all evil, hence melodramatic and unnatural. The reviewer contended that Uncle Tom's Cabin was grossly unjust because exaggeration pervaded the whole. Characters, uncommon anywhere, in any state of society, however Christian or refined, were held up as types of a race long held in a state of mental and moral degradation.[47]

Calling the novel a brilliant literary work, the Boston Morning Post stated that it was certainly one of the most remarkable literary productions of the era, an evident result of the highest attributes of the novel writer.[48] However, the Southern Quarterly Review complained that "She makes her Southern ladies and gentlemen talk 'Kentuck.'"[49] And another reviewer, in deprecating Mrs. Stowe's art, appraised the novel as inferior even to the novels of "Bulwer, Currer Bell and [curiously enough] Hawthorne."[50]

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[46]Ibid.

[47]Western Journal and Civilian, November, 1852, p. 133.

[48]Quoted in Maurice, p. 25.

[49]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Quarterly Review, January, 1853, p. 81.

[50]Fisher, p. 480.

In the very first issue of Putnam's, in January, 1853, the editor of that magazine exclaimed: "Never since books were first printed has the success of Uncle Tom been equalled; the history of literature contains nothing parallel to it, or even approaching it."[51] In a review of the book later in the year, the editor of that magazine proposed that the novel succeeded in spite of its subject matter, not because of it.

> The anti-slavery sentiment obtruded by the author...upon the reader must be felt by everyone to be a great blemish of the book; and it is one of the great proofs of its merit as a romance, that it succeeded in spite of this defect.[52]

The reviewer went on to say that it was the consummate art of the story-teller that had given popularity to Uncle Tom's Cabin, and nothing else. He could think of no novel after Tom Jones which he considered superior to Uncle Tom in constructive ability. In commending Mrs. Stowe's narrative, Mr. Briggs described her novel as seizing upon the attention of the reader at the outset and continuing with consummate skill to the end. How she managed this he felt was not important; that she did it was sufficient, for this is the chief aim of the romancer, and the greatest artist is he who accomplishes this in the most effectual manner.[53] He felt that the amazing popularity of the novel came because it was a "living thing."[54] He had the critical capacity to appraise the novel from a flexible vantage point which included ethics as well as aesthetics.

> There are not, in Uncle Tom's Cabin, any of the delicacies of language which impart so great a charm to the writings of Irving and Hawthorne, not any descriptions of scenery such as abound in the romances of Cooper,

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[51] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Putnam's Monthly, January, 1853, p. 98.

[52] Briggs, p. 97.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

nor any bewildering sensuousness of Typee Melville; but there are broader, deeper, higher and holier sympathies than can be found in other romances; finer delineations of character, a wider scope of observation, a more purely American spirit, and a more vigorous narrative faculty.[55]

A critic for the North American Review, though hastening to admit that had Uncle Tom's Cabin not been well written, it would not have produced such effects as it did, stated that whatever may have been the literary merits of the story, they did not account for its success, for the novel exhibited by no means the highest order of genius or skill. Having made various suggestions as to the possible cause of the book's overwhelming popularity, the reviewer proposed that one of the most important was the merit of the book itself. He felt that it was, unquestionably, a work of genius. It has defects of conception and style, exhibits a lack of artistic skill, is often tame and inadequate in description, and is tinctured with Methodistic cant; but, with all its blemishes, thought, imagination, feeling, high moral and religious sentiment, and dramatic power shine through on every page. The reviewer felt that the characters were drawn with truth.

St. Clare is a person of talents and education, high-minded, generous, and impulsive; the influences of his position and circumstances on his character are well developed. Ophelia is an admirable picture of a conscientious, practical, kind-hearted, energetic New England woman. St. Clare's wife is well imagined but overdrawn. Legree is a monster, and is painted in strong colors; but the picture wants truth and minuteness of detail to bring out the conception, for no woman's hand could properly describe him. The Shelbys are worthy, amiable, commonplace people, soberly and truly sketched. Eva and Tom are dreams; but to color and idealize is the privilege of romance provided the picture does not overstep the modesty of nature or contradict nature. There are no Evas or Uncle Toms, but there are some who possess, in a lower degree, their respective virtues.[56]

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[55]Ibid.

[56]Ibid.

William Gilmore Simms, himself a Southerner and editor of the Southern Quarterly Review, waited to write a review of the novel until the advent of the Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin triggered his response in 1854. He saw in the novel "a passionate power" and a remarkable "dramatic faculty." "She is, unquestionably," he wrote early in that year, "a woman of great inventive faculty, and 'Uncle Tom,' considered wholly aside from the slavery question, is a story of great and striking, though coarse, attraction."[57]

While many people denounced Mrs. Stowe and just as many praised and defended, the sale of the book continued. Not many days after the novel was published by Jewett and Company, the Liberator commented that "the effect of such a work upon all intelligent and humane minds...must be prodigious."[58] It was. Within eight weeks the book had sold 50,000 copies, or 100,000 volumes. "This is without precedent in the history of book publishing in this country," announced Norton's Literary Gazette.[59] But this was only a beginning. Three months later the Gazette told of 75,000 copies sold in America and three editions on the market in England.[60] By November there had been 120,000 copies sold on this side of the water, and nineteen editions had been published in England (one of which had been distributed to the number of 180,000 copies); and the publishers, advertising a new cheap edition at 37 1/2 cents, estimated a total distribution in America and Europe of a million

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[57]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Quarterly Review, January, 1854, p. 235.

[58]Quoted in Maurice, p. 26.

[59]Quoted in Frank Luther Mott, "Simon Legree Cracks His Whip," A History of American Magazines (Cambridge, 1938), II, p. 142.

[60]Ibid., September 15, 1852, p. 168.

copies within less than nine months.[61] By January, 1853, the figure was at 200,000 copies for the United States, according to Putnam's Monthly,[62] and within a year over three hundred thousand copies were sold.[63] That number (adjusted by eliminating Southern population, which included almost no customers) is equivalent to a sale of more than three million copies in the United States at the present time. If one could give proper consideration to literacy levels of the two dates and improved systems of book distribution, the sales figures would appear even more striking.[64]

Nor did the book sales tell the whole story; Uncle Tom's impact was felt by the non-reading public as well. Mrs. Stowe was by no means responsible for Uncle Tom's Cabin on the stage and derived no profit from it, but a full impact of her work upon the American mind cannot be gauged without some consideration of what became our closest approach to a folk-drama. In the summer of 1852, Asa Hutchinson wrote to Mrs. Stowe for permission to dramatize the book. Mrs. Stowe refused with the statement that if theaters began showing respectable, moral plays, the young people of Christian families would be allowed to see them and would develop the habit of promiscuous theater-going as a result.[65]

Despite her refusal, however, an experienced Boston writer began the task of dramatizing the story. With the exception of a few

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[61]Ibid., November 15, 1852, p. 212.

[62]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Putnam's Monthly, January, 1853, p. 98.

[63]Catherine Gilbertson, Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York, 1937), p. 162.

[64]James D. Hart, The Popular Book (New York, 1950), p. 110.

[65]Gilbertson, p. 159.

enthusiastic persons, Northerners viewed the proposed dramatization with indifference, but Southern disfavor was strong, as evidenced by the New Orleans Weekly Picayune. Calling the novel a promoter of sectional hatred, a teacher and preacher of national discord, whose end inevitably would be disruption of the Union, the editor of that paper stated that as a drama, its detrimental effects would be even greater.

> The gross misrepresentations of the South which have been propagated so extensively through the press...are to be presented in tableaux, and the lies they contain acted by living libellers before crowds of deluded spectators. The stage is to be employed in depicting to the people of the North the whole body of people of the South living in a state of profligacy, cruelty and crime, tyrants who fear not God and cruelly oppress their fellow creatures.[66]

Faced with opposition, within six months of Uncle Tom's publication two separate stage versions had opened in Boston and New York and had proved as notably successful as the book. In September George L. Aiken's dramatization, the most popular of many, opened an initial hundred-night run in Troy, New York, and soon the play, even more melodramatic than the novel, helped to sell the book.[67] In a period of nightly changes of program Uncle Tom delighted managers by filling the theaters night after night, and when Cordelia Howard, who starred as Eva, had a benefit performance in May, 1954, it was for her 325th consecutive performance.[68] Presented in tents and in the finest theaters, from 1853 to 1930 the play, generally in Aiken's dramatization, was never off the boards. "Uncle Tomming" had become a recognized branch of the theatrical profession; there were actors who appeared in no other play.

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[66]Quoted in Maurice, p. 26.

[67]Hart, p. 110.

[68]Gilbertson, p. 159.

Since Mrs. Stowe had neglected to secure dramatic rights, she was unable to prescribe requirements for stage productions; consequently, many versions promptly appeared, some of which closely followed the happenings in the novel and others which bore little resemblance. Therefore, inasmuch as the dramatizations furnished many Americans their only contact with the story, baseless legends have evolved around it. The most common instance of a groundless story widely credited as fact is the denunciation of Mrs. Stowe for having misrepresented Kentucky in Uncle Tom's Cabin because "she had big, savage bloodhounds chasing Eliza" whereas a real bloodhound is gentle and tame.[69] Actually Mrs. Stowe was in no way responsible for the canines.

George Broadhurst holds that the most devastating dramatic criticism ever written was inspired by Uncle Tom. It appeared in a Minnesota paper in the early nineties and read simply: "Thompson's Uncle Tom's Cabin company appeared at the Opera House last night. The dogs were poorly supported."[70]

Meanwhile, a flood of secondary Uncle Tom material was being published and manufactured. "Uncle Tom literature is almost overwhelming the bookstores," noted Norton's Gazette in September.[71]

> Within a few weeks, from North, South, East, and West, a host of pamphlets and volumes, old and new, good and bad, cheap and costly, pro and con, including facts, fictions, arguments, drama, poetry, songs, all relating more or less to "Life Among the Lowly" of the southern portion of our land, have been issued from the press.[72]

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[69] L. Lamprey, "Enduring Errors," American Mercury, LXIII (1944), 49.

[70] Wesley W. Stout, "Little Eva Is Seventy-Five," Saturday Evening Post, October 8, 1927, p. 11.

[71] Quoted in Mott, p. 142.

[72] Ibid.

Songwriters recognized a ready-made market for ballads, and before the end of 1852, twenty Uncle Tom songs, most of them in dialect, had been published. A Rhode Island manufacturer advertised a card game, "Uncle Tom and Little Eva," which consisted of the continued separation and reunion of families.[73]

Imitations or attacks upon Uncle Tom's Cabin had a vogue also. Within nine months of the publication of the novel seven other Uncle Tom stories were on the market.[74] Hildreth's The Slave and Sarah Josepha Hale's twenty-five-year-old Northwood, or Life North and South were reissued. Mrs. Hale rushed out a new novel, Liberia.[75] Aunt Phillis's Cabin or Southern Life as It Is, the best of the fourteen "Anti-Tom" novels that were written in the three years following Uncle Tom's appearance, concentrated simply on gilding plantation life. On the character of Uncle Tom, Mrs. Eastman, author of Aunt Phillis's Cabin, had this comment:

> And such a saint as Uncle Tom was, too! One would have thought his master, with the opinion he had of his religious qualifications, would have kept him until he died, and then have sold him bone after bone to the Roman Catholics. Why, every tooth in his head would have brought its price. St. Paul had been wicked once; and even after his miraculous conversion, he felt that sin was still impelling him to do what he would not. But not so with Uncle Tom! He was the very perfection of a saint. Well might St. Clare have proposed using him for a family chaplain, or suggested to himself the idea of ascending to heaven by Tom's skirts.[76]

The country, and indeed much of Western civilization, was swamped

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[73]H. G. Nicholas, "Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852-1952," American Heritage, Winter, 1953, p. 22.

[74]Hart, p. 110

[75]Ibid.

[76]Mary H. Eastman, Aunt Phillis's Cabin or Southern Life As It Is (Philadelphia, 1852), p. 43.

with maudlin, poignant Uncle Tom. He was versified, dramatized, set to music, made into dolls, erected into opera, and used as a basis for card games.[77] It was, indeed, an emotional outburst that has never quite found its parallel which was touched off when Uncle Tom's Cabin was written.

Obviously Mrs. Stowe and her novel did not lack for attention from both readers and critics the first two years of the life of the novel. After 1854, however, as was mentioned earlier, reviews of the book were relatively few until Mrs. Stowe's death in 1896 prompted revived interest. Between these two dates, most of the obtainable material consists of incidental remarks concerning Uncle Tom's Cabin made by critics reviewing Mrs. Stowe's later publications, biographies of Mrs. Stowe, and a report of activities in honor of her seventieth birthday.

In 1856 Mrs. Stowe published Dred, another novel on Negro slavery, and its appearance evoked reviews from several critics who compared it with Uncle Tom's Cabin.[78] While Mrs. Stowe had depicted the horrors suffered by the slave in her earlier novel, she dwelt more especially on the position of his master in Dred. A contributor to Littell's Living Age in reviewing the second novel stated that while "it is much to say of the book that it is worthy of its predecessor,"[79] it would be unjust to say less. After praising the character delineation in both novels, the critic continued to observe that one serious fault in Uncle

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[77]Eric F. Goldman, "The Book That Changed America," Saturday Review, July 4, 1953, p. 8.

[78]There were other reviews of Dred, but only the two here cited were accessible.

[79]"Dred," Littell's Living Age, LI (1856), 546.

Tom's Cabin was noticeable, the overstatement of the merits of the Negroes. He also felt that Mrs. Stowe was entirely too obvious in her plan which called for good and bad white characters in proportion to their sympathy with slaves. If the white man sympathized with the Negro, he was good; if not, he was bad. Although exaggeration was common in Uncle Tom's Cabin, it was remarkable for its humor and its pathos, and the reviewer felt that it was delightful even in its very faults--the "Americanisms" and the frequent negligence of style.[80]

A few months later, early in 1857, Littell's again carried a review of Dred. This reviewer concluded that although Uncle Tom's Cabin contained more "story" than Dred, neither had merits sufficient to cause them to survive.

