...The enthusiastic reception of Mrs. Stowe's novel is the result of various causes. One is the merit of the book itself. It is, unquestionably, a work of genius. It has defects of conception and style, exhibits a want 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 in every page. It has the capital excellence of exciting the interest of the reader; this never stops or falters from the beginning to the end.

But whatever may be the literary merits of Uncle Tom, they do not account for its success. It exhibits by no means the highest order of genius or skill. It is not to be named in comparison with the novels of Scott or Dickens; and in regard to variety of knowledge, eloquence, imaginative power, and spirited delineations of life and character, manners and events, it is inferior even to those of Bulwer, or Currier Bell, or Hawthorne. Yet none of these have been read and talked of, for months together, by Europe and America, or have sensibly influenced a great moral movement, or have disturbed whole communities by the dread of a social revolution. It is true, that, were Uncle Tom not well written, it would not have produced these effects; but the result is so disproportioned to its merit as a work of art, that we must look to other causes. The book has one idea and purpose to which it is wholly devoted. Its sole object is to reveal to the world the nature of American slavery, and thus to promote the cause of abolition....

Another cause of the wide-spread popularity of Uncle Tom is its foundation in truth. It is a highly-colored description of a reality. This is undeniable by any one who can reflect on what must be the consequences of absolute and irresponsible power, bestowed without reference to character. Here is the real source of the power of the work. Were it a mere fanciful picture of ideal scenes, it would have already taken the place of other falsehoods, and been forgotten; for it does not pretend to be a work of mere imagination, and if it did, it wants the creative power, the touches of genius, that could give it life as such. If it be not founded on truth, it is nothing. It has been accused of exaggeration, and it is said that the imputed atrocities are exceptions to ordinary usage. But the charge of exaggeration admits the substance, and to acknowledge the exceptions yields nearly the whole case; for the favorable view of Southern life is given by Mrs. Stowe as well as the unfavorable, and she does not say or imply that brutal violence and cruelty are either universal or general....

It is true, that, in some of the Southern States, particularly in Louisiana, there are laws providing for the protection of the slave from excessive cruelty, and for his proper treatment in regard to food, clothing, and labor. But they are so vague and general, encumbered with so many conditions, so easily evaded, and so very lenient to the master, that it is obvious they are totally inadequate for the end in view. In no case can a slave be a party to a suit, but must find a white man willing to act for him; and in those cases most requiring the intervention of the law, the oath of the master, denying the charge, is a sufficient defence. There is also one general principle pervading the whole law of the South, that no negro can be a competent witness against a white man, which, so long as it is maintained, must render all laws, intended for the defence and benefit of the negro race, nearly nugatory....

It may, with much truth, be urged, by way of extenuation and apology, that the system, on the whole, works well, as is proved by the rapid increase and general condition of the negroes in the South; that cruelty is rebuked by public opinion; that the large planters, the wealthy and educated, own the great majority of the slaves; that with these, as also with many others, they are for the most part well-fed, clothed, and kindly treated; that in some cases there is a certain proportion of miserable, ill-used, overworked negroes; but that in every community, violence, brutality, and ignorance exist, which produce, as a necessary consequence, much human suffering; that the statistics and police reports in the North show the existence of wretchedness from extreme want, and a constant succession of riots, brutal assaults, and horrible murders; but that it would be unfair thence to infer a general state of moral degradation, or to ascribe the presence of these evils to the institutions and domestic relations of Northern society.

To this reasoning there is a conclusive reply. It is true that, in the Northern States, cases of violence and outrage are of frequent occurrence. But they are crimes; they are against the law, not permitted and sanctioned by it....

The South is a valuable portion of our country. Its extent of fertile territory, its staple productions, the cultivation, refinement, and noble traits of a large portion of its people, add vastly to the power and wealth of the republic. Its rice, sugar, and tobacco increase the accommodation and luxury of mankind. Its cotton crop alone is a vital element in the industry and commerce of the world, and has become essential to the comfort of all classes in all civilized nations. The prosperity of the South advances the prosperity of the whole country; union with the South is essential to the safety, liberty, and happiness of the whole country; disunion can produce nothing but anarchy, bloodshed, and ruin. Can no way be found to reconcile interests so vast with the dictates of humanity and justice?....

