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## Uncle Tom's Cabin 1852

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*The daughter of famous evangelical preacher Lyman Beecher, Uncle Tom's Cabin author Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896) herself became a national influence with her success as an author, abolitionist, and social commentator. Powerfully critiquing the hypocritical disconnect between America and both its democratic and Christian ideals, Stowe's voice also reflected the values of womanly virtue and motherhood. Though driven by the spirit of millennialism and social benevolence, Stowe came to reject the Calvinism her father preached. The success of Uncle Tom's Cabin indirectly helped put the issue of slavery on the national agenda, both politically and socially. Since the Missouri Compromise, politicians had been successful keeping slavery relatively low on the political radar. Uncle Tom's Cabin heightened the existing tensions between the North and South, so much so, that President Lincoln would later credit Stowe for her role in instigating the Civil War. —Benjamin Reiss*

Bibliography: Joan D. Hedrick, "Harriet Beecher Stowe," in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 906–908.

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### **Chapter 5: Showing the Feelings of Living Property on Changing Owners**

*[After finding out that her husband has agreed to sell two of their slaves, including Tom and a young boy, Mrs. Shelby pleads with him to reconsider. In response, Mr. Shelby explains the details of their predicament.]*

"Why not make a pecuniary sacrifice? I'm willing to bear my part of the inconvenience. O, Mr. Shelby, I have tried—tried most faithfully, as a Christian woman should—to do my duty to these poor, simple, dependent creatures. I have cared for them, instructed them, watched over them, and know all their little cares and joys, for years; and how can I ever hold up my head again among them, if, for the sake of a little paltry gain, we sell such a faithful, excellent, confiding creature as poor Tom, and tear from him in a moment all we have taught him to love and value? I have taught them the duties of the family, of parent and child, and husband and wife; and how can I bear to have this open acknowledgment that we care for no tie, no duty, no relation, however sacred, compared with money? I have talked with Eliza about her boy—her duty to him as a Christian mother, to watch over him, pray for him, and bring him up in a Christian way; and now what can I say, if you tear him away, and sell him, soul and body, to a profane, unprincipled man, just to save a little money? I have told her that one soul is worth more than all the money in the world; and how will she believe me when she sees us turn round and sell her child?—sell him, perhaps, to certain ruin of body and soul!"

"I'm sorry you feel so about it,—indeed I am," said Mr. Shelby; "and I respect your feelings, too, though I don't pretend to share them to their full extent; but I tell you now, solemnly, it's of no use—I can't help myself. I didn't mean to tell you this Emily; but, in plain words, there is no choice between selling these two and selling everything. Either they must go, or all must. Haley has come into possession of a mortgage, which, if I don't clear off with him directly, will take everything before it. I've raked, and scraped, and borrowed, and all but begged,—and the price of these two was needed to make up the balance, and I had to give them up. Haley fancied the child; he agreed to settle the matter that way, and no other. I was in his power, and had to do it. If you feel so to have them sold, would it be any better to have all sold?"

## Chapter 16: Tom's Mistress and Her Opinions

*[Tom's new owners, Marie and Augustine St. Clare, as well as St. Clare's New England cousin Ophelia, are seated at the dinner table. Marie retells the lessons of the morning sermon to her non-churchgoing husband.]*

"O, Dr. G—— preached a splendid sermon," said Marie. "It was just such a sermon as you ought to hear; it expressed all my views exactly."

"It must have been very improving," said St. Clare. "The subject must have been an extensive one."

"Well, I mean all my views about society, and such things," said Marie. "The text was, 'He hath made everything beautiful in its season;' and he showed how all the orders and distinctions in society came from God; and that it was so appropriate, you know, and beautiful, that some should be high and some low, and that some were born to rule and some to serve, and all that, you know; and he applied it so well to all this ridiculous fuss that is made about slavery, and he proved distinctly that the Bible was on our side, and supported all our institutions so convincingly. I only wish you'd heard him."