> If Mrs. Stowe is writing for posterity, if she wishes her works, after they have served their immediate purpose of anti-slavery pamphlets, to take a permanent place in literature, she must devote...far more labor than she has yet bestowed on them.[81]

There is evidence that the reaction to Uncle Tom's Cabin was still violent in the South as late as 1858. It was reported in the anti-slavery papers that southern courts were sentencing men to prison for long terms when they were found with the hated book in their possession.[82]

The following year, 1859, saw the beginning of the serialization of another of Mrs. Stowe's novels, The Minister's Wooing. Although it was not completed as a serial until December of that year, Mrs. Stowe received letters from many interested readers long before its completion.

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[80]Ibid.

[81]"Dred--American Slavery," Littell's Living Age, LIII (1857), 708.

[82]Quoted in Mott, p. 142.

In February, one of these letters came from James Russell Lowell and contained valuable criticism of Uncle Tom's Cabin. In the letter, Lowell remarked that

> From long habit, and from the tendency of my studies, I cannot help looking at things from an aesthetic point of view, and what I valued in Uncle Tom was the genius, and not the moral. That is saying a good deal, for I never use the word 'genius' haphazard [sic] and always (perhaps, too) sparingly.[83]

Somewhat later in the year, in another reference to Uncle Tom's Cabin made in an early review of The Minister's Wooing, a statement full of wit and wisdom on the same topic was issued by Lowell. He wrote:

> We had the advantage of reading that truly extraordinary book [Uncle Tom's Cabin] for the first time in Paris, long after the whirl of excitement produced by its publication had subsided, in the seclusion of distance, and with a judgment unbiased by those political sympathies which it is impossible, perhaps unwise, to avoid at home. We felt then, and we believe now, that the secret of Mrs. Stowe's power lay in that same genius by which the great successes in creative literature have always been achieved--the genius that instinctively goes right to the organic elements of human nature, whether under a white skin or a black, and which disregards as trivial the conventional and factitious notions which make so large a part both of our thinking and feeling.[84]

Lowell went on to say that works of imagination written with an aim to immediate impression are commonly ephemeral, like Miss Martineau's "Tales," and Elliott's "Corn-law Rhymes," but that the creative faculty of Mrs. Stowe, like that of Cervantes in Don Quixote and of Fielding in Joseph Andrews, overpowered the narrow specialty of her design, and expanded a local and temporary theme with the cosmopolitanism of genius.[85]

In the June, 1866, issue of the Atlantic Monthly is to be found an

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[83]Charles Edward Stowe, p. 333.

[84]Fields, p. 249.

[85]Ibid.

article dedicated to Dr. Bailey, editor of the Era, and his services as an anti-slavery journalist. To the Era belongs the honor of introducing to the world Uncle Tom's Cabin, perhaps Dr. Bailey's chief contribution to the anti-slavery cause. For that article the editor himself contributed the facts of the inception and growth of the famed novel, but no literary evaluation was given.[86]

Three years later, in 1869, the Nation reviewed Mrs. Stowe's most recent contribution to literature, Oldtown Folks, and drew a comparison between the characterization in this work and that in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Miss Ophelia of Uncle Tom's Cabin was described as being "excellently good."[87]

> To be sure it is a Miss Ophelia who was not born, but was made up, for a special purpose, out of a greater or lesser number of Shuahs and Almiras and Aunt Hannahs and Miss Maranthas; but nevertheless, though it does not give us a person, it gives us the differentia of a class, and gives them pictorially and vividly...[88]

This the reviewer feels is as much to be commended as an individualized generalization as any of the similar generalizations which serve as Mrs. Stowe's human beings. "But Uncle Tom of the same story is as weak as the Miss Ophelia is strong."[89]

The famous Byron controversy of which Mrs. Stowe was an instigator began with the publication of "The True Story of Lady Byron" in the Atlantic of September, 1869.[90] This, probably the most discussed

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[86]"A Pioneer Editor," Atlantic Monthly, XVII (1866), 748.

[87]"Mrs. Stowe's 'Oldtown Folks,'" Nation, VIII (1869), 437.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Reprinted in Lady Byron Vindicated (Boston, 1870), pp. 413-450.

article of the nineteenth century, was called by the Nation "one of the greatest successes ever achieved in any country."[91] Mrs. Stowe later apologized for its "feebleness" of execution as due to "exhausted health," but such a critical judge as Henry Adams praised it as the most effective writing she had ever done.[92] This Byron controversy called forth an article in Harper's Weekly of September, 1869, in which the furor created by the previously named article was compared with that of Uncle Tom's Cabin.[93]

After the Byron controversy and the comparison of its stir with Uncle Tom's, the next noteworthy event in the reputation of the novel was the honor done Mrs. Stowe by her publishers, Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, who arranged a reception on her seventieth birthday to which all the literati of America were invited. According to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, among the literary people no one of consequence failed to do honor to the foremost woman of America. "There were possibly one or two exceptions, of the school which does not call Uncle Tom's Cabin literature unless it is obliged to; but they were scarcely missed."[94]

At this party, held on June 14, 1882, a brief speech by Henry Ward Beecher was followed by a poem from John Greenleaf Whittier, of which the following stanza is an excerpt:

> Thrice welcome from the Land of Flowers
> And golden-fruited orange bowers
> To this sweet, green-turfed June of ours!
> To her who, in our evil time,

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[91]Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines (Cambridge, 1938), II, p. 505.

[92]W. C. Ford, ed., Letters of Henry Adams, by Henry Adams (Boston, 1930), p. 168.

[93]"The Byron Controversy," Harper's Weekly, XIII (1869), 579.

[94]Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Chapters From A Life (New York, 1896), p. 138.

Dragged into light the nation's crime
With strength beyond the strength of men,
And, mightier than their sword, her pen;
To her who world-wide entrance gave
To the log cabin of the slave,
Made all his wrongs and sorrows known,
And all earth's languages his own,--
North, South, and East and West, made all
The common air electrical,
Until the o'ercharged bolts of heaven
Blazed down, and every chain was riven![95]

Whittier's poem was followed by a few words from Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who also read the subjoined as a part of his contribution to the chorus of congratulation:

Briton and Frenchman, Swede and Dane,
Turk, Spaniard, Tartar of Ukraine,
   Hidalgo, Cossack, Cadi,
High Dutchman and Low Dutchman, too,
The Russian serf, the Polish Jew,
Arab, Armenian, and Mantchoo
   Would shout, "We know the lady."

Know her! Who knows not Uncle Tom
And her he learned his gospel from,
   Has never heard of Moses;
Full well the brave black hand we know
That gave to freedom's grasp the hoe
That killed the weed that used to grow
   Among the Southern roses.[96]

Other poems written for the occasion were read and speeches were made by prominent literary personages.[97]

In 1887, five years after the birthday party, came an attack from Kentucky upon the veracity of the lot of the Negro as pictured in the story.

Here today the few survivors live, ready to testify of their relations with their former masters and mistresses, and indirectly to point a great

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[95]Charles Edward Stowe, p. 502.

[96]Ibid., p. 504.

[97]Ibid.

moral: that, however justly Mrs. Stowe may have chosen one of their number to show the fairest aspects of domestic slavery in the United States, she departed from the common truth of history, as it respected their lot in life, when she condemned her Uncle Tom to his tragic fate. For it was not the character of Uncle Tom that she so greatly idealized; it was the category of events that were made to befall him.[98]

And concerning the veracity of the novel, Charles Tuckerman, writing in 1890, thought it gave a very "unfair picture to the world at large" of the "normal" conditions of the slave in the southern states.[99] But he did commend the book for vivid descriptions, sustained interest, and admirably handled pathetic portions.

Mrs. Stowe's death the last of June, 1896, prompted renewed interest among the literary critics. Now that sufficient time had elapsed since the publication of the novel, and the problem dealt with in the story had been settled by the Civil War, judges could be much more objective than before. Even then, however, critics had not forgotten the great newspaper debate and they were not totally without prejudice. At this particular time, most critics, although recognizing some literary blemishes, were quite complimentary in their comments about the book as a novel.

Julius Ward felt that even if the novel did owe the larger part of its popularity to historical circumstances, read in 1896 when it had done its work, it lost none of its power over the mind and heart. "Its pathos, its wit, its humor, and its terrible fidelity to truth were an

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[98]James Allen, "Mrs. Stowe's 'Uncle Tom' at Home in Kentucky," Century, XXXIV (1887), 854.

[99]Charles Tuckerman, "Sir John Bowring and American Slavery," Magazine of American History, XXIII (1890), 232.

inspiration and an argument that no one could resist."[100] Earlier, Florian Thayer McCray in her biography of Mrs. Stowe attributed the popularity of the story to its "graphic power, its deep philosophy, and its rare humor."[101]

It may be true, as has been pointed out only recently,[102] that the interest in the Negro as a humorous character, an interest which by the 1850's was almost an English tradition, was responsible for much of its wide audience of readers in both England and the United States. Nevertheless, late nineteenth century critics felt that the characterization was meritorious. Charles Warner, an Atlantic contributor, stated that every character in the novel was perfectly visualized. Although the characters were types, the type created remained consistent throughout the story, and every chief personage in the book followed a line of absolutely consistent development from Uncle Tom and Legree down to the most contemptible of all, Marie St. Clare. "...The actors, by a few strokes of the pen, appear as distinct and unmistakable personalities, marked by individual pecularities of manner, speech, motive, character, living persons in natural attitudes."[103] Of Marie St. Clare, Warner thought "The selfish and hysterical woman has never been so faithfully depicted by any other author."[104]

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[100]Julius H. Ward, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," The Forum, XXI (1896), 730.

[101]Florine Thayer McCray, The Life Work of the Author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, quoted in "Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mrs. Stowe," Magazine of American History, XXIII (1890), 16.

[102]Clarence Gohdes, American Literature in 19th Century England (New York, 1944), p. 75.

[103]Charles D. Warner, "The Story of Uncle Tom's Cabin," Atlantic Monthly, LXXVIII (1896), 319.

[104]Ibid.

In the Library of the World's Best Literature, the master and the mistress of Uncle Tom's Cabin are referred to as "charming characters."[105] In the same article, the author voiced his opinion that one of the most admirable qualities of the novel was its wholly generous and sympathetic spirit toward the master class, the condemnation being all for the system.[106]

Charles Warner defended the lack of unity in construction of the novel as due to the necessity of exhibiting the effect of slavery in its entirety. The parallel plots, one running to Louisiana and the other to Canada, are tied together by this consideration, and not by any real necessity to each other.[107]

A different sort of tribute was paid to the novel by the Review of Reviews, which attributed its power to the story's simple pathos, its charming characterization, its effective grouping and noble sincerity. The qualities mentioned brought to Mrs. Stowe the close friendship of such renowned literary personages as Charles Kingsley George Sand, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Thomas Macaulay, and many other people who were proud to know the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin.[108]

With Mrs. Stowe's death in 1896, new predictions were made as to her future place in American fiction. Remembering the early prediction of a permanent place in literature forwarded by Littell's Living Age in 1852, a critic for the Nation had this to say:

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[105]George Merriam, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," Library of the World's Best Literature, ed. Charles Warner, XXIV (New York, 1896), p. 14067.

[106]Ibid.

[107]Warner, p. 320.

[108]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Review of Reviews, XIV (1896), 177-180.

If now the question be asked, how far Uncle Tom's Cabin has vindicated its claims to be one of the great and permanent works of literature, it can only be replied that it is too soon to judge, but that the probabilities now seem against such a destiny.[109]

He was highly complimentary of the book, but felt that in view of the favorable conditions offered by the subject and occasion, genius would not be a necessity for a popular book.

Warner believed, however, that genius was involved and that the book would hold permanent popularity. "It is safe to say that Uncle Tom's Cabin has the fundamental qualities, the sure insight into human nature, and the fidelity to the facts of its own time which have from age to age preserved works of genius."[110]

One final word was added by George Merriam, that "By the test of power to win and to impress, and looking both at the number and the quality of the audience, it seems a moderate judgment that no American novelist has equalled her."[111]

While Mrs. Stowe lived, she witnessed many changes in the attitudes of her critics. The adverse criticism which promptly appeared when the novel was published proceeded from three sources. First, and least numerous, were stylists who caviled at the artistic deficiencies of the book, its faulty characterization, passages in bad rhetorical taste, and lapses from standard English usage. Second, and most numerous, were the advocates either of slavery or abolition who pointed out factual errors in the book. Third, and by all odds the most annoying to the author, were critics who cast reflections upon Mrs. Stowe's motives.

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[109]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nation, July 9, 1896, p. 25.

[110]Warner, p. 321.

[111]Merriam, p. 171.

But for every review that criticized the author, there seemed to be another that praised her, and, more important, the public continued to buy and to read the book.

After 1854 interest in the story began to wane, and during the later years of Mrs. Stowe's life, she witnessed an almost complete cessation of literary criticism of her masterpiece. But after it had accomplished its purpose, it commanded a wide reading audience, and Mrs. Stowe was content to spend the later years of her life in peace.