The wealth and greatness of the South are the result of the labor of about 4,000,000 of negroes directed by the superior intelligence of the whites. These 4,000,000 of negroes are, as a race, not inferior in mental and moral forces to the white race with whom they live. This inferiority is proved by their condition here and everywhere. Being the result of organization, it is a permanent inferiority. The negro is improvable to a certain point by contact with the civilized white, but only to a certain point. When that contact ceases, he relapses speedily into barbarism.

It is a law of nature, that the intellectually strong shall govern the weak; in other words, that the weak shall serve and obey the strong. As the white race is the permanently strong, and the negro race the permanently weak, it follows that so long as the two races live together, the negro must be the servant of the white.

But the negro, though inferior to the white, is still a man. He has intelligence, passions, moral sentiments, affections. He is capable of happiness and misery, of other pains and pleasures than those of the body. The laws of nature are all beneficent. If superior strength implies government, government implies duty and responsibility. The duty of the governing party is care, guidance, and protection, and it is responsible for the well-being of the party governed....

If these principles be correct, it follows, that the negroes in the South are naturally and permanently the servants of the white race; that it is the duty of Southern legislatures to provide for their proper treatment, and to protect them from violence and outrage. The masters must be required to perform the duty of masters; so far as the law can compel, they must be compelled to exercise justice and humanity, kindness and care. It follows, also, that these same legislatures are responsible for the happiness of these 4,000,000 of toiling human beings; that in withdrawing from them the protection of law, in declaring that they do not and will not regard their welfare, but simply the profit of their owners, and thus delivering them up helpless victims to occasional brutality and vice, they have failed to perform a solemn duty.

These 4,000,000 of negroes, with their humble capacities for enjoyment and improvement, are worthy and meritorious objects for the attention and care of a wise and humane government. They are here. To send them away is impossible; to emancipate them, equally so. It would destroy great interests, it would endanger the peace of society, it would be disastrous to themselves. Ignorant, improvident, without self-sustaining energy of character, and of limited intellectual faculties, they are incapable of providing for their own support or caring for their own interests. Freedom to them would be like freedom to children, or to the domestic animals. It would be helplessness, abandonment, the absence of guidance and protection. Thus deserted, indolent, voice, and poverty would speedily degrade them below even their present condition, and they would gradually dwindle away and disappear, as they are disappearing in the North, where they are left to themselves to struggle with difficulties too
great for their strength, difficulties arising from climate and social circumstances which do not exist in the original seat of their race, and which therefore they are not fitted, by nature, to encounter.

The enormities of the law of the South, as it exists in the statutes and judicial decisions of the several States, arise from one great principle upon which the whole system is founded—that a slave is property.

This is an error. A slave is not, and cannot be, property. Such an idea is equally inconsistent with the nature of property and the nature of slavery: and it is because the institution has been thus founded on an untruth, that so much evil has flowed from it; for error is the source of all evil, and evil continually.

A slave is not property, because he is a man. A man cannot be the subject of property, though his labor may. He is not a thing. Even in the lowest forms of humanity, he has intellect, passions, sentiments, conscience, which establish his brotherhood with all men, which establish the theoretic equality of man as man, and separate him from the lower animals and material things. To man, to the race of men, the earth was given as an inheritance. Whatever he can make, or modify, or add value to, is property. But man was not given to man to possess. He is not a product of industry, but himself a producer.

The argument that inferiority of race confers the right of property is an obvious fallacy. What degree of inferiority confers it? The Indians are an inferior race. Are they property? The Irish Celt is inferior to the Anglo-Saxon. Is he property? What would be thought of any State that should declare him a chattel? Is the negro the only race who can be the subject of property? With his capacity for improvement, his courage, his warm feelings, is he so low in the scale of being that he cannot be recognized as a man, but must be regarded as one of the lower animals? If so, why are there free negroes?