"O, I didn't need it," said St. Clare. "I can learn what does me as much good as that from the Picayune, any time, and smoke a cigar besides; which I can't do, you know, in a church."

"Why," said Miss Ophelia, "don't you believe in these views?"

"Who,—I? You know I'm such a graceless dog that these religious aspects of such subjects don't edify me much. If I was to say anything on this slavery matter, I would say out, fair and square, 'We're in for it; we've got 'em, and mean to keep 'em,—it's for our convenience and our interest;' for that's the long and short of it,—that's just the whole of what all this sanctified stuff amounts to, after all; and I think that it will be intelligible to everybody, everywhere."

"I do think, Augustine, you are so irreverent!" said Marie.

"I think it's shocking to hear you talk."

"Shocking! it's the truth. This religious talk on such matters,—why don't they carry it a little further, and show the beauty, in its season, of a fellow's taking a glass too much, and sitting a little too late over his cards, and various providential arrangements of that sort, which are pretty frequent among us young men;—we'd like to hear that those are right and godly, too."

"Well," said Miss Ophelia, "do you think slavery right or wrong?"

"I'm not going to have any of your horrid New England directness, cousin," said St. Clare, gayly. "If I answer that question, I know you'll be at me with half a dozen others, each one harder than the last; and I'm not a going to define my position. I am one of the sort that lives by throwing stones at other people's glass houses, but I never mean to put up one for them to stone."

"That's just the way he's always talking," said Marie; "you can't get any satisfaction out of him. I believe it's just because he don't like religion, that he's always running out in this way he's been doing."

“Religion!” said St. Clare, in a tone that made both ladies look at him. “Religion! Is what you hear at church, religion? Is that which can bend and turn, and descend and ascend, to fit every crooked phase of selfish, worldly society, religion? Is that religion which is less scrupulous, less generous, less just, less considerate for man, than even my own ungodly, worldly, blinded nature? No! When I look for a religion, I must look for something above me, and not something beneath.”

“Then you don’t believe that the Bible justifies slavery,” said Miss Ophelia.

“The Bible was my mother’s book,” said St. Clare. “By it she lived and died, and I would be very sorry to think it did. I’d as soon desire to have it proved that my mother could drink brandy, chew tobacco, and swear, by way of satisfying me that I did right in doing the same. It wouldn’t make me at all more satisfied with these things in myself, and it would take from me the comfort of respecting her; and it really is a comfort, in this world, to have anything one can respect. In short, you see,” said he, suddenly resuming his gay tone, “all I want is that different things be kept in different boxes. The whole frame-work of society, both in Europe and America, is made up of various things which will not stand the scrutiny of any very ideal standard of morality. It’s pretty generally understood that men don’t aspire after the absolute right, but only to do about as well as the rest of the world. Now, when any one speaks up, like a man, and says slavery is necessary to us, we can’t get along without it, we should be beggared if we give it up, and, of course, we mean to hold on to it,—this is strong, clear, well-defined language; it has the respectability of truth to it; and, if we may judge by their practice, the majority of the world will bear us out in it. But when he begins to put on a long face, and snuffle, and quote Scripture, I incline to think he isn’t much better than he should be.”

“You are very uncharitable,” said Marie.

“Well,” said St. Clare, “suppose that something should bring down the price of cotton once and forever, and make the whole slave property a drug in the market, don’t you think we should soon have another version of the Scripture doctrine? What a flood of light would pour into the church, all at once, and how immediately it would be discovered that everything in the Bible and reason went the other way!”

“Well, at any rate,” said Marie, as she reclined herself on a lounge, “I’m thankful I’m born where slavery exists; and I believe it’s right,—indeed, I feel it must be; and, at any rate, I’m sure I couldn’t get along without it.”

