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George Graham
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BLACK LETTERS;

OR UNCLE TOM-FOOLERY IN LITERATURE.

THAT sudden popularity and success are not always evidences of merit to be relied upon, Barnum has taught us with the Wooly Horse, Tom Thumb, and his Mermaid.... A popular rage for any thing is a pretty good test of its worthlessness, and when the book presses are occupied with prurient French novels, sanctified dissertations upon negro carousals, and puritanical eulogies of blasphemous psalm-singing, almost to the exclusion of the Bible and healthy and robust works, we need scarcely stop to prove that the devil is having a pretty good time of it among the sons of men--or that such taste is false and damnable.

Our female agitators have abandoned Bloomers in despair, and are just now bestride a new hobby--an intense love of black folks, *in fashionable novels*!...

We have a regular incursion of the blacks. The shelves of booksellers groan under the weight of Sambo's woes, done up in covers! What a dose we have had and are having! The population of readers has gone a wool-gathering! Our "Helots of the West" are apparently at a premium with the publishers just now; and we have Northern folks as anxious to make money of them, as the Southerners can be, for their lives. A plague of all black faces! We hate this niggerism, and hope it may be done away with. We cannot tolerate negro-slavery of this sort--we are abolitionists on this question!...

In the name of the Prophet--not the bookseller's profit!--let us have done with this woolly-headed literature; let us have a change; let us have a reaction. We see reactions at work every day--the democracies of 1848 have run back as fast as they ran forward. Let us have a literary reaction here. Let us go back to our original Mexican brigands, our fresh Texans, with their big beards and unerring "Beeswings," our Prairie heroines, and all that wonderful adventure which is only sunburnt, at the deepest. Let us have the breathless "Romance of the Lowell Factory Girl," the thrilling "Pirate of the Chesapeake," the "Mystery of the Modern Gomorrah," the "Dark Monk of Wissawampanoag." We are really weary of preaching negroes, and "Mas'r," and "specs lse wicked," and "that yer ole man," and "dat ar nigger." We want something refreshing. Seriously speaking--our writers who would take the public ear, should turn to something worthier than these negro subjects. Where is the great need of going to the black section of the population in quest of themes, while the broader and richer domains of the better races lie before them?...
Mrs. Stowe's style is as careless as her plot. We cannot tolerate a scene where her own feelings are poured out upon it to the neglect of every thing else. Mrs. Stowe feels vehemently on the subject of personal tyranny, and the disruption of dear ties by the separation of negro parents, wives and children; and this is womanly and natural, of course. But she allows her feelings to overpower her judgment in the arrangement of her narrative; and the latter has a tone of exaggeration in consequence, which must counteract the aim of the writer, inasmuch as it injures the vraisemblances of the tale.

The plot of Uncle Tom's Cabin—"the plot, Lord bless you, there is none to tell, sir"—the plot is feeble; it is strung and tacked together in a very unworkmanlike way. In the series of scenes which go to make it up, our feelings of interest are a good deal jolted backward and forward, between Uncle Tom and the St. Clare family on one side, and Eliza and the melodramatic George on the other. Uncle Tom is an exaggeration—a monster of perfection—

"A faultless monster, which the world ne'er saw."

He is only fit for a high, pure part on the stage; and, indeed, he has already gone on it, as if with a consciousness of "the eternal fitness of things." We cannot take cordially to that big, wise black. We require to have a dash of human infirmity in our favorite heroes—we look for a little gravel along with the soft food for our critical gizzard. Why, in one respect, Uncle Tom is as inhuman as Legree! We should have liked Thomas much better if he had fairly agreed with Chloe that Shelby was an ungrateful man, and had told him so, or had given Legree some ill-language, in a high fit of human exasperation. George is semi-Castilian and chiefly melodramatic—well enough, however, for the part he plays. Cassy is a caricature of human passion and suffering, and Legree is as much a man in buckram as George. He comes up strongly on the stage, however—makes a good, ferocious character and touches the gallery very effectively.