...Slavery is necessary to the repose, prosperity, and safety of the white race in the South, because of the numbers and degraded condition of the negroes; it is also essential to the well-being of the negro, because of his incapacity to govern and take care of himself, and because experience shows that he is by nature fitted for this relation, and that he thrives and is happy in it. Slavery, therefore, exists rightfully in the South. No rights of the negro are violated when he is made a slave. His right, like that of all men, is to be governed for his own benefit. Some even go so far as to maintain that a social relation, founded on the same principles, and modified to suit different circumstances, a relation more strict than that of master and apprentice, and less severe and permanent than that of slavery, might, with equal justice and much advantage, be introduced into some of the Northern States, in relation not only to negroes, but to the swarms of emigrants who crowd our shores, many of them equally degraded by ignorance, poverty, and vice, and equally needing care, guidance, and government.

The governments of the Southern States, then, commit no wrong when they keep the negro in slavery; but they do commit a wrong, and violate the truth of things, when they declare that he is property. The consequences that flow from this distinction are most important, and show the imperative necessity of founding all institutions and all reasoning on the eternal principles of moral truth.

Mrs. Stowe has also, in her novel, unconsciously and unintentionally, done the South a service, by showing very clearly three things of great importance.

First, that the general condition of the slaves, notwithstanding many exceptions, is a happy one, well suited to their nature. The Shelbys may be regarded as a fair picture of the majority of masters, because they are a fair specimen of the majority of families of respectability and easy fortune everywhere. With such masters and such treatment, the negro is as well placed as he can be. He has kindness and care, government and guidance, but is exempt from the miseries of poverty, idleness, and vice. His position is better than that of most of the free negroes in the North, of the peasantry of many parts of Europe, and infinitely better, in all respects, mental, moral, and material, than that of his brethren in Africa. A similar description of the condition of the slaves on a well-ordered estate is contained in the letter of a gentleman in Virginia, at page 8 of the Key.

Secondly, the book shows that while the benefits of slavery may be increased and extended, its evils are capable of being remedied by wise and just legislation. These evils arise chiefly from the cruelty of brutal masters; from the separation of families by judicial and other sales; and from the defenceless condition of the slave with reference to others than his master.

Thirdly, no one can read Uncle Tom without the irresistible conviction, that the Southern people alone can deal with this subject. Slavery, as this work shows, is so interwoven with all the relations, interests, and habits of their lives, that they only, who are thus in contact with it, can properly understand and manage it. It is no light task; and we believe that this novel, though written in no friendly spirit—written, indeed, with much of the bitterness of fanaticism—will have a happy influence in convincing the liberal and enlightened among the Southern people of the necessity for reform, and of stimulating them to the work.

Much has been said of the evils of slavery; and it is a remark that passes current with most persons, that it is a social and political curse. It would be more correct to say, that it is an evil for any country to have any portion of its people who are fit subjects for slavery. It is not slavery that is the curse of the South; it is Africa. It is the presence of an alien, inferior race, with whom amalgamation is degradation and corruption of blood, who can never be citizens; whose natural tendency is not to improvement, but to barbarism; who make industry ignorant, unskilful, and abject; who form no part of the people, though a large proportion of the population; and who are thus a source of weakness, and not of strength. This is the curse; and it would be infinitely greater, were this degraded population free instead of being slaves. It is the punishment for the lawless rapine that tore the negro from his native sands,—for the nameless horrors of the middle passage,—for all the atrocities of the slave trade. A portion of the South being so largely African, slavery is a necessity.

One word more. It is said, perhaps truly, that the existence of this Union depends on the execution of the fugitive slave law of 1850. That law is not liked at the North. By some, it is openly and vehemently denounced and opposed; by many, it is reluctantly acquiesced in, as a hateful necessity. There are very many whom this law places in a most painful conflict between their reverence for right, and their love and duty to their country. They appreciate fully all the evils of disunion; they also appreciate fully all the shame and misery of living under a law that shocks their sentiments of humanity and justice, and of giving to it their aid and support; for "whoso consents to wrong doeth wrong."...