### **Chapter 19: Miss Ophelia’s Experiences and Opinions (Continued)**

*[St. Clare explains to Ophelia that he does not mean to defend slavery. In his critique, St. Clare’s comments explore other issues surrounding slavery such as paternalism, free labor, and moral righteousness.]*

“Wait,—I’m coming on,—you’ll hear. The short of the matter is, cousin,” said he, his handsome face suddenly settling into an earnest and serious expression, “on this abstract question of slavery there can, as I think, be but one opinion. Planters, who have money to make by it,—clergymen, who have planters to please,—politicians, who want to rule by it,—may warp and bend language and ethics to a degree that shall astonish the world at their ingenuity; they can press nature and

the Bible, and nobody knows what else, into the service; but, after all, neither they nor the world believe in it one particle the more. It comes from the devil, that's the short of it;—and, to my mind, it's a pretty respectable specimen of what he can do in his own line.”

Miss Ophelia stopped her knitting, and looked surprised; and St. Clare, apparently enjoying her astonishment, went on.

“You seem to wonder; but if you will get me fairly at it, I'll make a clean breast of it. This cursed business, accursed of God and man, what is it? Strip it of all its ornament, run it down to the root and nucleus of the whole, and what is it? Why, because my brother Quashy is ignorant and weak, and I am intelligent and strong,—because I know how, and can do it,—therefore, I may steal all he has, keep it, and give him only such and so much as suits my fancy. Whatever is too hard, too dirty, too disagreeable, for me, I may set Quashy to doing. Because I don't like work, Quashy shall work. Because the sun burns me, Quashy shall stay in the sun. Quashy shall earn the money, and I will spend it. Quashy shall lie down in every puddle, that I may walk over dry-shod. Quashy shall do my will, and not his, all the days of his mortal life, and have such chance of getting to heaven, at last, as I find convenient. This I take to be about what slavery is. I defy anybody on earth to read our slave-code, as it stands in our law-books, and make anything else of it. Talk of the abuses of slavery! Humbug! The thing itself is the essence of all abuse! And the only reason why the land don't sink under it, like Sodom and Gomorrah, is because it is used in a way infinitely better than it is. For pity's sake, for shame's sake, because we are men born of women, and not savage beasts, many of us do not, and dare not,—we would scorn to use the full power which our savage laws put into our hands. And he who goes the furthest, and does the worst, only uses within limits the power that the law gives him.”

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“O, yes, to be sure, the question is,—and a deuce of a question it is! How came you in this state of sin and misery? Well, I shall answer in the good old words you used to teach me, Sundays. I came so by ordinary generation. My servants were my father's, and, what is more, my mother's; and now they are mine, they and their increase, which bids fair to be a pretty considerable item. My father, you know, came first from New England; and he was just such another man as your father,—a regular old Roman,—upright, energetic, noble-minded, with an iron will. Your father settled down in New England, to rule over rocks and stones, and to force an existence out of Nature; and mine settled in Louisiana, to rule over men and women, and force existence out of them...”

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“Now, an aristocrat, you know, the world over, has no human sympathies, beyond a certain line in society. In England the line is in one place, in Burmah in another, and in America in another; but the aristocrat of all these countries never goes over it. What would be hardship and distress and injustice in his own class, is a cool matter of course in another one. My father's dividing line was that of color. Among his equals, never was a man more just and generous; but he considered the negro, through all possible gradations of color, as an intermediate link between man and animals, and graded all his ideas of justice or generosity on this hypothesis. I suppose, to be sure, if anybody had asked him, plump and fair, whether they had human immortal souls, he might have hemmed and hawed, and said yes. But my father was not a man much troubled with spiritualism; religious sentiment he had none, beyond a veneration for God, as decidedly the head of the upper classes.”

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“What poor, mean trash this whole business of human virtue is! A mere matter, for the most part, of latitude and longitude, and geographical position, acting with natural temperament. The greater part is nothing but an accident! Your father, for example, settles in Vermont, in a town where all are, in fact, free and equal; becomes a regular church member and deacon, and in due time joins an Abolition society, and thinks us all little better than heathens. Yet he is, for all the world, in constitution and habit, a duplicate of my father. I can see it leaking out in fifty different ways,—just the same strong, overbearing, dominant spirit. You know very well how impossible it is to persuade some of the folks in your village that Squire Sinclair does not feel above them. The fact is, though he has fallen on democratic times, and embraced a democratic theory, he is to the heart an aristocrat, as much as my father, who ruled over five or six hundred slaves.”

