

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.

Some Account of George Harris and Other Famous Characters in the Famous Anti-Slavery Novel.

[Detroit Correspondence to the New York Tribune.]

LEWIS CLARKE, ALIAS GEORGE HARRIS.

A few months since a friend came to my office in Detroit, and said that he had been over the river to Windsor, where the Canadian farmers of Essex County were holding a fair, and had found among the exhibitors one Lewis Clarke, who was the original of the character of George Harris in "Uncle Tom's Cabin." I dispatched a messenger to Windsor next day to seek out this George Harris, and say to him that I wished to see him in Detroit. The messenger reported that he had visited the groups of colored people in the assembly, and could get no traces of him. At last he went among the lighter colored visitors, gathered at the Secretary's tent, to hear the premiums read. About every alternate premium was awarded to Lewis Clarke. Among his products were to be found the most exaggerated cucumbers, overgrown cabbages, and pretentious potatoes. He was, in fact, the only exhibitor worthy the name, and as such was the lion of the day. Here my messenger found him and submitted my proposition for an interview. It was readily agreed to, and the meeting was brought about a few months ago. George Harris in real life in Detroit in March, 1850, was not the George Harris of the stage from 1832 hitherward. The theaters always selected their best looking youth, and made a handsome quadron of him. George Harris in life, March, 1850, is old, his hair streaked with white, and wearing a heavy, gray and grizzly beard. His complexion is not the lemon colored complexion which the stage George Harris wears. His brow is as white as that of most men of his age; his lower face dark, like the sunburnt face of any man who tills the earth for a livelihood. His eyes are black, and his features regular. He is not a negro with a mixture of white blood in his veins; he is a white man with a tinge of Africa in his blood. In his speech and manner there is no trace of African adulteration; there is none in his features, in his complexion or his hair. He says "char" for "there," and "whar" for "where;" that is a custom he brought from Kentucky. There is none of the boisterous, quickly-ignited laughter of the negro about him, and there is none of the subservient commonly shown by the black-skinned man toward the white. He treats every body with respect, but "he calls no man master." The story of his escape and certain incidents thereof, as portrayed both by the book, and in the play, represent him as brave, determined and defiant. The book, the play, and the reality all correspond in this regard. From what I have seen of him, I can readily understand that he might have been what a Kentuckian would have called, in slave times, a "mighty troublesome nigger." If I had been a slaveholder in those days I should not have cared to own him. I spent several hours with Lewis Clarke, talking over the story of his life, and questioned him particularly in relation to the part he is given in the novel, and his acquaintance with other prominent characters.

Lewis George Clarke was born in Madison County, Kentucky, seven miles from Richmond, on the plantation of his grandfather, Samuel Campbell, in 1816. His grandmother was a half white slave, and his mother a quadroon. His father was a Scotchman, who married this quadroon daughter of Samuel Campbell on condition that he made her free in his will; but when he died no such will could be found, and she and her children, of whom Lewis was one, were retained in bondage as the property of the heirs. Lewis fell to the portion of William Campbell. The days of the "patriarchal institution" are ended. I therefore omit from this letter all mention of the experience of my subject in slavery—except what he saw and heard and suffered—except such incidents as may be useful in illustrating the reality of the characters of Uncle Tom's Cabin. He met with his full share of the peculiar benefits of the aforesaid "institution" at the hands of the superior race. In common with his class, he enjoyed the bludgeon and the lash; and as the varying fortunes of his owners made it necessary, he was mortgaged to secure a debt or given in payment of a claim. In such a career he passed twenty-four years of his life, when he became the property of "Young Tom Kennedy" of Garrard County. He hired his time of this master for twelve dollars a month. He peddled grass seed, cut wood, and engaged in such other pursuits as he could profitably undertake. One day this master died, and in settlement of the estate Lewis was ordered sold by the administrators, and was put upon the block. There was the usual crowd in attendance, and some of the slaves had been readily sold before Lewis was put up. When he mounted the stand all bidding was at an end. Experienced traders did not care to handle such property, as it had been allowed too much latitude by its late master, and was, in the language of the trade, "a spoilt nigger." He left the block, still belonging to "Young Tom Kennedy's estate." But the business had to be settled, and not long after the auction William A. Bridges, one of the administrators, notified Lewis that he must be present at Lancaster Court-house the next Monday, to complete the settlement of the estate. James Letcher's house-girl had overheard a conversation between Bridges and a pair of traders from Mississippi, named Childs and Lawless, who were in that neighborhood to get a drove to take down to their plantation. In this conversation Lewis, Jim, Steve, and Mose, were bargained for and the contract closed, the property to be delivered at Lancaster Court-house, on Monday. Lewis still had the pass which had been given him as a seed peddler, to protect him from the patrol, and when the girl repeated to him the story of his sale and destination, he determined, assisted by this pass, to make a strike for freedom.

Fall of this intention to escape, he mounted his pony, equipped as for a tour at seed selling, and started, on a pleasant Saturday, in August, 1841, to visit the country north of the Ohio. He met with some difficulty at the hands of inquisitive parties, encountered on the road, who knew him; but, aided by his pass, he had little real trouble in making his way. Upon the Monday when he was expected to make his appearance at Lancaster Court-house, Kentucky, he saw the Monday sun directly over his head as he crossed the river into Ohio, at Aberdeen. The novel sensation he experienced when he first placed his foot on free soil can never be experienced by those who have never been captive. Everything was new and wonderful. He trembled with his overpowering emotion, and could actually feel his hair rise upon his head. With that unflinching intent never to be taken alive, but to kill or be killed before capture, he continued his route to Canada, and reached his destination after many days.