CHAPTER III

AMERICAN CRITICISM OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN SINCE THE AUTHOR'S DEATH, 1897-1959

1897-1913

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth century, critics were still puzzled by Uncle Tom's Cabin. Some felt, as John Macy stated, that this was one of the few American books which "have sufficient depth and breadth to be called masterpieces," that it stood "self-contained and all but assured of immortality."[1] Other judges had concluded by this time that the novel was not good art and that it would not be among the great pieces of literature handed down through posterity, but even they could not account for its continuous sale and its vast reading audience. Forty-seven years after its publication, in 1899, this book, which was said to be a wicked libel, still led in popularity all the English fiction in the New York Public Library.[2] Thus it appeared that earlier evaluations that gave credit for its overwhelming success to historical circumstances were not valid, for those conditions were now greatly altered, while Uncle Tom's Cabin and its following remained basically unchanged.

Perhaps it is fitting that a well-known man of letters should be

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[1]John Macy, The Spirit of American Literature (New York, 1913), p. 32.

[2]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nation, XCII (1911), 620.

one of the first to give a twentieth-century appraisal. In an interview in the New York Sun on February 6, 1898, William Dean Howells called the book the only great American novel produced before the Civil War.[3] Later, in his Literary Friends and Acquaintances (1901), he stated that he did not consider Uncle Tom's Cabin to be a novel at all. He explained that the story by Mrs. Stowe, as well as novels by some other authors, was marred by the intense ethicism that had pervaded New England minds for so long. Most New England writers, he said, hopelessly pointed the moral in all they did, some to a lesser degree than others, and although Howells did not criticize them for their ethical intentions, he believed that they felt their vocations as prophets to such an extent that they failed as writers. Uncle Tom's Cabin was to him the exception that proved the rule. Referring to it as "almost" the greatest work of imagination produced in prose, he continued:

> It is like begging the question to say that I do not call it a novel, however; but really, is it a novel, in the sense that War and Peace is a novel, or Madame Flaubert or The Return of the Native, or Virgin Soil? In a certain way, it is greater than any of these except the first; but its chief virtue...is in its address to the conscience, and not its address to the taste; to the ethical sense, not the aesthetical sense.[4]

That Mark Twain, unlike his friend Howells, apparently did not express his opinion on the value of Uncle Tom's Cabin is somewhat surprising. However, Mrs. Stowe was much older than Twain, and by the time he was firmly established as a writer, she always seems to have been approached by him with courteous respect. Her home abutted Twain's

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[3]W. L. Phelps, Howells, James, Bryant and Other Essays (New York, 1924), p. 202.

[4]William Dean Howells, Literary Friends and Acquaintances (New York, 1901), pp. 117, 118.

property and he shared the neighborhood's respect for the aged heroine of antislavery. Seeking to amuse her whenever he could, he once sent his necktie by the butler when his wife reminded him that he had called on Mrs. Stowe without it.[5] It is almost a certainty that Twain would not have approved her direct appeal to the human emotions.[6] It may be that he, like Howells, withheld his comment when he could not conscientiously praise her work.[7] On various occasions he commended and defended Mrs. Stowe. As early as 1866 when he was in New York, he wrote for a California newspaper to which he was contributing that Uncle Tom's Cabin was playing in Chatham Street to people who "went there in elegant toilettes and cried over Tom's griefs."[8]

Paul Baenders believes that six unsigned editorials in the Buffalo Express were written by Twain. If his contention is correct, Twain anonymously contributed many pertinent comments to the Byron controversy. These editorials, only recently attributed to him, defended Mrs. Stowe against her critics. They stated that those who cherished an ancient political grudge against the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin looked for and found in the Byron story sufficient reason to savagely denounce Mrs. Stowe. Twain himself believed the only reasonable thing that could be said in criticism of the published narrative was that it was neither satisfactorily nor skillfully written.[9] If it can be assumed that

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[5]Kenneth R. Andrews, Nook Farm: Mark Twain's Hartford Circle (Cambridge, 1950), p. 87.

[6]Ibid., p. 165.

[7]Ibid., p. 158.

[8]Franklin Walker and Ezra Dane, Mark Twain Travels with Mr. Brown (New York, 1944), p. 84.

[9]Paul Baender, "Mark Twain and the Byron Scandal," American Literature, XXX (January, 1959), 468.

Twain wrote the editorials, he undoubtedly was joking in his humorous "Last Words of Great Men." Here he parodied the passage Mrs. Stowe had selected from Moore's Life of Byron and which she had allowed to pass for some of Byron's deathbed words. In both Moore and Mrs. Stowe the passage read, "'Go to my sister; tell her--Go to Lady Byron,--you will see her, and say--.'"[10] But in Twain it read, "'Augusta--sister--Lady Byron--tell Harriet Beecher Stowe,--.'"[11]

Mark Twain, then, seems to have had a general respect for his elderly neighbor, as a person and as a writer, but available evidence does not show that he ever wrote a commentary specifically on Uncle Tom's Cabin.

The twentieth of March, 1902, marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin and the twenty-third of August the semicentennial of the production of the drama based on that novel. Not a literary review in America remembered the first occasion.[12] The dramatic jubilee was celebrated by Munsey's Magazine, which related that the play had been presented in every European capital, that it had had more than a quarter of a million presentations, and that the total attendance during the half century of its existence equaled the total population of the United States. Although the play was not then, if ever it had been, admired as a dramatic work, and although the time was not yet when critics could determine whether the novel would live with

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[10]Ibid., p. 481.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Frank S. Arnett, "Fifty Years of Uncle Tom," Munsey's Magazine XXVII (1902), 897.

the deathless classics, nothing indicated a cessation of the marvelous popularity of either.[13]

With a lapse of ten more years, however, the decline in popularity had begun to be felt, and some literary critics had begun to speak in the subjunctive mood. "If the extent of a writer's audience and the measure of his immediate success were the final test," wrote Alphonso Newcomer, "and not the artistic excellence,...Mrs. Stowe would deserve to stand with the major novelists of her time."[14] But this critic believed that Uncle Tom's Cabin would surely suffer the final eclipse that overtakes all productions of a social movement. He admitted that the movement with which this novel was linked was of extraordinary significance, and that the fate of the book was therefore indefinitely postponed, but even then he considered it more an historical document than a novel.[15]

Uncle Tom's Cabin had never been very highly commended for its artistic qualities, and early twentieth century critics offered no exception to this. "The style," said the historian, James Ford Rhodes, "is commonplace, the language is often trite and inelegant, sometimes degenerating into slang; and the humor is strained."[16] A Nation critic, who asserted that the perfect artist holds a mirror up to nature, while remaining unrevealed himself, found that Mrs. Stowe notably "shines through" in her most famous work.[17] "The story is deficient in many

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[13]Ibid., p. 901.

[14]Alphonso Newcomer, American Literature (Chicago, 1911), p. 148.

[15]Ibid.

[16]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nation, XCII, p. 620.

[17]"Literature," Nation, XCIII (1911), 143.

points of art," said another.[18] But with these deficiencies pointed out, most critics also found Uncle Tom's Cabin alive with emotion and concurred with W. P. Trent who said that "the book that is alive with emotion after fifty years is a great book."[19] The Nation correspondent stated that

> Mrs. Stowe touched with rare dramatic power the underlying human emotions...and thus proved anew that an appeal in behalf of human rights, made with justice and passion and self-obliterating earnestness, can never fail to bear fruit.[20]

William Long stated the case well when he said that the world, which has almost forgotten slavery, still reads the book with pleasure and probably would so read it if it pictured a suffering Turk or Eskimo instead of a Negro slave. This he attributed to the facts that live characters are created in Uncle Tom's Cabin, that it is essentially a human book dealing with elemental human nature, and that it possesses "dramatic intensity, moral earnestness, intense emotionalism, and, above all, human interest."[21]

Long was not the only critic who admired the dramatic intensity in Uncle Tom's Cabin; Halleck was also impressed. But even more than by the dramatic quality, he was impressed by Mrs. Stowe's knowledge of psychological values which he believed was exemplified in the novel. He pointed out that Mrs. Stowe was quite selective in the means she chose to make it appear to Senator Bird that it would be the natural

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[18]Newcomer, p. 148.

[19]Halleck, p. 173.

[20]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nation, XCII, p. 620.

[21]William J. Long, American Literature (New York, 1913), p. 411.

thing for him to defeat his own law, by driving the woman and her child seven miles in the dead of the night to a place of greater safety.[22]

While a few persons discussed the novel as a work of art, others still feuded over its truthfulness, or lack of it, and it is obvious that all sections of the country still did not agree on whether Uncle Tom's Cabin gave a fairly representative picture of slavery. It was reported in 1911 that the college professor who would praise the novel and declare it a reasonably fair characterization of slavery could not hold his position south of Mason and Dixon's Line.[23]

And Hopkinson Smith, a versatile writer, painter, and lecturer, played a new role as historical critic when, in a dispatch from Camden, New Jersey, he was represented as having said before the high school of that city that "Uncle Tom's Cabin has done more harm to the world than any other book ever written."[24] He thought the book gave the world "an erroneous conception of the life of the Negro and conditions before the War," and attributed "much of the bitter resentment that prevailed in the South for so many years after the War to the general ill feeling engendered by statements in Mrs. Stowe's book."[25] Smith's stigmatizing of Uncle Tom's Cabin aroused the ire of a number of persons, among whom were the editors of the Boston Journal and the Philadelphia Inquirer. Both of these men attempted to dispute his assertion. The Journal quaintly remarked that if Mr. Smith's statement

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[22]Halleck, p. 171.

[23]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nation, XCII, p. 620.

[24]"The Most Harmful Book," Literary Digest, XLV (1912), 1225.

[25]Ibid., p. 1226.

were accepted as correct, Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" must be denounced as the most harmful poem ever written.[26] The Inquirer made the acute observation that "in politics or in the field of ethical dramaturgy," Mr. Smith was "wholly at sea."[27] The critic who wrote the article in the New York Times from which the above quotations were taken, however, was in complete agreement with Smith. He believed Mr. Smith had "hit the mark" because, "It has long been admitted that Uncle Tom's Cabin was...responsible for the insatiable brutality of the reconstruction period."[28] He added that Mrs. Stowe managed to convey the idea, by means of an isolated instance, that the same conditions prevailed over the entire South.[29]

At least one reviewer felt that the story's immortality was proof of its truth because "no book of slander and lies, no unjust condemnation of a great social system affecting millions" could survive merely by great art.[30] This statement was in direct contrast with the often-stated opinion that even if it were true, it would not survive, for it lacks in essential artistic qualities.

Another critic felt that the fault of Uncle Tom's Cabin was not that it was unfair, but that it was too highly idealized. Although the South is full of loyal, devoted Negroes, Uncle Tom was not quite real.[31]

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[26]Edward Bierstadt, "Hopkinson Smith's Heresy," New York Times, February 9, 1913, p. 69.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]"Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nation, XCII, p. 620.

[31]"A Moving Novel Sixty Years After," Outlook, XCVIII (1911), 287.

When in A Small Boy and Others (1914) Henry James referred to Uncle Tom's Cabin as "that triumphant work," he meant that it was triumphant in winning readers of all classes, not that it was triumphant in the sense that Mrs. Stowe with fine calculation and intelligence had lifted life to form. In fact, for him her first novel was remarkable in constituting a triumph exactly opposite to that he admired in Hawthorne, Flaubert, and Turgenev and had sought to achieve in his own masterpieces. Looking back to his youth, he remembered that Uncle Tom's Cabin

> had above all the extraordinary fortune of finding itself, for an immense number of people, much less a book than a state of vision, of feeling and of consciousness, in which they didn't sit and read and appraise and pass the time, but walked and talked and laughed and cried, and, in a manner of which Mrs. Stowe was the irresistible cause, generally conducted themselves.[32]

To James the amazing thing about the novel was that the whole impression gained by it was an effect for which there had been no process. This was, he said, probably the first book ever printed which reached its mark

> without having at least groped for that goal as a book or by the exposure of some literary side. Letters, here, languished unconscious, and Uncle Tom, instead of making even one of the cheap short cuts through the medium in which books breathe, even as fishes in water, went gaily roundabout it altogether, as if a fish, a wonderful "leaping" fish, had simply flown through the air.[33]

Thus Henry James, perhaps the most artful of American novelists, with his characterization of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a literary "leaping fish," a book that made its impression in disregard of art, summed up with fine perception the impression of most early twentieth century readers who had exposed themselves to Uncle Tom's Cabin.

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[32]Henry James, A Small Boy and Others (New York, 1914), p. 160.

[33]Ibid.

1914-1941

During the twenty-seven years separating the beginnings of the two World Wars, 1914-1941, critics once more busied themselves in an attempt to evaluate critically the novel which the great emancipator believed had inspired the Civil War of the previous century.

Although Uncle Tom's Cabin had many times earlier been branded as offensively moralistic, and although any reading of the novel, however superficial, would reveal many references to "the Lord" and to "heaven," critics of this period were the first to become interested in the novel chiefly as a moral agent or as "Sunday School" literature, as it was called by one reviewer.[34]

W. L. Phelps initiated this discussion in 1919. Having searched for the cause of the seemingly eternal vitality of the novel which, although written as propaganda, had long survived the institution it attacked, and having found no other suitable explanation, Mr. Phelps directed his readers to the rare first edition of Uncle Tom's Cabin found in the Aldis Collection in the library of Yale University. From that copy of the book, he quoted the following scriptural passage which had been scribbled onto the flyleaf of the book in Mrs. Stowe's handwriting, and which Phelps believed might help to explain the book's immortality:[35]

> The voice said cry,--and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field... The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever.[36]

[34] E. K. Maxfield, "Goody Goody Literature and Mrs. Stowe," American Speech, IV (1929), 202.

[35] Phelps, p. 190.

[36] Ibid., p. 206.