Miss Ophelia felt rather disposed to cavil at this picture, and was laying down her knitting to begin, but St. Clare stopped her.

“Now, I know every word you are going to say. I do not say they were alike, in fact. One fell into a condition where everything acted against the natural tendency, and the other where everything acted for it; and so one turned out a pretty wilful, stout, overbearing old democrat, and the other a wilful, stout old despot. If both had owned plantations in Louisiana, they would have been as like as two old bullets cast in the same mould.”

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“It’s all nonsense to talk to me about slaves enjoying all this! To this day, I have no patience with the unutterable trash that some of your patronizing Northerners have made up, as in their zeal to apologize for our sins. We all know better. Tell me that any man living wants to work all his days, from day-dawn till dark, under the constant eye of a master, without the power of putting forth one irresponsible volition, on the same dreary, monotonous, unchanging toil, and all for two pairs of pantaloons and a pair of shoes a year, with enough food and shelter to keep him in working order! Any man who thinks that human beings can, as a general thing, be made about as comfortable that way as any other, I wish he might try it. I’d buy the dog, and work him, with a clear conscience!”

“I always have supposed,” said Miss Ophelia, “that you, all of you, approved of these things, and thought them right according to Scripture.”

“Humbug! We are not quite reduced to that yet. Alfred who is as determined a despot as ever walked, does not pretend to this kind of defence;—no, he stands, high and haughty, on that good old respectable ground, the right of the strongest; and he says, and I think quite sensibly, that the American planter is ‘only doing, in another form, what the English aristocracy and capitalists are doing by the lower classes;’ that is, I take it, appropriating them, body and bone, soul and spirit, to their use and convenience. He defends both,—and I think, at least, consistently. He says that there can be no high civilization without enslavement of the masses, either nominal or real. There must, he says, be a lower class, given up to physical toil and confined to an animal nature; and a higher one thereby acquires leisure and wealth for a more expanded intelligence and improvement, and becomes the directing soul of the lower. So he reasons, because, as I said, he is born an aristocrat;—so I don’t believe, because I was born a democrat.”

“How in the world can the two things be compared?” said Miss Ophelia. “The English laborer is not sold, traded, parted from his family, whipped.”

“He is as much at the will of his employer as if he were sold to him. The slave-owner can whip his refractory slave to death,—the capitalist can starve him to death. As to family security, it is hard to say which is the worst,—to have one’s children sold, or see them starve to death at home.”

“But it’s no kind of apology for slavery, to prove that it isn’t worse than some other bad thing.”

“I didn’t give it for one,—nay, I’ll say, besides, that ours is the more bold and palpable infringement of human rights; actually buying a man up, like a horse,—looking at his teeth, cracking his joints, and trying his paces and then paying down for him,—having speculators, breeders, traders, and brokers in human bodies and souls,—sets the thing before the eyes of the civilized world in a more tangible form, though the thing done be, after all, in its nature, the same; that is, appropriating one set of human beings to the use and improvement of another without any regard to their own.”

“I never thought of the matter in this light,” said Miss Ophelia.

“Well, I’ve traveled in England some, and I’ve looked over a good many documents as to the state of their lower classes; and I really think there is no denying Alfred, when he says that his slaves are better off than a large class of the population of England. You see, you must not infer, from what I have told you, that Alfred is what is called a hard master; for he isn’t. He is despotic, and unmerciful to insubordination; he would shoot a fellow down with as little remorse as he would shoot a buck, if he opposed him. But, in general, he takes a sort of pride in having his slaves comfortably fed and accommodated.