Mrs. Stowe, as we have said, relies on her own feelings, and writes as they are affected, without thinking steadily of her characters. She introduces Topsy, and wishing to show that a long course of evil example and neglect cannot be neutralized at once, she makes Topsy show it—to the discomfiture of Miss Ophelia. Afterward, wishing to show a sudden conversion, a sudden revulsion of feeling, countervailing all the influences of the aforesaid evil example, she makes use of the very same Topsy to show it. In this Mrs. Stowe is true to herself, but somewhat fallacious as regards the claims of a consistent
The argument against emancipation on this question of dollars and cents, not of slavery or of the right way to treat negroes. It is a wicked place, and men are a bad concern there, save him from fanaticism. No doubt the world is a pair of case-hardened reprobates, and, artistically speaking, unexceptional, till, unhappily for their consistency of character, Mrs. Stowe brings them into a scene where her own feelings are roused to a climax—very justifiably no doubt—and they lose themselves in an impossible ecstasy of piety, to our great discomfiture; after that we give them up! When they have done Legree's bidding and flogged Uncle Tom to death's door, in the most brutal way—"Sartin, we's been doin' a dreeful thing," sighs Sambo the savage.

"O, Tom," exclaims Quimbo the man-queller, "we's been awful wicked to ye!"

"O, Tom! do tell us who Jesus is, anyhow," sobs Sambo the savage!

Tom then prays energetically to the Almighty, and—mark what follows! "They wept, both the two savage men!" They have repented on the spot. Tom then cries, in a strong agony of love: "O, Lord, give me those two more souls, I pray!" and he gets them forthwith. "That prayer was answered"—Mrs. Stowe assures us! What, in the name of common sense, can be said of this astounding business? Why, that Mrs. Stowe is a woman of strong humane feelings which run away with her, clean, and make her forget she is making a book—whisk her from the desk of the novelist to the pulpit of the revivalist. It is impious to suppose that Heaven will accept such a pair of devils as Sambo and Quimbo; and we have only to say, that we reject them positively. Mrs. Stowe wishes to raise the negroes in our estimation by saying they have a warmth of impulse—a credulous impressibility. Now these are things that act both ways—both on the wrong side as well as the right. That vivacity of emotion is only good when it is in the right way. Religion is the right way, of course. But we must say we do not agree with the author that a love of hymn-choruses and holdings-forth are high moral characteristics. We fear that, with the negroes, religion is often a monomania—a feeling vehement from its narrowness, and existing mostly in expression. That suddenness of conversion is a very unhealthy and unnatural thing; it cannot be a true thing. If the pendulum swings violently one way, you may suspect it will have a tendency to go back the other way. Many of the hymns sung by the negroes do not meet our ideas as favorably as they do those of Mrs. Stowe. They are entirely too irreverent and have too strong an animal taint for our ideas of spiritual worship. But let us get out of this theological swamp—for fear of skeeters!...

The truth is, that all these characters, Tom, Topsy, Cassy, Sambo, Quimbo, etc., are not living people; they are only Mrs. Stowe's feelings dressed up—her emotions transfigured on paper. When we go to the South we will not look out for one of them—either in Kentuck or Louisiana. We know they are not there.
Mrs. Stowe's style is as careless as her plot. We can understand that, writing for the "[National] Era," perhaps in a hurry, she had not time to trim or prune, though a correct writer scarce needs any such work. But she should not have let her slovenliness show itself in the book. In her description of Topsy, for instance, Mrs. Stowe uses the word odd half a dozen times in something over a dozen lines. There are many such instances of carelessness. Mrs. Stowe offends us very often in the matter of style--which, after all, is to the writer what discipline is to the soldier. The negroes need not talk English, of course; but St. Clare and the Anglo-Saxon folk should speak correctly and avoid localisms and vulgarisms. As we have said, Mrs. Stowe's characters speak too much of her own feelings to affect us with a strong sense of their reality. No doubt there is a great deal of heart and spirit in the dialogues. Topsy speaks very well, and is a general favorite; so is Eva, and so is St. Clare. The vivacity of the book is undoubted, and to that, and to the familiar and stirring incidents, such as catch the tastes of the many all over the world, the "Cabin" owes some of its popularity. It also has that seasoning of melodrama which that tender-hearted monster--the public--loves so dearly in books or on the stage. But, after doing justice to the spirit and earnestness of the work, we are still happy to think it has not power enough to cause as much mischief as some have supposed. Indeed, were Mrs. Stowe's book ten times more meritorious and forcible than it is, the existing sense of this community, and its growing tendencies--political or otherwise--would neutralize it. It is hopeless to look for any more exasperations on account of slavery, or to think it can ever be done away with by vilipendation or the high hand....