V. L. Parrington was another reputable critic who wrote of the strong religious coloring in the novel. He believed the emphasis placed upon the abolition argument in the story that "slavery trafficked in Christian souls and rendered it hateful to every humanitarian instinct" was greatly responsible for the success of the book.[37]

A contributor to the Journal of Negro History cited numerous instances in the novel of detrimental effects of slavery from a moral and religious point of view.[38] But undoubtedly the ultimate in the discussion of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a piece of religious literature was E. K. Maxfield's article which termed the novel "goody goody literature."[39] He pointed out that Little Eva was a born evangelist, not only causing Tom, but also the hopeless Topsy, to be uplifted. To him the "good" characters were much given to sanctimonious talk, Eva and Tom both died in "Sunday School" tradition, and the whole book was cloyed with sticky godliness. "Stripped of all sectional delusions, the book will stand glorified as its author only could make it; a Sunday School story book about a good little girl who died and went to heaven."[40]

The increased emphasis on the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin as homilist was one of the outstanding new contributions to the reputation of the novel made by the critics during the 1920's. Another "first" during these years was prompted by the many articles, begun in 1852 and

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[37] V. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II (New York, 1927), p. 376.

[38] Lorenzo D. Turner, "Anti-Slavery Sentiment in Literature," Journal of Negro History, XIV (1929), 442.

[39] Maxfield, p. 202.

[40] Ibid.

persisting even now, which declare that neither in action nor in language were Mrs. Stowe's characters truthful. Three separate studies were conducted to determine whether this criticism was justifiable. The first of these was conducted by Francis P. Gaines in 1925 in an attempt to ascertain the truthfulness of the accusation that Mrs. Stowe idealized her Negro characters. His findings indicated that Mrs. Stowe's plantation life was congruous with that already presented in literature.[41] He related that a Southern scholar had made a list of Negro traits displayed in Uncle Tom's Cabin in comparison with the character generally accepted and found the fictional treatment lacking only in the absence of "appropriativeness," the natural propensity to steal.[42] In spite of Uncle Tom's "unreal piety," Gaines concluded that the story exhibited "the Negro's gregariousness, his love of finery, his childish irresponsibility, the variations in conduct that result from difference of blood content, and many other qualities which run true to form."[43]

The language spoken by Mrs. Stowe's characters is another subject often-discussed and often-criticized by her critics. The second study, then, was an extensive article which dealt entirely with her use of the Negro dialect.[44] In this study Tremaine McDowell found that the foundation of the speech of all of Mrs. Stowe's characters was the dialect. Therefore, because the language of her Negroes and whites so closely

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[41] Francis P. Gaines, The Southern Plantation (New York, 1925), p. 38.

[42] T. P. Bailey, Race Orthodoxy in the South, p. 192, quoted in Gaines, p. 38.

[43] Gaines, p. 39.

[44] Tremaine McDowell, "The Use of the Negro Dialect by Harriet Beecher Stowe," American Speech, June, 1931, p. 322.

resemble, the reader is often unable to make adequate distinction between the two. This confusion is caused by various defects in Mrs. Stowe's method. She relied too heavily on the heaping up of vulgarisms and colloquialisms to distinguish the speech of her slaves from that of their betters. The weakness of this device lay, of course, in the fact that few of the barbarisms used in Uncle Tom's Cabin were the unique possession of the black man. McDowell believed that while excellent effects were often obtained by the introduction of certain expressions not actually confined to Negro dialect, the effectiveness of such words was weakened by the author's constant reliance on a much more numerous series of barbarisms not definitely associated with Negroes and familiar to all readers in the language spoken by whites. Again Mrs. Stowe was all but oblivious to the slave's persistent and fundamental confusion of genders, of pronouns, of possessives, of plurals, and of tenses. Finally, she failed, in disastrous fashion, to record the changes which the Negro wrought in the consonants. Thus was the very core of authentic Negro dialect slighted or ignored until much of the speech of Uncle Tom and his contemporaries might have come from the lips of semiliterate European immigrants.[45]

Obviously the conclusion reached by the critic was that the dialect in Uncle Tom's Cabin is notably faulty and not at all an exact recording of Negro speech. That inexactness found in McDowell's report caused Van Doren to observe that nothing about Uncle Tom was distinctively Negro, that he spoke a "low grade of highly evangelized English, but no more distinctive of the Negro than of illiterate whites. Let one

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[45]Ibid.

compare his language with that of Uncle Remus and the difference will at once be felt."[46] Another critic declared that while the motives behind the work undoubtedly were genuine and sincere, neither in character nor in language was the story a faithful treatment of the facts of slavery.[47]

The inexact recording of Negro dialect is not the only unusual feature of the language used in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Several peculiarities in word choice and idiom used in the novel prompted a third study by J. M. Purcell. From his work, he learned that Mrs. Stowe seemingly worked certain words to death. For instance, the word beautiful occurs six times on two pages of chapter twenty-six, and eleven times in the whole chapter. In chapter forty-two, it appears three times in a short paragraph of thirty words.[48] In his article entitled "Mrs. Stowe's Vocabulary," Purcell also listed many interesting usages of words, select samples of which follow:

BLUES. 'Depressed emotionally.' "You've got the blues this morning." (Chap. XVI) The earliest use listed in Dictionary of American English is 1873. Uncle Tom's Cabin was published in 1852.

CAFE. (Chapter XXVIII) No American example is given in NED where its first use in English is given in 1816. Mrs. Stowe's use must be an early American one.

ORSON. 'Giantlike or coarse and rough in type, as in "He was a great, tall, bristling Orson of a fellow." (Chap. IX) Not listed in NED with this meaning.

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[46]Carl Van Doren, et al., eds., The Cambridge History of American Literature, II (New York, 1936), p. 352.

[47]Thomas H. Dickinson, The Making of American Literature (New York, 1932), p. 399.

[48]J. M. Purcell, "Mrs. Stowe's Vocabulary," American Speech, XIII, October, 1938, p. 230.

PALLAISE. 'Mattress, or quilt,' as in "Dragging in a small pallaise." (Chap. XXXIV) Not listed in NED.

SMART CHANCE. 'A large number' as in "We'll larn a pretty smart chance of things." (Chap. XXXIII) NED gives no examples, though Bartlett in his Dictionary of Americanisms (184') gives three quotations of its use.

SOFT SOAP. 'Flattery,' as in "Niggers never gets around me...with soft soap." (Chap. XXXI) NED lists no American examples, though Bartlett's American Dictionary gives the definition.

UNDERSTANDINGS. 'Feet' as in "Travelers exhibit a decided preference for this particular mode (putting feet upon the mantel-piece) of elevating their understandings." (Chap. XI) Mrs. Stowe may have been intending a deliberate pun. Latest American example given in NED is dated 1844.[49]

In addition to the relatively new studies already discussed, the critics of this period also restated earlier opinions that the novel was successful primarily as a political document, and that its dramatic qualities and its human appeal served to obliterate its grave literary blemishes so that it continued to be popular.

Percy H. Boynton suggested that the only fair basis for criticizing Uncle Tom's Cabin was as a piece of propagandist literature, since it was a story with an "avowed purpose." He said that Mrs. Stowe happened to have just the "tone of mind" and level of culture which were attuned to the temper of the day, and she employed them to the utmost effect. Moreover, she used them just as Whittier used his powers in some of his poetry, not relying on her narrative to carry its own burdens, but expounding it as she went along.[50]

Walter Bronson stated that it would have been superfluous to praise the moral intensity, the pathos, the descriptive genius, and the

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[49]Ibid., pp. 230, 231.

[50]Percy H. Boynton, A History of American Literature (New York, 1919), p. 301.

dramatic power of a book that still found many readers of mature years after the political issues that gave rise to it had become obsolete.[51] Another critic termed Mrs. Stowe "the woman who made so much by such very bad writing," and called her masterpiece a "melodrama...compounded of pious reflections, gushing apostrophes to the helpless reader, sheer brutality, immoral relations between the sexes, and a happy ending."[52] Parrington, although critical of the novel's "obvious" blemishes of structure and its sentimentalism, admired its humor and pathos.[53]

The judgment of the present critics, as in past years, concerning the quality of Mrs. Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom's Cabin varied from great admiration to condemnation. Arthur Hobson Quinn had few words of kindness for the characterization in the novel. "The characters are, from nearly all points of view, either black or white. Uncle Tom, Eva, Topsy, Eliza, are by any critical standard, absurdities, and...Legree and Loker seem overdrawn to us now..."[54] He continued that she selected individuals from the white race who were lower than the average and chose slaves that were much higher,[55] and this in turn caused unrealistic characterization.

Like Quinn, G. D. Eaton saw little commendable in the characterization. "In Uncle Tom's Cabin you will find odd flashes of shrewd sense

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[51]Walter C. Bronson, American Literature (New York, 1919), p. 174.

[52]Lorin Pruette, "Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Universal Backdrop," Bookman, September, 1926, p. 18.

[53]Parrington, p. 376.

[54]Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New York, 1936), p. 159.

[55]Ibid.

emanating from St. Clare. No other character in the whole book shows even a grain of intelligence and the contrast is startling."[56]

But if Eaton and Quinn were uncomplimentary in their discussion of Mrs. Stowe's work, others were just as complimentary. Ernest Leisy spoke of the novel's "admirable delineation of secondary characters,"[57] and Barrett Wendell stated that her characters, even though little studied in detail, have a pervasive vitality "which no study can achieve; you unhesitatingly accept them as real."[58]

Another reviewer felt that even if in construction the book is really three novels instead of one, as Stout pointed out,[59] Mrs. Stowe's sensitivity resulted in a series of brilliant sketches in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Countless scenes were drawn with varying power, but with a pathos which recognized no bounds.[60]

Meanwhile, the old passions associated with Uncle Tom's Cabin were still in evidence; throughout the period from the beginning of the First World War to the beginning of the Second World War outstanding incidents occured now and then which were inseparably linked with early prejudices for and against the novel.

In the spring of 1916 came the report that a beautiful memorial

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[56]G. D. Eaton, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," The American Mercury, X (1927), 459.

[57]Ernest Leisy, American Literature (New York, 1929), p. 64.

[58]Barrett Wendell, A Literary History of America (New York, 1931), p. 354.

[59]Wesley W. Stout, "Little Eva Is Seventy-Five," Saturday Evening Post, October 8, 1927.

[60]Herbert Ross Brown, The Sentimental Novel in America (Durham, North Carolina, 1940), p. 259.

window had been installed in the little Church of Our Savior in Mandarin, Florida, where Professor and Mrs. Stowe had so long made their home.[61] It is significant that such a memorial in honor of the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin should be erected in a Southern state where only four years later the faculty of a girls' finishing school was to resign after a flurry of angry words precipitated by the book. The resignations came when the President of Chatham Episcopal Institute flatly refused to allow a lecturer to speak to the student body on Mrs. Stowe's novel.[62]

The Savannah, Georgia, public library probably has a distinction no other library of its importance in the United States enjoys. In 1931 it was learned that that institution permitted on its shelves not one copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin,[63] the novel which a Chicago attorney credited with practically sustaining the Union when it was menaced by the Civil War.[64]

Evident of the respect for the novel and its author was the result of a nationwide poll conducted in 1932 in an effort to ascertain whom American women considered the twelve leaders of their sex who had made the most valuable contributions to American progress. This poll, conducted by the National Council of Women, ranked Mrs. Stowe sixth in the list.[65]

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[61] "A Memorial to Harriet Beecher Stowe," The Outlook, CXIII (1916), 56.

[62] "Lecture on Harriet Beecher Stowe Is Forbidden," New York Times, April 28, 1920, p. 1.

[63] New York Times, March 15, 1931, III, p. 6.

[64] New York Times, February 5, 1926, p. 3.

[65] New York Times, December 21, 1932, p. 21.

And shortly before war was declared in 1941, Governor Lehman, of New York, addressed an assembly gathered before the bust of Harriet Beecher Stowe in the hall of fame of New York University. Having expressed to a group his tribute to a "courageous and indomitable spirit," he predicted that "Such strength of mind /as Mrs. Stowe's/ must be forever present if our form of government is to endure."[66]

Far from being forgotten during the war years and the period of adjustment following the world-wide turmoil, the plays made from Uncle Tom's Cabin seemed to go on forever. As a drama it was without parallel. Writing in 1927 and commemorating the seventy-fifth year of continuous playing of the melodrama, Wesley W. Stout[67] asked and then attempted to answer the oft-asked question, "Why has the play survived for so long against odds unsuspected in its youth?" Often described as a wretched play, this one in its youth was night after night enacted before delighted audiences which would have mobbed an abolitionist orator[68] and in its seventy-fifth year was said to have been played more often and to have made more money than any other five plays combined.[69] In fact, although Mrs. Stowe in fact received nothing from the play, had she been rewarded on the present royalty basis, her earnings by 1925 would have amounted to approximately two million dollars.[70]

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[66] New York Times, June 14, 1939, p. 27.

[67] Stout, p. 10.

[68] Bronson, p. 174.

[69] Stout, p. 10.

[70] Arthur B. Maurice, "The Play That Goes on Forever," The Mentor, March, 1923, p. 43.

Stout reported that the dramatization had been translated into more languages than any other work written in English, and had been played in fifty times that many versions. It had been done in six acts, thirty scenes and eight tableaux in the great theaters of the world, and in court rooms, hotel dining rooms, lodge halls, beer gardens, tobacco warehouses, and even under a tent with no scenery whatsoever. The cast had ranged from as many as twenty-seven speaking parts and thirty Negro jubilee singers to as few as four adults and one child.[71]

Whatever was responsible for the play's almost unbelievable popularity, the New York Times Magazine reported in 1931 that, faced with the invasion of the motion picture, the number of Uncle Tom's Cabin road shows was dwindling.[72] Interest also waned in the stage productions and several attempts were made to reclaim their earlier followings. The Player's Club of New York presented the Aiken version as its revival in 1933, with a remarkable cast headed by Otis Skinner as Tom. Well presented after half a century, the play proved to be the most successful revival in the long list of the Club's productions and was taken on tour.[73]

As the comeback was staged in New York, two admiring critics of the dramatization of Uncle Tom's Cabin looked back upon its history with nostalgia. Until the 1933 revival New York had not seen the play since 1901, but the "road" had clung to its favorite until 1932 when

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[71] Stout, p. 10.