“When I was with him, I insisted that he should do something for their instruction; and, to please me, he did get a chaplain, and used to have them catechized Sunday, though, I believe, in his heart, that he thought it would do about as much good to set a chaplain over his dogs and horses. And the fact is, that a mind stupefied and animalized by every bad influence from the hour of birth, spending the whole of every week-day in unreflecting toil, cannot be done much with by a few hours on Sunday. The teachers of Sunday-schools among the manufacturing population of England, and among plantation-hands in our country, could perhaps testify to the same result, there and here. Yet some striking exceptions there are among us, from the fact that the negro is naturally more impressible to religious sentiment than the white.”

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“But, then, to come back to this point,—we were on this liberation business. I don’t think my feelings about slavery are peculiar. I find many men who, in their hearts, think of it just as I do. The land groans under it; and, bad as it is for the slave, it is worse, if anything, for the master. It takes no spectacles to see that a great class of vicious, improvident, degraded people, among us, are an evil to us, as well as to themselves. The capitalist and aristocrat of England cannot feel that as we do, because they do not mingle with the class they degrade as we do. They are in our homes; they are the associates of our children, and they form their minds faster than we can; for they are a race that children always will cling to and assimilate with. If Eva, now, was not more angel than ordinary, she would be ruined. We might as well allow the small-pox to run among

them, and think our children would not take it, as to let them be uninstructed and vicious, and think our children will not be affected by that. Yet our laws positively and utterly forbid any efficient general educational system, and they do it wisely, too; for, just begin and thoroughly educate one generation, and the whole thing would be blown sky high. If we did not give them liberty, they would take it.”

“And what do you think will be the end of this?” said Miss Ophelia.

“I don’t know. One thing is certain,—that there is a mustering among the masses, the world over; and there is a *dies irae* [“day of wrath”] coming on, sooner or later. The same thing is working in Europe, in England, and in this country. My mother used to tell me of a millennium that was coming, when Christ should reign, and all men should be free and happy. And she taught me, when I was a boy, to pray, ‘thy kingdom come.’ Sometimes I think all this sighing, and groaning, and stirring among the dry bones foretells what she used to tell me was coming. But who may abide the day of His appearing?”

#### **Chapter 40: The Martyr**

*[Tom’s vicious third master, Simon Legree, questions Tom’s knowledge of the whereabouts of two fugitive slaves. Tom’s choices are between saving his self by speaking-up, or facing harsh punishment by remaining silent.]*

“Now, Quimbo,” said Legree, as he stretched himself down in the sitting-room, “you jest go and walk that Tom up here, right away! The old cuss is at the bottom of this yer whole matter; and I’ll have it out of his old black hide, or I’ll know the reason why!”

Sambo and Quimbo, both, though hating each other, were joined in one mind by a no less cordial hatred of Tom. Legree had told them, at first, that he had bought him for a general overseer, in his absence; and this had begun an ill will, on their part, which had increased, in their debased and servile natures, as they saw him becoming obnoxious to their master’s displeasure. Quimbo, therefore, departed, with a will to execute his orders.

Tom heard the message with a forewarning heart; for he knew all the plan of the fugitives’ escape, and the place of their present concealment;—he knew the deadly character of the man he had to deal with, and his despotic power. But he felt strong in God to meet death, rather than betray the helpless.

He sat his basket down by the row, and, looking up, said, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit! Thou hast redeemed me, oh Lord God of truth!” and then quietly yielded himself to the rough, brutal grasp with which Quimbo seized him.

“Ay, ay!” said the giant, as he dragged him along; ye’ll cotch it, now! I’ll boun’ Mas’r’s back ‘s up high! No sneaking out, now! Tell ye, ye’ll get it, and no mistake! See how ye’ll look, now, helpin’ Mas’r’s niggers to run away! See what ye’ll get!”

The savage words none of them reached that ear!—a higher voice there was saying, “Fear not them that kill the body, and, after that, have no more that they can do.” Nerve and bone of that poor man’s body vibrated to those words, as if touched by the finger of God; and he felt the strength of a thousand souls in one. As he passed along, the trees and bushes, the huts of his

servitude, the whole scene of his degradation, seemed to whirl by him as the landscape by the rushing ear. His soul throbbed,—his home was in sight,—and the hour of release seemed at hand.