The slave-owners will not be bullied into any thing, and they have a natural regard for their homes and properties. People talk of the glory of England's negro emancipation. The glory of it was that the government took twenty millions of money belonging to the English people and purchased the freedom of the slaves--gave compensation for them. In this country, compensation to our fellow citizens for the sacrifice of their property consequent on emancipation is never talked of. If the abolitionists of the North had their property in slaves, we should like to hear their opinions on the matter. Would they be so ready to give all up--to sacrifice every thing to principle? The idea of such Yankee chivalry is funny enough.

As for the condition of the slaves, it is false to say it is as bad as that of the Irish, the Italians, the Highland Scotch, or the English poor in the manufacturing towns. All these are slaves in every hard practical sense of the word but one, and that's a mere matter of idea. The separation of children from brothers, parents, and each from all the rest, is even more cruel in the old pauper countries that it can be here in the South. They who talk of human misery should take in the whole picture--it would save him from the
monomania that attends narrow views. It would not lessen his desire to do good, but it would save him from fanaticism. No doubt the world is a wicked place, and men are a bad concern altogether, deserving to be hanged or drowned. But the Supreme Ruler will not take to violent measures. He tolerates largely, in fact....

The argument against emancipation on this continent is a good one. What would the negroes do, if they were free amongst us? Nothing at all--or next to nothing. They have not the muscle or mind of the European races. If freed here, they would refuse to work--preferring to grow flabby with idleness and impious psalm-singing. Carlyle is right in denouncing the lazy philosophy of the blacks. All the dwellers on this continent must work, otherwise the whole national machinery must get out of order. The emancipation of the Southern negroes would be a disastrous policy--as cruel to the blacks as injurious to the general interests of society....

To this end--a removal of the race--we must come at last. Mrs. Stowe is in favor of the system of deportation to Africa; and the sooner the negroes can find their way to a nation of their own, the better. At this moment, when improved navigation is opening all the seas of the world to all the races thereof, Asiatics are crowding Eastward and supplanting the negro people. When that result shall fairly arrive, the remedy will appear as an inevitable consequence. Our Southern fellow citizens will find the cheap labor of Chinese, Coolies, etc., more profitable than any other; the last negro serf will disappear after the last free negro. It is as inevitable as destiny; but the North and South must stand shoulder to shoulder--AND WILL....

Ah! Brother of the North, what becomes of scores of laborers with you, whose sweat and sinews have enriched some gigantic capitalist at the cost of health and hope? When age comes upon him, or he is laid upon a bed of fever and languishing, fierce and prolonged, are his comforts attended to--his expenses paid? Unless you are greatly belied, you give "the laborer his hire"; but you give him no more. The sickly workman--is he not speedily cast adrift?... Go home, brother! each system has its evils; and, with each other's help, we shall cure them by and bye--but it will be by something else than talk! There will have to be some very earnest work, and some very manly sacrifices on both sides before that day. But it will come!

We have taken up the "Cabin literature" for the purpose of saying frankly what we think of the whole business--for it is a business, and nothing more. We have spoken temperately and critically of the books, indignantly and perhaps warmly of the spirit which pervades them, and we say by way of emphasis, that we despise the whole concern--the spirit which dictated them is false. They are altogether speculations in patriotism--a question of dollars and cents, not of slavery or liberty. The whole literary atmosphere has become tainted with them--they are corrupt
altogether and abominable....