[72] "Last Days for Uncle Tom," New York Times Magazine, July 12, 1931, p. 18.

[73] Harry Birdoff, The World's Greatest Hit (New York, 1947), pp. 411-416.

the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle announced that it had at last ended its run, that not one company was to be seen in America.[74] With a history of eighty years, the play had seen numberless metamorphoses. A mere list of troupers who had appeared at one time or another in the dramatization would evoke the history of the American stage since the Civil War. It achieved the power of folklore and became a part of American cultural heritage,[75] and if it virtually expired in the revival by the Player's Club, at least that apotheosis went far to wipe out indignities heaped upon it in the past.[76]

After having been done continuously since the Civil War period, and having been more popular after the War than during it, the play lost its grip when America went "modern."[77] Uncle Tom had itself been filmed, first by Vitagraph in 1909,[78] and again in 1917 and 1927.[79] Later, in 1949 it was reported that MGM planned a technicolor version, with Margaret O'Brien as Little Eva and Lena Horn as Eliza.[80]

Thus during this period the public witnessed the last of the

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[74]"Uncle Tom, Authentic Americana," Literary Digest, June 17, 1933, p. 13.

[75]Richard Dana Skinner, "The Play," The Commonweal, June 9, 1933, p. 160.

[76]The first burlesque of Uncle Tom's Cabin was staged in New York in 1853. Since then many travesties have been presented, including the musical comedy, Topsy and Eva, which was especially prepared for the Duncan sisters in 1923. (Birdoff, p. 382.)

[77]"Last Days for Uncle Tom," p. 18.

[78]Stout, p. 11.

[79]Grace Seiler, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," College English, December, 1949, p. 135.

[80]Ibid.

'Uncle Tom' road shows, saw one final attempt made to sustain an interest in the stage version of the novel, and eventually turned to the movie version of Uncle Tom's Cabin. From an artistic standpoint, critics complained of the novel's "obvious" blemishes, but hundreds of readers felt that its genuine passions triumphed over all else and continued to buy and to read the book.[81] Therefore, with the beginning of the Second World War, Uncle Tom's Cabin and its dramatization continued to command interest and respect from their readers, viewers and critics.

1941-1959

In the one hundred years since Uncle Tom's Cabin first shook the soul of the world, critics have never tired of exposing the book's faults or of demonstrating again and again that Mrs. Stowe violated every rule of literary construction, good taste and common sense in its creation. Readers, however, have had a different opinion with the result that the total sale of Uncle Tom's Cabin remains unequaled by any other novel in any language.[82]

Neither George Snell's opinion that "today the book lives only as a memory, as the womb from which sprang a bit of folklore,"[83] nor Marion Troughton's statement that "nowadays it is little read except by students of history and by children"[84] is quite convincing when confronted

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[81]John Macy, The Story of the World's Literature (London, 1936), p. 531.

[82]Helen Papashvily, All the Happy Endings (New York, 1956), p. 69.

[83]George Snell, The Shapers of American Fiction (New York, 1947), p. 30.

[84]Marion Troughton, "Eminent Victorians," Contemporary Review, February, 1953, p. 97.

with the information that no fewer than six editions are presently in print in the United States, and in 1950 the New York Public Library replaced forty copies of the book which had been worn out.[85]

After a century the book and its dramatization still call forth passionate reviews. J. C. Furnas, in a collection of somewhat disparate essays on American slavery entitled Goodbye to Uncle Tom, tied his whole book together with the argument that by writing Uncle Tom's Cabin Mrs. Stowe initiated most of what is now wrong with relations between the races in America.[86] A critic for Harper's Magazine, however, came to Mrs. Stowe's rescue when he called Furnas's argument "preposterous," and continued that when Furnas talked about Mrs. Stowe, his prose "frothed at the mouth" in a way equally offensive to good taste, good sense, and good writing. Pickrel stated that Furnas "manhandled" quotations from Uncle Tom's Cabin and thereby disqualified himself as a critic.[87]

Regardless of whether or not Furnas's criticism was just, he was not alone in his disparagement, for he quoted Miss Mary Eakins of the Center for Children's Books, University of Chicago Library, as having said that Uncle Tom's Cabin:

> probably has a place in high school libraries as an original document in American history...has no place in an elementary school collection, nor should it be recommended for general reading in high schools. Mrs. Stowe has employed most of the stereotypes to which there is the greatest objection...immature readers will not recognize it as a social document

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[85]David Dempsey, "Uncle Tom Centenarian," New York Times Magazine, June 3, 1951, p. 55.

[86]J. C. Furnas, Goodbye to Uncle Tom (New York, 1956).

[87]Paul Pickrel, "The Cargo That Came," Harper's Magazine, July, 1956, p. 88.

but will accept it at its face value...It can do much harm in perpetuating stereotypes and fostering misunderstanding.[88]

The book was not alone in evoking protests; its dramatizations brought similar condemnation. In addition to stage versions of the novel which had been in existence for years, at least two new ones appeared in the 1940's. In one of these, through a series of dramatic scenes covering three acts, the events leading up to and following the writing of the world-shaking novel were presented.[89] This provoked action which barred Uncle Tom's Cabin from the stage, not in a Southern town but in Harriet Beecher Stowe's own Connecticut, first in Bridgeport and later in New Haven. According to a headline in the Herald Tribune, which summarized the irony of the situation, it was barred because the play was "anti-Negro."[90] The ban objected to it because it

refreshed memories that tend to portray only the weaknesses of a racial minority, and holds up to ridicule peoples who in the early days of our country were unfortunately subjected to exposures that today would be considered atrocious.[91]

Lee Wallace then conducted a survey to determine whether the general public, white as well as Negro, considered the play "anti-Negro." A very small percentage of whites agreed with the majority of Negroes who felt that Uncle Tom's Cabin presented the Negro in a submissive, docile, cringing role which portrayed him as less than a man. Although both races agreed that the play and the novel were valuable in their earlier

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[88]Furnas, p. 63.

[89]Florence Ryerson and Colin Clement, "Harriet," Senior Scholastic, April 24, 1944, pp. 13-16.

[90]John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review of Literature, October 6, 1945, p. 24.

[91]Ibid.

days, they believed the story now has no place on the American stage. They also pointed out that the name Uncle Tom in Negro circles has become synonymous with any colored person who will not fight for his full rights as an American.[92]

However, by 1941, nearly one hundred years after the publication of the novel, most critics viewed the work with more objectivity. A few reviewers, it is true, still clung to the belief that Uncle Tom's Cabin owed its success entirely to historical circumstances and declined even to discuss the work from a literary standpoint. More typical was Frank Luther Mott's stated opinion that the immense popularity of the book was not due wholly, nor even chiefly, to the fact that it was topical.[93] The fact that the struggle over slavery had grown so tense, and the moral atmosphere so thickly charged, just waiting for a fatal spark, was part of the explanation for the novel's touching the world so deeply. But the mere fact that an audience was already prepared would not explain the mystery of a work which shook a powerful institution. Although it began as an anti-slavery tract, it differed from many others of its kind which had no far-reaching effect.[94] Likewise, the argument fell before the world-wide interest in it as a mere story, with its immediate translation into a score of languages, by races unaffected by our own relation to slavery.[95] Given a start by the

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[92]Wallace Lee, "Is Uncle Tom's Cabin Anti-Negro?" Negro Digest, January, 1946, p. 68.

[93]Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 120.

[94]Ibid.

[95]"America's No. 1 Best Seller Reaches a Centenary," Publisher's Weekly, CLXI (1952), 1290.

ready interest in the slavery controversy, it gathered momentum primarily because it was "a vital story, striking with extraordinary directness to the heart of fundamental human feelings and relationships."[96]

Having concluded that the timeliness of the topic was not wholly responsible for its success, critics then turned to a discussion of its literary qualities. Just as reviewers of past years reached no agreement on the merits of Mrs. Stowe's characterization, so critics of the present day state contrasting opinions. Remarks, all coming from reputable judges, vary from "characterization which often has charm and convincingness,"[97] and "She can make us see a person and hear him talk,"[98] to "faulty in characterization,"[99] and "the glaring unreality of characters."[100] George Snell reminded his readers that Mrs. Stowe was one of the few novelists who have created personages so vivid that they have left the realm of literature and entered the domain of folk inheritance.[101] Topsy, little Eva, Simon Legree, and Uncle Tom all have become a part of American folklore, contributing to the common speech such words as "Simon Legree" to signify a cruel taskmaster and lodging in the minds of successive generations unforgettable pictures of little

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[96]Mott, p. 120.

[97]Ibid., p. 121.

[98]Edmund Wilson, "Books," New Yorker, XXXI (1955), 126.

[99]Seiler, p. 135.

[100]Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York, 1952), p. 92.

[101]Snell, p. 30.

Eva dying or of Eliza crossing the ice.[102] These typical figures she established so clearly that today they are accepted as myths, the public having forgotten that a novelist invented them.[103] One critic, however, regretted that the characters have become myths because "as the story passed from literature to folklore, Mrs. Stowe's sound craftsmanship and creative artistry grew blurred and distorted and were finally almost obliterated."[104] Her characters were no longer human beings, complex and contradictory, but only crude symbols of good and evil reduced to the simplest form.[105]

According to Walter Taylor, Mrs. Stowe's creative power was nowhere better shown than in the vividness of her minor characters, the "wire-working" Sam, the incorrigible Topsy, the prim Miss Ophelia, and others. Having stated that these minor characters "become for us a living world, overflowing with vivid life,"[106] he also proposed that these figures, less thesis-bound than the principal characters, show what Mrs. Stowe might have accomplished had she been free to study the eccentric personalities brought forth in a semi-frontier environment.

Alexander Cowie believed that Mrs. Stowe's greatest weakness in characterization lay in her tendency to sacrifice character to moral crusade. He thought that most of the characters had basic strength, but

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[102]C. B. Munson, Twelve Decisive Battles of the Mind (New York, 1942), p. 138.

[103]Wilson, p. 126.

[104]Papashvily, p. 69.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Walter F. Taylor, History of American Letters (Boston, 1947), p. 186.

that this strength became impaired in varying degree as they became the pawns of propaganda. Uncle Tom's simple affectionate nature, his manifold troubles, and even his zeal for salvation, sounded real, but "he was occasionally drafted into the service of Mrs. Stowe's Christian war."[107] The question of whether a poorly educated Negro who was living more comfortably under a benevolent master than he could possibly live as a freeman would prefer to remain in bondage or be emancipated was difficult to answer. At any rate, Cowie felt that the abstract academic remarks made by Uncle Tom to St. Clare on this subject were simply a set speech prompted by the author.[108] Likewise, some of the minor characters began as rather strong personages but suffered loss of realism as they were touched by the saintliness of Eva and Tom, who had become propaganda pieces. Although Topsy's diablerie was described with verisimilitude, her reform, though slow, seemed a mechanical dispensation. The amiable but vacillating St. Clare was at first a splendidly drawn character, but Mrs. Stowe, who had foreordained his conversion, finally made him utter religious sentiments that were as hollow as his earlier opinions on slavery had sounded genuine. Cowie felt that one of the poorest characters in the novel was the hypocritical Mrs. St. Clare, who was merely a vessel into which Mrs. Stowe poured her contempt for the selfish and unthinking proponents of slavery. Although as wicked as Tom was saintly, even Legree, "chief of sinners in the hands of an

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[107]Alexander Cowie, Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 449.

[108]Ibid.

angry Mrs. Stowe," was more real than Mrs. St. Clare, because a number of real elements did go into his characterization.[109]

One critic stated that everyone who had read the novel must have been struck by the fact that the characters were types and not individuals. He went further to say that they became mere outlines of human beings and not persons of flesh and blood at all. "Uncle Tom is not an individual Negro but the typical faithful slave."[110] Little Eva was a type of innocence and Simon Legree was a typical villain.

Another critic agreed that typifications were used in the novel, but he insisted that "their tremendous vitality as powerful types of human myth or fantasy"[111] was more valuable than individual characterization because the reader grasps the significance of types without effort. In Mrs. Stowe's attempt to impart an idea, typing was especially useful because if she had fully drawn each character, the average reader would have been so lost in a maze of psychological subtleties that he would have missed the aim of the writer.[112]

In her book The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels, Dorothy Deegan listed Miss Ophelia as an interesting variation of the English prototype of the spinster.

> When Miss Ophelia goes from staid New England to the lackadaisical life of New Orleans, as housekeeper for her cousin...her conscience is under severe strain. The episodes in which she is involved not only point up

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[109]Ibid.

[110]Russell Blankenship, "Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe," American Literature (New York, 1949), p. 330.

[111]Wagenknecht, p. 92.

[112]Ibid.

differences in manners and mores, but also reveal amusing aspects of her prim personality.[113]

One of the most amusing, even if it is not just, evaluations of Mrs. Stowe's characterization was J. C. Furnas's remark that "her Negro characters all sound like the Stella Dallas soap opera."[114]

G. B. Munson made an interesting observation when he stated that not the least reason for the novel's effectiveness was the author's constant appeal to mankind's love of the fabulous. Eliza's leap and dash across the Ohio was fabulous and readers loved it. Little Eva's perfection, Uncle Tom's humility, Legree's cruelty, were fabulous, and readers uncritically accepted them. "Eliminate the crude impossibilities from Uncle Tom's Cabin and you have only a bad novel."[115] Munson pointed out that, like Hitler, Mrs. Stowe uncynically knew the craving of men for the fabulous, and her constant use of "impossibilities" made her work good propaganda.[116]

Alexander Cowie related that the changing locale of the action in Uncle Tom's Cabin made breaks in the narrative which Mrs. Stowe spliced with so little skill that the whole structure seemed to sprawl.[117] Another critic said that its "double plot" consisted of "two journeys, that of escaped slaves to freedom in Canada and that of Tom to martyrdom in the deep South."[118] He further pointed out that while the novel fell

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[113]Dorothy Deegan, The Stereotype of the Single Woman in American Novels (New York, 1951), p. 133.