“Well, Tom!” said Legree, walking up, and seizing him grimly by the collar of his coat, and speaking through his teeth, in a paroxysm of determined rage, “do you know I’ve made up my mind to KILL YOU?”

“It’s very likely, Mas’r,” said Tom, calmly.

“I have,” said Legree, with a grim, terrible calmness, “done—just—that—thing, Tom, unless you’ll tell me what you know about these yer gals!” . . .

“I han’t got nothing to tell, Mas’r,” said Tom, with a slow, firm, deliberate utterance.

“Do you dare to tell me, ye old black Christian, ye don’t know?” said Legree. Tom was silent.

“Speak!” thundered Legree, striking him furiously. Do you know anything?”

“I know, Mas’r; but I can’t tell anything. I can die!”

Legree drew in a long breath; and, suppressing his rage, took Tom by the arm, and, approaching his face almost to his, said, in a terrible voice, “Hark ‘e, Tom!—ye think, ‘cause I’ve let you off before, I don’t mean what I say; but, this time, I’ve made up my mind, and counted the cost. You’ve always stood it out again’ me: now, I’ll conquer ye, or kill ye!—one or t’ other. I’ll count every drop of blood there is in you, and take ‘em, one by one, till ye give up!”

Tom looked up to his master, and answered, “Mas’r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I’d give ye my heart’s blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I’d give ‘em freely, as the Lord gave his for me. O, Mas’r! don’t bring this great sin on your soul! It will hurt you more than ‘twill me! Do the worst you can, my troubles’ll be over soon; but, if ye don’t repent, yours won’t never end!”

Like a strange snatch of heavenly music, heard in the lull of a tempest, this burst of feeling made a moment’s blank pause. Legree stood aghast, and looked at Tom; and there was such a silence, that the tick of the old clock could be heard, measuring, with silent touch, the last moments of mercy and probation to that hardened heart.

It was but a moment. There was one hesitating pause,—one irresolute, relenting thrill,—and the spirit of evil came back, with seven-fold vehemence; and Legree, foaming with rage, smote his victim to the ground.

Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear. What brother-man and brother-Christian must suffer, cannot be told us, even in our secret chamber, it so harrows the soul! And yet, oh my country; these things are done under the shadow of thy laws! O, Christ! thy church sees them, almost in silence!

But, of old, there was One whose suffering changed an instrument of torture, degradation and shame, into a symbol of glory, honor, and immortal life; and, where His spirit is, neither degrading stripes, nor blood, nor insults, can make the Christian's last struggle less than glorious.

Was he alone, that long night, whose brave, loving spirit was bearing up, in that old shed, against buffeting and brutal stripes?

Nay! There stood by him ONE,—seen by him alone,—“like unto the Son of God.”

The tempter stood by him, too,—blinded by furious, despotic will,—every moment pressing him to shun that agony by the betrayal of the innocent. But the brave, true heart was firm on the Eternal Rock. Like his Master, he knew that, if he saved others, himself he could not save; nor could utmost extremity wring from him words, save of prayers and holy trust.

“He’s most gone, Mas’r,” said Sambo, touched, in spite of himself, by the patience of his victim.

“Pay away, till he gives up! Give it to him!—give it to him!” shouted Legree. “I’ll take every drop of blood he has, unless he confesses!”

Tom opened his eyes, and looked upon his master. “Ye poor miserable critter!” he said, “there ain’t no more ye can do! I forgive ye, with all my soul!” and he fainted entirely away.

“I b’lieve, my soul, he’s done for, finally,” said Legree, stepping forward, to look at him. “Yes, he is! Well, his mouth’s shut up, at last,—that’s one comfort!”

Yes, Legree; but who shall shut up that voice in thy soul? that soul, past repentance, past prayer, past hope, in whom the fire that never shall be quenched is already burning!