[114]Furnas, p. 56.

[115]Munson, p. 139.

[116]Ibid.

[117]Cowie, p. 450.

[118]Wagenknecht, p. 93.

into two distinct parts, Uncle Tom's adventures fell into three stages, his life in Kentucky with his first owners, his sojourn with kindly new masters, and his final torture at the hands of Simon Legree. The first of these sections gave the book its verisimilitude, for Mrs. Stowe had observed the life of Negroes on Kentucky estates. The second section contained most of the humor, in the contrast between the New England spinster, Miss Ophelia, and the wayward slave girl, Topsy. Here also was to be found the most effective discussion of Negro slavery, in the witty and tolerant complaints of Augustine St. Clare. The final section was pure melodrama, which intensified the horror previously suggested in the opening chapters by the frenzied escape of Eliza over the icy Ohio river.[119] Hubbell also considered the plot "made up of two stories, only loosely tied together,"[120] but Pattee had earlier spoken of its being "not one book but three, with three different casts of characters, Uncle Tom only remaining permanent."[121] C. H. Foster pointed out that, like Moby Dick and Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom's Cabin is in structure an expanded tale of travel. He believed Mrs. Stowe developed this form quite naturally because she wished to give a broad view of slavery through Uncle Tom's journey south and George's, Eliza's, and little Harry's journey north. The author could easily have been influenced by Scott in thus making the novel a panorama of mid-America.[122]

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[119]Ibid.

[120]Jay B. Hubbell, The South in American Literature (New York, 1954), p. 390.

[121]Fred Lewis Pattee, Feminine Fifties (New York, 1940), p. 132.

[122]C. H. Foster, The Rungless Ladder (Durham, North Carolina, 1954), pp. 15, 16.

Even more serious than the sprawling structure, however, was the violence done to the story by Mrs. Stowe's doctrinaire method. Time and time again she interrupted the narrative to emphasize a moral which the action itself spelled out clearly enough, and, as a result, the book was frequently offensively moralistic.[123] Having stated that there was too much preaching in Uncle Tom's Cabin, one critic hastened to add that this was a fault shared with the highly esteemed Pilgrim's Progress of an earlier century.[124]

This sermonizing was, of course, partially responsible for another criticism of the novel, that it is excessively sentimental. One critic found that Mrs. Stowe used no subterfuge and no artistry in appealing to the simplest emotions of the reader, but that she appealed directly to his sympathy, and as a result, "It literally wallows in tears."[125] He admitted, however, that this very fault of the story assisted in its successful appeal to readers. The aim of the book was to create a moral revulsion, an emotional protest, against slavery, and if the book had not been sentimental, it would not have enlisted the millions who read it only to become embittered against slavery.[126]

James Baldwin compared the sentimentality in Uncle Tom's Cabin with that in Little Women and found in both novels a "self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality...the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion."[127] This he felt was a mark of dishonesty. "The wet eyes of

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[123]Hubbell, p. 390.

[124]Mott, p. 121.

[125]Blankenship, p. 331.

[126]Ibid.

[127]James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel," Partisan Review, XVI (1949), 578.

the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart, and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty."[128]

However, it has been pointed out by several reviewers that critical points of view change with the times. Although the novel is perhaps sentimental to an extreme unbearable today, sentimentalism was demanded of Mrs. Stowe. The fifties were a decade of sentimentality in life as in literature, and what now seems mawkish was then regarded as real pathos.[129] This perhaps explains Stark Young's statement that he found Uncle Tom's Cabin excessively dated, very much of the epoch--1840, 1850, the early 1860's--bombastic, turgid, lurid, sentimental, indignant, and laden with the moral reformer's rhetoric of the time.[130]

According to Herbert Brown, critics have often been puzzled by the curious union of Mrs. Stowe's shrewd, homely realism and her comic Yankee perception with her crusading imagination, her passionate seriousness and religious hunger.[131] Looking at things with a New Englander's eye, the author of the recent The Rungless Ladder found the answer to that puzzle, at least to his own satisfaction, in Puritan "doubleness," the alternating moods of desperate earnestness and comic realism which became an emotional necessity for those who daily faced the frustration

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[128]Ibid.

[129]Mott, p. 121.

[130]Stark Young, "A Gentle Mrs. Stowe," New Republic, CVIII (1941), 381.

[131]Herbert Brown, "The Source of Her Power," New York Times, November 20, 1955, p. 26.

of a creed which offered surpassing bliss but denied its attainment except by an unmerited act of Divine Grace.[132]

Whatever the merits of Uncle Tom's Cabin are and regardless of whether Mrs. Stowe was a great artist, she did write the words which convulsed a mighty nation, and, although several celebrations were held, the centennial of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1952 probably received less attention than it merited. At the Maine Writers' Conference that year a tribute was paid to Mrs. Stowe and a collection of Stowe memorabilia, some of it on loan from Harvard, was shown. Robert E. Bacon, Assistant Supervisor in Education, Massachusetts Department of Education, gave an extension course in Boston on "Centennials of 1952 Literature and Life," which included Uncle Tom's Cabin. And the Friends of the Detroit Public Library held a special centennial meeting at which they exhibited a fifty-two page guide to displays on the novel and material related to it.[133]

Thus, although modern critics apparently do not consider Uncle Tom's Cabin a skilled novel, the story and its dramatic forms have not lacked for attention and consideration during the past twenty years.

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[132]Foster, pp. 1-10.

[133]John T. Winterich, "Bookmarks," Saturday Review of Literature, February 28, 1953, p. 23.

CHAPTER IV

FORTUNES OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN ABROAD

Exceeding even the American vogue was the popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin abroad. The novel broke all sales records in its appeal to men and women of every class, not only in the United States but in Great Britain and, before the year 1852 was out, over the entire Continent as well as in South America. A young employee of Putnam's sent a copy to an English publisher, receiving five pounds for his trouble, and from this point, the novel took England by storm. Since international copyright protection was lacking, pirated editions proliferated. In its first week an edition of seven thousand was disposed of. Published in March in the United States, the book made no great stir in England until the middle of June, but during July it sold at the rate of one thousand a week. By the twentieth of August the demand for it was overwhelming. The printing firm was then employing four hundred people in getting it out, and seventeen printing machines, besides hand presses.[1] Soon there were eighteen English publishing houses supplying the demand with forty different editions varying from an illustrated edition at fifteen shillings to a cheap popular edition at sixpence.[2] And even more impressive, during September, 1852, one

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[1]Charles Dudley Warner, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Atlantic Monthly, LXXVIII (1896), 316.

[2]Robert B. Downs, Books That Changed the World (Chicago, 1956), p. 80.

firm in London sold ten thousand copies a day of various editions, according to the Edinburgh Review of April, 1855. Sampson Low, later Mrs. Stowe's London publisher, after "carefully analyzing" the British editions which appeared within a year of the book's first English publication in April, 1852, "and weighing probabilities with ascertained facts," asserted "pretty confidently" that Uncle Tom's Cabin sold more than a million and a half copies in England and her colonies during that time.[3]

The London Times for September 3, 1852, in a review three and a half columns long, began its discussion with the announcement that the book was "at every railway bookstall in England, and in every third traveller's hand."[4] A reviewer for the Eclectic Review reported that Uncle Tom's Cabin "is everywhere: drawing room, nursery, kitchen, library, physician's waiting room. We have nothing like it in the previous history of books."[5] Another critic stated that

> The west end library and the railway bookstall are alike loaded with Uncle Tom. It is a matter of argument in the drawing room, which of the family circle shall have the first perusal; the housemaid is so absorbed in her copy that the beds are unmade and the bell unanswered; and men, who never read any other books, are surprised, deeply absorbed in this.[6]

The North British Review related that the novel had been so widely read

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[3]Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes (New York, 1947), p. 118.

[4]Quoted in Clarence Gohdes, American Literature in Nineteenth Century England (New York, 1944), p. 30.

[5]"Uncle Tom's Cabin and Its Opponents," Eclectic Review, XCVI (1852), 717.

[6]"Review of Uncle Tom's Cabin," The Prospective Review, VIII (1852), 490.

in England that "The question is not if you have read Uncle Tom's Cabin but what do you think of it."[7]

Despite the fact that England and all Europe were free from the slavery problem which plagued the United States in 1852, many foreign critics read and wrote about the book with much the same passion as was exhibited in its homeland. Mrs. Stowe had succeeded in riveting universal attention on slavery.[8] One critic was caustically unfriendly to several attacks on Uncle Tom's Cabin and stated ardently that "if Union must be bought at the price of slavery, then Union is overpriced."[9] And while admitting that the union of races would be to a great extent inevitable if the slave were freed, another reviewer candidly remarked that "...the pedigree of innumerable slaves throughout the South proves that there is no natural repugnance between them /white and Negro people/."[10] The London Times attacked the nobility of Uncle Tom and the reality of the conditions depicted in the novel. The critic asserted that if Uncle Tom were "a type of a class,...we have nothing more to communicate to the Negro, but everything to learn from his profession and practice."[11] Far more typical was the review in the Illustrated London News which devoted two and a half columns to unmitigated enthusiasm

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[7] "Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly," North British Review, XVIII (1852), 235.

[8] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Chamber's Edinburgh Journal, XVIII (1852), 187.

[9] "Uncle Tom's Cabin and Its Opponents," p. 717.

[10] "Review of Uncle Tom's Cabin," p. 491.

[11] Quoted in Gohdes, p. 30.

and concluded that Mrs. Stowe's portrayal of life and conditions bore the "stamp of truth."[12]

At least one critic was so overcome by the popularity of the novel that he hesitated to "descend" to mere literary evaluation. "We covet not the office of criticizing a picture before which all that have eyes and hearts are still standing breathless as before the living reality."[13] Others were not so hesitant, however, and several reviewers wrote evaluations either praising or condemning Mrs. Stowe's craftsmanship. The London Times praised the skill in delineation of character,[14] Chambers's Edinburgh Journal made several references to her weak plot and strong characters,[15] and a reviewer for the Prospective Review reported that he was not convinced that the author was an expert novelist.[16]

In a rather lengthy article, a reviewer for Blackwood's Magazine endeavored to determine what was remarkable enough about Uncle Tom's Cabin to cause it to excite such attention and emotion among its readers. Purporting to judge the novel only by its intrinsic merits and demerits, the critic concluded that Mrs. Stowe was unquestionably a woman of genius and her book a remarkable work of art. He noted the writer's "artlessness," and often spoke with highest regard for the novel and the novelist. He called her humor and satire genuine and racy and her pathos deep and pure. She exhibited high dramatic capabilities

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[12]Ibid.

[13]"Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly," p. 235.

[14]Quoted in Gohdes, p. 30.

[15]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, p. 187.

[16]"Review of Uncle Tom's Cabin," p. 490.

and admirable dialogue. The reviewer felt that the primary defect of the construction of her work was its lack of connectedness and suggested that Uncle Tom and his fortunes might have constituted a work by itself, and those of George and Eliza Harris, a second. "The former might have been called Uncle Tom and the latter George and Eliza,"[17] for there were two classes of adventures quite separate from each other--the experiences of the submissive slave and the adventures of the recalcitrant slave. He pointed out that Mrs. Stowe attempted to link the two sets of events together, first, by making Uncle Tom and Eliza Harris fellow-slaves of the same master and mistress, and secondly, by making Uncle Tom and Eliza's child the subject of a joint sale to a slavetrader, but this was the only connection and it was very slight.[18] He observed that while her characters were often drawn with delicate discrimination, they almost as often exhibited poverty and crudeness. The poorly-developed characters probably originated as a result of momentary exigencies of her story which required that a new character be introduced. Mrs. Stowe hastily added the new figure, perhaps intending at a future time, which never came, to complete the picture.[19] Reviewing the work as a literary whole, however, the reviewer concluded that he knew of no living writer who could surpass Mrs. Stowe.[20]

Having related the strange story of Uncle Tom's success, a critic for the Edinburgh Review attempted to ascertain and explain what had

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[17] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXIV (1853), 402.

[18] Ibid., p. 403.

[19] Ibid., p. 397.

[20] Ibid., p. 395.

caused the novel to be so popular that its success would probably be treated as fabulous by succeeding generations. Like many American critics, he believed the most important factor in its popularity was the subject matter of the novel. Next in importance was the attractiveness of the moral coloring which caused the reader to sympathize with Mrs. Stowe and to feel himself better for having done so. A third source of the popularity of the novel was its naturalness which the reviewer felt was marred only by the characterization. Uncle Tom was simply perfect, with not a particle of human infirmity allowed to profane his excellence. Eva was also perfect, her whole character being formed of youthful love and piety. Marie was a simple character made up merely of intense selfishness and weak intelligence. Those who were wicked had no virtues; those who were good had no vices. All qualities given to any character led their possessor into one line of conduct, and this detracted from its naturalness. With this exception, however, the reviewer believed that the story was perfectly natural. The fortunes of the different dramatis personae moved in separate lines, little influencing one another, and the novel was free of elaborate entanglements and clever unravellings which tend to create artificiality.[21]

Although critics in England occasionally found fault with Mrs. Stowe's masterpiece, they more often had only enthusiastic praise for her. That the book was highly regarded as late as 1885 is evidenced by an article in the Andover Review. The reviewer for that magazine regretted that many critics denied Uncle Tom's Cabin the classification of novel because the author of the book had a conscious and openly

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[21] "Slavery in the United States," The Edinburgh Review, CI (1855), 313, 314.

avowed practical end in writing it. While he joined the protest against turning the novel into a pulpit, the reviewer believed that the ethical purpose and the artistic purpose could coexist in an artistic effort, and he personally insisted that the book was a novel.[22]

There were critics in London, however, who were just as uncomplimentary in their remarks as those just quoted have been complimentary. A writer for the Literary World brought against her the charge of plagiarism, pointing out that what he considered to be the weakest part of Uncle Tom's Cabin, little Eva's characterization, had been borrowed from Mrs. Sherwood, an English novelist, and that little Eva was unquestionably nothing more than an adaptation of one of the English lady's characters, little Henry.[23] And another critic calls it a "terrible tale of life and suffering" in the slave states of America, and fails to recommend it to the reader because "pleasure no one can find in reading it," for the author's arguments and selections of illustrations have necessarily led her into "horrors as deep as those toyed with for coarse excitement's sake by Gozlan and other romancers of the convulsionnaire school of French fiction."[24]

Mrs. Stowe saw to it that Uncle Tom's Cabin fell into the hands of prominent humanitarians who might give it publicity. "She sat down at Great-Grandfather General Ward's drop leaf table and wrote letters forwarding her book to Charles Dickens, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Lord

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[22]"Uncle Tom's Cabin: Is It a Novel?" Andover Review, IV (1885), 363, 366.

[23]Arthur Bartlett Maurice, "Famous Novels and Their Contemporary Critics," Bookman, March, 1903, p. 23.

[24]"Uncle Tom's Cabin," The Atheneaum, July 3, 1853, p. 574.

Carlisle, Charles Kingsley, and the Prince Consort."[25] Her letters accompanying the special copies were almost immediately replied to, generally in terms of enthusiastic and fervent thankfulness for the book, and before midsummer her mail contained letters from all classes of English society. In some of them appeared a curious evidence of the English sensitiveness to criticism. A British government official, Lord Carlisle, offset his admiration by a protest against the remark in the mouth of one of the characters that "slaves are better off than a large class of the population of England." Earlier, speaking of her great

> grace of style, great power of language, a play of humor which relieves and lightens the dark depth of the background...a force of pathos... of highest praise, a variety, a discrimination, a truth in delineation of character,"[26]

he finally told her that she had failed to do justice to England when she spoke of its institutions.

Charles Dickens wrote from London in July, and while courteously suggesting that she had gone too far and sought to prove too much, he closed by saying, "Your book is worthy of any heart that ever inspired a book. I am your debtor, and thank you most fervently and sincerely."[27] Macaulay wrote, thanking her for the volume and assuring her of his high respects for the talents and for the benevolence of the writer. Prince Albert's secretary sent a polite acknowledgement informing Mrs.

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[25]Catherine Gilbertson, Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York, 1937), p. 159.

[26]Ibid., p. 160.

[27]"Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mrs. Stowe," Magazine of American History, XXIII (1890), 18.

Stowe that the Prince and the Queen had read her story with most intense interest.[28] The most effusive response came from Charles Kingsley, who found Uncle Tom's Cabin "a really healthy indigenous growth, 'authochthones,' free from all second and third hand Germanisms and Italianisms, and all other unrealisms."[29] Kinglsey also cited another critic as having said that Uncle Tom's Cabin reminded him more of Shakespeare, on a lower sphere, than anything he had ever read.

Letters kept pouring in to Mrs. Stowe. Florence Nightingale wrote to her that amid the hardships of their eastern campaigns the British soldiers read her book in their encampments.[30] Jenny Lind ended a letter of praise with the words: "Certainly God's hand will remain with a blessing over your head."[31]

The enormous European popularity had begun. From England came news that the Duchess of Sutherland had been moved by the book to hold a meeting in her London home, historic Stafford House, at which was drafted an anti-slavery appeal from the women of the British Empire to the women of America. There came also an invitation from the Anti-Slavery Society of Glasgow for the Stowes to tour the British Isles on behalf of the cause. In response to pressing invitations, Mr. and Mrs. Stowe and Charles Beecher sailed for Europe. In London she was lionized in somewhat extravagant fashion. Her reception there was like a royal progress.

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[28]Gilbertson, p. 161.

[29]Charles H. Foster, The Rungless Ladder (Durham, North Carolina, 1954), p. 48.

[30]"A New Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe," American Review of Reviews, XLIX (1914), 48.

[31]Forrest Wilson, Crusader in Crinoline (Philadelphia, 1941), p. 103.

She was met everywhere by deputations and addresses, and the enthusiasm her presence called forth was thoroughly democratic.[32] At Edinburgh there was presented to her a national penny offering, consisting of a thousand gold sovereigns on a magnificent silver salver.[33]

Almost simultaneously with this furor in England the book made its way on the Continent. It was translated and circulated in unprecedented numbers in every city, country and court of Europe; and wherever it was read, it excited a like abhorrence of the system it so vividly portrayed, kind sympathy with every effort for abolition, and hearty goodwill and earnest wishes for the new party of freedom.

The number of translations has been variously estimated as involving from twenty to forty languages and dialects. There are known translations into at least twenty-one different languages, as follows: Arabic; Armenian; Bohemian; Danish (two distinct versions); Dutch (three distinct versions and one for children--fourteen separate editions); Finnish; Flemish; French (eleven distinct versions, two abridgments for children and two dramatic adaptations); Hungarian (one complete version, one for children, and one versified abridgment); Illyrian (two versions); Italian (twelve versions and one for children, two editions of the Key); Portuguese; Polish; Romaic or modern Greek; Russian (two versions); Spanish (six versions: Spain, five; Mexico, one); Servian; Swedish (five for children, six distinct versions--at least sixteen editions); Wallachian (two versions); Welsh (three versions); Wendish; German (at least seventy-five separate versions.)[34] Another writer has added three

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[32]Ibid., pp. 362-386.

[33]Ibid., pp. 344-361.

[34]Grace Maclean, Uncle Tom's Cabin in Germany (New York, 1910), p. 21.

more languages to this list--Chinese, Japanese, and Siamese--explaining that the translation into some of the Oriental tongues did not appear until several years after the great excitement.[35]

That the book was generally read in Germany is proved by the number of translations. There were at least seventy-five editions of more than forty different translations, to sixteen of which the names of translaters are given, with eleven abridgments for children, one dramatic adaptation, and one volume of illustrations. Besides these there were published in Germany three editions in English, one of which was for school use, and one edition in French, also for schools. Grace Maclean reported that "Mrs. Stowe everywhere was known as 'die Humanistin,' and her book was called the Evangelium der Negersklaven."[36] The poet Heine reported that reading it caused him to turn to a study of the Bible.[37]

It seems significant that the novel which dealt with a specific American social problem should excite sufficient interest in France to warrant a celebration there of the hundredth anniversary of the publication of the novel. That anniversary was observed at the Sorbonne in February, 1953, in the presence of Andre Marie, Minister of National Education, and United States Ambassador James C. Dunn.[38] Many years earlier, in December, 1852, George Sand wrote Mrs. Stowe that it was "in all hands and in all journals," that it had "editions in all forms," that "the people devour it, they cover it with tears."[39] Later, having

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[35]Warner, p. 317.

[36]Maclean, p. 23.

[37]New York Times Magazine, June 3, 1951, p. 56.

[38]New York Times, February 19, 1953, p. 28.

[39]Mott, p. 118.

been asked to evaluate Uncle Tom's Cabin, Mme. Sand said, "In matters of art there is but one rule, to paint and to move. And where shall we find conditions more complete, types more vivid, situations more touching, more original than in Uncle Tom?" She went on to relate her opinion that it was because Mrs. Stowe was so instinctive that she appeared not to have talent. She concluded that whether or not the author of Uncle Tom had talent as one understands it in the world of letters, she had genius "as humanity feels the need of genius--the genius of goodness, not that of the man of letters, but of the saint."[40] With its eleven versions, the novel continued to be a best seller in Paris for two or three years.

Macaulay, the historian, returning in the fall of 1856 from a visit to Italy, wrote Mrs. Stowe, "Your fame seems to throw that of all other writers into the shade. There is no place where Uncle Tom, transformed into Il Zio Tom, is not to be found."[41] And this was despite the Pope's prohibition, which probably was brought about by the flavor of Jacobinism in the novel. It is true that the author had St. Clare talking like a German student of 1848 about irresistible stirrings among the masses, of which slaves' unrest was only part.[42]

In a different and more intimate manner Mrs. Stowe inspired the enthusiasm of freedom-loving Brazilians. Lincoln's was not the only name which carried the story of the North American struggle for emancipation to Brazil. As the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Mrs. Stowe's

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[40]Warner, p. 319.

[41]"Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mrs. Stowe," p. 18.

[42]J. C. Furnas, Goodbye to Uncle Tom (New York, 1956), p. 25.

name came to be as widely known as that of Lincoln; and after its translation into Portuguese, her novel went through several Brazilian editions. It was also published serially in papers throughout the country. It was probably as a play that Uncle Tom's Cabin served as the greatest inspiration to the Brazilian abolitionist movement, for in this way it reached the illiterate as well as the plantation owners. It is interesting to note that the play was adapted in several versions, some for upper-class audiences and others for more popular groups. Besides the direct influence of Mrs. Stowe's work, Uncle Tom's Cabin stimulated a series of Brazilian anti-slavery novels, many in a similar vein, in which the slave was highly idealized. Others were based on the more realistic conception that slavery morally degrades both the slave and the master. Above and beyond this, moreover, Brazilian literature of that day was rich in its forceful condemnation of slavery.[43]

The Swedish novelist, Fredrika Bremer, had on several occasions voiced a desire that someone would write a novel picturing American slavery, a task which she herself wanted to do but had not the necessary knowledge and experience for. When Uncle Tom's Cabin appeared in Sweden, Miss Bremer wrote Harriet:

> It was the work I had long wished for, that I had anticipated, that I wished while in America to be able to write, that I thought must come in America as the uprising of the woman's and the mother's heart on the question of slavery. I wondered that it had not come earlier...I wondered, and God be praised! it has come.[44]

When the work was translated into Siamese, reading about Uncle Tom's faith in the Bible by one of the ladies of the court induced her to

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[43]Barbara Hadley, "Uncle Tom's Cabin in Brazil," Inter-American Monthly, October, 1943, pp. 26, 27.

[44]Foster, pp. 57, 58.

liberate all her slaves, men, women, and children, one hundred thirty in all.[45] When carving The King and I out of Anna and the King of Siam, Rodgers and Hammerstein made much of this Siamese lady who learned English, read Uncle Tom's Cabin and grew obsessed with it, translated it into Siamese, and renamed herself "Harriet Beecher Stowe Son Klin." The result was a pseudo-Siamese ballet, "The Small House of Uncle Thomas," to amuse millions of paying customers. In it a Siamese-style Eliza fled pursued by dog-masked dancers urged on by King Simon of Legree and eventually found refuge in the cabin of Uncle Tom with a kinky blue wig and a minstrel-show black mask.[46]

Tsar Nicholas I permitted the book to be translated into Russian, and a few months later Tolstoy ranked Uncle Tom's Cabin "among the great achievements of the human mind."[47] In fact, it made such an impression on Tolstoy that when he came to write "What is Art?" he took it as an example of the highest type, grouping it with the few masterpieces of the world.[48] In 1952 came the report that a new edition of Uncle Tom's Cabin was on sale behind the Iron Curtain. The newspaper Magyar Nemzet told its readers that "in Truman's America they try to hide this book..."[49] The "Tom Shows" also are still popular in Russia, where Soviet children are permitted to sniffle over the woes of Uncle Tom.[50] Mrs. Stowe has

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[45] Furnas, p. 13.

[46] Ibid.

[47] "Uncle Tom's Manny," Time, March 10, 1941, p. 37.

[48] James Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review of Literature, October 6, 1945, p. 24.

[49] New York Times, January 19, 1952, p. 2. The same source shows that the truth of the matter is that in 1952 the anti-slavery book of a century past was on the trade list of at least four publishers in the United States.

[50] "Uncle Tom in Russia," Literary Digest, June 2, 1932, p. 16.

always been charged with exaggeration, but she was mild when compared with the producers of the Moscow version of the play. Nearly all the white characters are grotesque caricatures, in contrast to the Negroes, most of whom are shown in a favorable light. Eva's conversation with her father and Uncle Tom are all eliminated here, for Soviet children are not exposed to anything which would stimulate an interest in religious things. Little Eva fails to die during the play, and of course there is no suggestion at the death of Uncle Tom either that he has a soul to go to heaven or that there is a heaven.[51] The Soviet production deflated Uncle Tom to a "meek, Bible-reading secondary character" and added a narrator who explains that Simon Legree is really a Wall Street villain, true today as he was in the age of slaves. "Do you children wish to side with Simon Legree or with the camp of peace led by the Soviet Union?"[52]

Although the play has been presented in every European capital.[53] Americans might not recognize some of the versions used. In Paris, where the Negro finds social equality, many features objectionable to him were omitted.

Many estimates of the world distribution of this book have been made. A circulation of six and a half million copies seems fairly conservative. This is probably the top figure for any American work. It came in the one moment of history when its success could have been possible. But come it did, and there is no escaping the fact that it will stand for many years to come among the greatest masterpieces of fiction.

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Wesley W. Stout, "Little Eva Is Seventy-Five," Saturday Evening Post, October 8, 1927, p. 10.

CHAPTER V

TRENDS IN THE REPUTATION OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

Like most novels, Uncle Tom's Cabin has continually stimulated criticism. It has been a popular subject with literary critics, with the exception of the period during 1854-96, when most of the relatively few comments were prompted by one or more of Mrs. Stowe's later writings.