Yet Tom was not quite gone. His wondrous words and pious prayers had struck upon the hearts of the imbruted blacks, who had been the instruments of cruelty upon him; and, the instant Legree withdrew, they took him down, and, in their ignorance, sought to call him back to life,—as if that were any favor to him.

“Sartin, we ‘s been doin’ a drefful wicked thing!” said Sambo; “hopes Mas’r’ll have to ‘count for it, and not we.”

They washed his wounds,—they provided a rude bed, of some refuse cotton, for him to lie down on; and one of them, stealing up to the house, begged a drink of brandy of Legree, pretending that he was tired, and wanted it for himself. He brought it back, and poured it down Tom’s throat.

“O, Tom!” said Quimbo, “we’s been awful wicked to ye!”

“I forgive ye, with all my heart!” said Tom, faintly.

“O, Tom! do tell us who is Jesus, anyhow?” said Sambo;—“Jesus, that’s been a standin’ by you so, all this night!—Who is he?”

The word roused the failing, fainting spirit. He poured forth a few energetic sentences of that wondrous One,—his life, his death, his everlasting presence, and power to save.

They wept,—both the two savage men.

“Why didn’t I never hear this before?” said Sambo; “but I do believe!—I can’t help it! Lord Jesus, have mercy on us!”

“Poor critters!” said Tom, “I’d be willing to bar’ all I have, if it’ll only bring ye to Christ! O, Lord! give me these two more souls, I pray!”

That prayer was answered!

### **Chapter 45: Concluding Remarks**

*[Stowe’s concluding remarks give insight into her motivation for writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Appealing to Christianity and family values, Stowe plead for both Northern and Southern readers to recognize their own duties to bring about the abolition of slavery.]*

For many years of her life, the author avoided all reading upon or allusion to the subject of slavery, considering it as too painful to be inquired into, and one which advancing light and civilization would certainly live down. But, since the legislative act of 1850, when she heard, with perfect surprise and consternation, Christian and humane people actually recommending the remanding escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizens,—when she heard, on all hands, from kind, compassionate and estimable people, in the free states of the North, deliberations and discussions as to what Christian duty could be on this head,—she could only think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a living dramatic reality. She has endeavored to show it fairly, in its best and its worst phases. In its best aspect, she has, perhaps, been successful; but, oh! Who shall say what yet remains untold in that valley and shadow of death, that lies the other side?

To you, generous, noble-minded men and women, of the South,—you, whose virtue, and magnanimity and purity of character, are the greater for the severer trial it has encountered,—to you is her appeal. Have you not, in your own secret souls, in your own private conversings, felt that there are woes and evils, in this accursed system, far beyond what are here shadowed, or can be shadowed? Can it be otherwise? Is man ever a creature to be trusted with wholly irresponsible power? And does not the slave system, by denying the slave all legal right of testimony, make every individual owner an irresponsible despot? Can anybody fail to make the inference what the practical result will be? If there is, as we admit, a public sentiment among you, men of honor, justice and humanity, is there not also another kind of public sentiment among the ruffian, the brutal and debased? And cannot the ruffian, the brutal, the debased, by slave law, own just as many slaves as the best and purest? Are the honorable, the just, the high-minded and compassionate, the majority anywhere in this world?

The slave-trade is now, by American law, considered as piracy. But a slave-trade, as systematic as ever was carried on on the coast of Africa, is an inevitable attendant and result of American slavery. And its heart-break and its horrors, can they be told?

The writer has given only a faint shadow, a dim picture, of the anguish and despair that are, at this very moment, riving thousands of hearts, shattering thousands of families, and driving a helpless and sensitive race to frenzy and despair. There are those living who know the mothers whom this accursed traffic has driven to the murder of their children; and themselves seeking in death a shelter from woes more dreaded than death. Nothing of tragedy can be written, can be spoken, can be conceived, that equals the frightful reality of scenes daily and hourly acting on our shores, beneath the shadow of American law, and the shadow of the cross of Christ.