Since the novel dealt with the controversial subject of slavery, more early reviews were written from a social and moral standpoint than from a literary one. First published as a book on March 20, 1852, the novel had previously been serialized in a Washington anti-slavery newspaper, the National Era, and was already a debated topic of discussion among its readers. Pro-slavery advocates and abolitionists alike found in it reason for articles designed to further their own personal interests and prejudices. Those who had a financial stake in slavery sensed a positive danger, and in the South the novel was regarded not only as destructive of "the peculiar institution," but also as an invitation to slave rebellion. In the North it was generally hailed and applauded as an aid to the abolitionist cause, but some of the most bitter adverse criticism also came from there since much Northern money was invested in Southern cotton plantations, which were dependent on slavery for survival.

While most of Mrs. Stowe's admirers wrote their commendations with restraint, those reviews hostile to the author were usually written in

vitriolic language. Advocates of slavery who continuously pointed out factual errors in the book insisted that "slanders impudently uttered and obstinately persevered in"[1] could be expected of the writer who has no knowledge of his subject. They declared that Mrs. Stowe had caricatured slavery, that she had portrayed only the most odious features of the system, and that she had exaggerated the social evils inherent in it. Having shaped the exception into the rule, she had conveyed erroneous impressions and introduced false conclusions. But while many critics condemned Mrs. Stowe for inadvertently disseminating "incendiary falsehoods,"[2] others cast reflections upon her motives. She was accused of having had a greater love for money than for truth; she was branded an immoral writer whose subject dealt with "habitual prostitution;"[3] and she was described as unpatriotic since she criticized an institution of her native country.

Northern reviews favorable to Uncle Tom's Cabin asserted that the accusation that Mrs. Stowe pictured only the worst features of slavery was unjust. They believed the evil depicted by the author actually existed and declared that her description was more agreeable and more truthful than many pro-slavery writings. According to them, no one should doubt that Mrs. Stowe dealt justly with both slaves and slaveholders. Well known authors were among those who voiced opinions from

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[1] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Quarterly Review, January, 1853, p. 81.

[2] "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Southern Literary Messenger, XVIII (June, 1853), 721.

[3] A. Beatty, "The Evils of Slavery," Western Journal and Civilian, X (1853), 319.

a social standpoint. Whittier and Longfellow both expressed their gratitude for the book, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson felt that it was a double triumph--the most powerful contemporary fiction and a most efficient anti-slavery tract.[4] One critic who compared Mrs. Stowe with Sir Walter Scott found that "Even the Wizard of the North never so held a world spellbound."[5]

While early literary reviews were few in comparison with the number of personal and political ones, the novel was generally highly regarded by those who did view it from a strictly literary standpoint. Although an occasional reviewer criticized the book as faulty in construction, as unrealistic in characterization, or as inexact in its recording of Negro dialect, many more had only praise for it. Several critics, including Whittier and Emerson, spoke of its great skill in delineation of character and its nimble dialogue. One reviewer stated that he knew of no novel after Tom Jones which was superior to Uncle Tom's Cabin in constructive ability,[6] and he, like many another reviewer, was impressed with the author's dramatic power. Those who expressed themselves at all believed that the book succeeded in spite of its subject matter rather than because of it. Regarded purely as a novel, the work was considered by critics contemporary with its publication to be a brilliant literary work, and the best piece of literature yet contributed to American fiction. Its author they assigned to the front ranks of American writers.

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[4]Charles Edward Stowe, Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York, 1889), p. 162.

[5]"Uncle Tom's Cabin, Slavery, and The North American Review," The Freewill Baptist Quarterly, II (1854), 23.

[6]Charles F. Briggs, "Uncle Tomitudes," Putnam's Magazine, December, 1853, p. 97.

Meanwhile, the sales of the novel had surpassed all expectations. Having sold more than a million copies in Europe and over three hundred thousand copies in the United States within a year of its publication, it was without precedent in the history of book publishing. But the impact of Uncle Tom's Cabin was felt by the non-reading public as well. The hero of the book was versified, set to music, made into dolls, erected into opera, and used as a basis for card games. And although Mrs. Stowe refused permission for her story to be enacted on the stage, it was first dramatized less than a year after her novel was published; since then it has appeared in many different versions. The text of the play, like a ballad, has been handed down verbally with improvisations multitudinous according to the whims of actors, managers, and adapters. Especially popular before and during the Civil War as a "road show" as well as a stage production, Uncle Tom amazed its critics when it became even more successful following the War than during it. While critics were insisting that the play owed its popularity to the anti-slavery movement, that its productions had always been poorly constructed, and that its glory would pass with the freeing of the slaves, it swept the country anew. Critics of the 1860s, the '70s, the '80s, the '90s, and the early decades of the twentieth century similarly predicted that the play was either dead or dying. Despite all predictions, however, the dramatization apparently has not yet been completed. Having been produced in tents and in the finest theaters of the world, its popularity was again renewed when its movie versions appeared early in this century. No other American drama has been so variously and so often presented.

After the initial outburst which saw contemporary newspapers and magazines literally flooded with Uncle Tom material, however, critics

evidently were relatively unconcerned with the novel for the next forty years. The sales records indicated that the book continued to be read, and there was considerable evidence that reactions against it were still strong in the South. Most literary comments about the book during this period were stated in reviews of Mrs. Stowe's later writings, Dred, The Minister's Wooing, and Oldtown Folks, and they, like earlier reviews, were highly complimentary of the novel. James Russell Lowell wrote that the secret of Mrs. Stowe's power lay in "that same genius by which great successes in creative literature have always been achieved."[7] He believed she had imbued a local and temporary theme with the cosmopolitanism of genius. Critics continued to be favorably impressed with Mrs. Stowe's character delineation, and with the humor and pathos she displayed.

On June 14, 1882, a party celebrating Mrs. Stowe's seventieth birthday was given in her honor by her publishers, Houghton, Mifflin and Company. Most of the literati of America were present. Whittier, Holmes, and many other prominent literary personages read poems and made speeches especially prepared for the occasion.

The birthday party apparently was the last noteworthy event in the reputation of the novel before Mrs. Stowe's death in 1896. With her passing, however, came a renewed interest in her masterpiece as literature. Inasmuch as almost fifty years had elapsed since the publication of the novel and the problem with which it dealt had been settled by the Civil War, judges could then be much more objective than before. At this time most critics, although recognizing some of the literary

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[7]Annie Fields, Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe (New York, 1897), p. 249.

blemishes which were to be debated and criticized by twentieth century reviewers, were quite complimentary in their comments about the book as a novel. The pathos, the humor, and the characterization were considered especially meritorious. Every chief personage was said to have followed a consistent development throughout the story. Observing that the characters were often types rather than individuals, reviewers felt that this too was praiseworthy since every character was so perfectly visualized. The lack of unity in the construction of the novel, in which Eliza's story and the adventures of Uncle Tom do not fuse, was defended by critics who argued that the journeys North and South served to describe slavery as a national issue, a significantly devised narrative in which the two major plots were complementary. But in spite of the fact that critics then almost unanimously praised the literary value of the work, they were not unanimous in their predictions of its future place in literary history. Some felt that as an artist Mrs. Stowe had never been equaled; others felt that in view of the favorable conditions offered by the subject and occasion, genius would not be a necessity for a popular book. That it would find its place as a permanent work of literature was then regarded as improbable.

Thus with the turn of the twentieth century, the novel had begun to lose some of the prestige it had commanded in the literary world. Some reviewers still believed that it was assured of immortality, but for the first time those with that opinion were considerably outnumbered. Much more characteristic at this time were reviews which asserted that Uncle Tom's Cabin would not be among the great pieces of literature handed down through posterity, but that it would be remembered only as a social document which greatly affected a particular institution.

Early in this century William Dean Howells first called Uncle Tom's Cabin the only great American novel produced before the Civil War, but he later altered his position to state that he did not consider it to be a novel at all because it addressed the ethical sense more than the aesthetical. He therefore initiated the discussion of the delicate interrelation of aesthetics and ethics which has continued to be one of the major criticisms of Mrs. Stowe's work up to the present day. Perhaps the close personal friendship between Mrs. Stowe and Mark Twain was responsible for his apparently avoiding comment on her masterpiece, but it is fairly certain that he would not have approved her frank and fervent appeal to the conscience. Henry James marveled that the readers of Uncle Tom's Cabin had been literally "hypnotized" by a work which was written without a carefully formulated strategy, evidently without concern for structure or character or many of the other details usually considered necessary for an artistic composition. There was an effect for which there was no apparent cause. But his admiration was for her ability to win readers of all classes, not for her craftsmanship. Thus James, with his characterization of the novel as a "literary leaping fish,"[8] summed up with fine perception the impression of most early nineteenth century critics.

Critics writing during the years between the beginnings of the First and the Second World Wars, 1914-1941, expressed evaluations similar to those of the very earliest years of the century. The primary difference was that there was a new interest in conducting exact

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[8]Henry James, A Small Boy and Others (New York, 1914), p. 160.

studies to determine the truth or falsity of expressed opinions concerning the book, and an increased interest in the novel as a moral agent.

The study of Uncle Tom's Cabin as a moral agent began with references to the strong religious coloring in it, gained momentum as critics cited numerous passages from the story which depicted the detrimental effects of slavery from a moral and religious standpoint, and eventually reached its climax in an article which termed the novel "Sunday School" and "goody goody" literature.[9]

Three separate studies were conducted to determine the justness of accusations which declared that neither in action nor in language were Mrs. Stowe's characters truthful. The first of these, an attempt to ascertain whether she idealized her Negro characters, concluded that Mrs. Stowe's plantation life was congruous with that already presented in literature. The second, an extensive study of her use of the Negro dialect, determined that her recording of Negro speech was so inexact that it might have been spoken by Negroes, whites, or European immigrants. The third study revealed many peculiarities in word choice and idiom used in the novel.

In addition to the relatively new studies already discussed, critics of this period admired the dramatic qualities, the human appeal, the humor and the pathos in Uncle Tom's Cabin; deplored its faulty construction and its hopeless sentimentality; and variously praised and condemned its characterization.

During the last twenty years, more criticism has been leveled against

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[9] E. K. Maxfield, "Goody Goody Literature and Mrs. Stowe," American Speech, IV (1929), 202.

Uncle Tom's Cabin than ever before. Critics agree that it remains a document no one who hopes to understand the springs of American history can afford to neglect, but viewing it from a strictly literary standpoint, they generally regard it as poor art. Throughout this period Mrs. Stowe has been reproved for her doctrinaire method which has caused her novel to be branded as offensively moralistic. Although critics apparently have never reached a definite agreement on whether aesthetics and ethics can co-exist, several judges continue to declare that her morality overwhelms her art. Other charges brought against the novel during these years have been denied by few critics; most agree that the book is sentimental and melodramatic, that the situations are often too conveniently contrived, and that the dialogue needs more differentiation among the characters. The sprawling structure with its changing locale makes breaks in the narrative which Mrs. Stowe spliced with little skill. But critics continue to admire the humor and the pathos of the work, and, as in past years, the characterization is considered poor by some critics and admired by many others. Indeed, some of the characters have left the realm of literature and become a part of American folklore. Simon Legree is a common household term used to signify a hard taskmaster, and Uncle Tom has come to signify, at least in Negro circles, the colored person who fails to demand his rights as an American.[10]

The European reception accorded Uncle Tom's Cabin was without precedent. In England, where more than a million and a half copies were sold within a year, critics almost invariably praised the book with unmitigated enthusiasm. Mrs. Stowe solicited responses from

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[10]Wallace Lee, "Is Uncle Tom's Cabin Anti-Negro?" Negro Digest, January, 1946, p. 68.

prominent English humanitarians to whom she had sent copies of her book. Replies, generally in terms of fervent thankfulness for the book and assured respect for the talents and benevolence of the writer, came from the novelists Dickens, Macaulay, and Kingsley; and from such respected persons as the Prince and Queen of England, Florence Nightingale, and Jenny Lind. Almost simultaneously with the furor in England the book made its way on the Continent. It was translated and circulated in unprecedented numbers in every city, country, and court of Europe. The number of translations has been variously estimated from twenty to forty languages and dialects. In Germany, in France, in Sweden, and in many other European countries, the book was highly successful; in Russia it is still employed as a propaganda piece. With an estimated world circulation of six and one half million copies, Uncle Tom's Cabin probably has been sold and read more than any other book besides the Bible.

The literary rating of the novel has steadily diminished. It is now often regarded as a children's classic; it is also considered by many to be nothing more than an historical landmark. But despite all criticism, evidence indicates that it continues to be read by many mature readers.[11] A part of its contemporary popularity was attributable to historical circumstances. It may be that the novel served as a cathartic to the English who had themselves only recently freed the slaves. The fact that problems of racial discrimination are presently foremost in the minds of many Americans may help to account for continued

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[11] David Dempsey, "Uncle Tom Centenarian," New York Times Magazine, June 3, 1951, p. 35.

interest in it. But none of these explanations reveals why Uncle Tom's Cabin alone, among many slavery stories, has survived. In view of the many evaluations of the novel from the time of its publication to the present, the merits of the book itself seem to be primarily responsible for its survival. Critics of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have admired the humor, the pathos, the characterization, and the suspense of the story. But above all, the novel is said to contain an abundance of the human element, the elusive quality that makes people of all races, situations, and climates interested in the actions and fate of the characters.

Although Uncle Tom's Cabin does not today command the full admiration and praise of professional literary critics, it has demonstrated its power to survive regardless. There can be no doubt that it was the most immediately famous and influential of nineteenth century American novels, and the pattern of its reputation indicates that it will continue to appeal to numerous readers.

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