And now, men and women of America, is this a thing to be trifled with, apologized for, and passed over in silence? Farmers of Massachusetts, of New Hampshire, of Vermont, of Connecticut, who read this book by the blaze of your winter-evening fire,—strong-hearted, generous sailors and ship-owners of Maine,—is this a thing for you to countenance and encourage? Brave and generous men of New York, farmers of rich and joyous Ohio, and ye of the wide prairie states,—answer, is this a thing for you to protect and countenance? And you, mothers of America,—you who have learned, by the cradles of your own children, to love and feel for all mankind,—by the sacred love you bear your child; by your joy in his beautiful, spotless infancy; by the motherly pity and tenderness with which you guide his growing years; by the anxieties of his education; by the prayers you breathe for his soul's eternal good;—I beseech you, pity the mother who has all your affections, and not one legal right to protect, guide, or educate, the child of her bosom! By the sick hour of your child; by those dying eyes, which you can never forget; by those last cries, that wrung your heart when you could neither help nor save; by the desolation of that empty cradle, that silent nursery,—I beseech you, pity those mothers that are constantly made childless by the American slave-trade! And say, mothers of America, is this a thing to be defended, sympathized with, passed over in silence?

Do you say that the people of the free state have nothing to do with it, and can do nothing? Would to God this were true! But it is not true. The people of the free states have defended, encouraged, and participated; and are more guilty for it, before God, than the South, in that they have not the apology of education or custom.

If the mothers of the free states had all felt as they should, in times past, the sons of the free states would not have been the holders, and, proverbially, the hardest masters of slaves; the sons of the free states would not have connived at the extension of slavery, in our national body; the sons of the free states would not, as they do, trade the souls and bodies of men as an equivalent to money, in their mercantile dealings. There are multitudes of slaves temporarily owned, and sold again, by merchants in northern cities; and shall the whole guilt or obloquy of slavery fall only on the South?

Northern men, northern mothers, northern Christians, have something more to do than denounce their brethren at the South; they have to look to the evil among themselves.

But, what can any individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do,—they can see to it that they feel right. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race. See, then, to your sympathies in this matter! Are they in harmony with the sympathies of Christ? or are they swayed and perverted by the sophistries of worldly policy?

Christian men and women of the North! still further,—you have another power; you can pray! Do you believe in prayer? or has it become an indistinct apostolic tradition? You pray for the heathen abroad; pray also for the heathen at home. And pray for those distressed Christians whose whole chance of religious improvement is an accident of trade and sale; from whom any adherence to the morals of Christianity is, in many cases, an impossibility, unless they have given them, from above, the courage and grace of martyrdom.

But, still more. On the shores of our free states are emerging the poor, shattered, broken remnants of families,—men and women, escaped, by miraculous providences from the surges of slavery,—feeble in knowledge, and, in many cases, infirm in moral constitution, from a system which confounds and confuses every principle of Christianity and morality. They come to seek a refuge among you; they come to seek education, knowledge, Christianity.

What do you owe to these poor unfortunates, oh Christians? Does not every American Christian owe to the African race some effort at reparation for the wrongs that the American nation has brought upon them? Shall the doors of churches and school-houses be shut upon them? Shall states arise and shake them out? Shall the church of Christ hear in silence the taunt that is thrown at them, and shrink away from the helpless hand that they stretch out; and, by her silence, encourage the cruelty that would chase them from our borders? If it must be so, it will be a mournful spectacle. If it must be so, the country will have reason to tremble, when it remembers that the fate of nations is in the hands of One who is very pitiful, and of tender compassion.

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### Discussion Questions:

1. What are Stowe's arguments against slavery?
2. In what ways does Stowe use Christianity in the novel?
3. What does St. Clare's explanation of slavery reveal about it?
4. How does Stowe illustrate the competing claims of reason and emotion in the debate over slavery?

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SOURCE: Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin Or Life Among The Lowly* (1852).

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