Lewis had been preceded, by a year's time, by a brother named Milton, and in Canada he inquired among his numerous predecessors from the happy land of bondage for his stray brother. In a short time he gained intelligence that Milton was at Oberlin, Ohio, and straightway he started on his return to the "land of the free," via Detroit, to find him, and did so without difficulty. While at Oberlin he lived in the family of John M. Eels, President of the Oberlin Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society, and worked as a laborer. Mrs. Eels, a daughter of Judge Hooker, of Boston, readily undertook, at his request, to teach him to read, as he had in view a return to Kentucky, and the rescue of another brother, Cyrus. It was no easy task, but he mastered it tolerably well by springtime. His plan was to run over the underground railroad, where the stations were sometimes far apart, and the conductors not always trustworthy. For this reason he concluded that it was best to arrange his own time table, and go down on a special train at his own convenience, conducting the train himself by the aid of the guide-boards and maps, which he could now consult. In July, 1842, he started on his trip through Ohio to pay a visit to his native State. The underground railroad station-master on the Ohio River, at Ripley, made a rough map of the Kentucky roads for his guidance, and with this in his pocket he rowed across the stream, and stepped upon the Kentucky shore. At a short distance from the water was a log, upon which he sunk trembling. His strength was gone, and he sat for a few moments crying like an infant. Conflicting emotions overwhelmed him, but their strength was soon spent, and in all the dangerous and thrilling scenes he passed through afterward, he declares that he never felt a doubt or fear. Cyrus was at Lexington, and thither Lewis made his perilous way. It was performed on foot, stealthily at times, slowly and painfully. His brother was pleased to see him, but was not surprised, as Lewis had promised, when he left, to return for him in a year, if he escaped himself. He lay concealed in the wash-house of the place for one week, and then, on a moonlit Saturday evening, started North with his brother, and as 11 o'clock of the Monday following gained the Ohio shore a few miles below Ripley. Nothing could exceed the delight of Cyrus to find himself north of this dividing line between freedom and slavery. He drank from the brooks his first taste of water from free soil; he loitered in the forest because he could breathe in the fresh air of the free woods, he would lie down and roll on the earth because it grew free grass, shouting with glee, and announcing to his sedate brother, who would hurry him beyond the danger not yet passed, that "it's a game horse that can roll clear over." In five weeks from the time that Lewis started from Oberlin he returned with his brother. This is the whole outline story of the life of the original George Harris, shorn of the interesting details of his sufferings and his wrongs.

Lewis having brought Cyrus to Oberlin, sent

him to Canada in a short time, being yet fearful that some unlucky accident might arise to reduce him again to slavery in Kentucky. R. E. Gillette, Esq., a merchant of Oberlin, but now of Milwaukee, forwarded Lewis to New York city, in charge of Lewis Tappan, who received him in good order, and passed him along to Salem, Massachusetts. At Salem he reported to William B. Dodge, agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, who put him at work on the platform at his anti-slavery meetings, to "tell the story of his thralldom." From that day to this George Harris—otherwise Lewis Clarke—has been, in one capacity or another, a public man, engaged in the great work of fighting slavery, or caring for its victims as they escaped. For the ten years following his arrival at Mr. Dodge's, in the autumn of 1843, he did little else than lecture against slavery; and in that time he made over five hundred addresses, principally in New England.

In 1844 Clarke took up his residence with A. H. Safford, of Cambridgeport, and remained there five or six years. Mrs. Safford was a step-daughter of Rev. Dr. Beecher, and, when in Boston, in attendance at the May anniversary, Mrs. Stowe made her home at that lady's house. It was here that Mrs. Stowe came upon the George Harris of her future novel. Her conversations with Clarke were frequent, and he was closely questioned by her as to his life in Kentucky. From these conversations came into life most of the characters who afterward took up their residence in the cabin of Uncle Tom; they were, so to speak, all acquaintances of Lewis Clarke. Mrs. Stowe noted down the facts she gained, and when Clarke afterward saw the information he had given reproduced and enlarged upon in Mrs. Stowe's book, he told her that he would have given her further facts if he had known the use she intended to put them to, and she replied that she had preserved them without any definite purpose, but with the thought that, perhaps, they might be some day useful. Of such material as this, and thus collected, Mrs. Stowe built the foundation for the structure which has become so famous.

OTHER CHARACTERS.

I gained from George Harris a brief account of his associates in the Cabin. Uncle Tom, whose name is inseparably connected with the story, and over whose uncompromising piety and cruel sufferings so many men, women and children have wept, is entitled to the first consideration. "He is a compound character." Jostab Henson and Samuel Peter were the two men who combined to make the perfect Uncle Tom—Henson representing the religious element of the character, Peter the tragical termination of a pious life. Henson was a native of Maryland, but went to Kentucky several years before Clarke left the State. His character is fairly represented in Uncle Tom. To the most shameful abuse and cruelty he submitted with Christian resignation year after year, hoping for better things at the hands of his masters. They took advantage of his known integrity to place important trusts in his hands, and he never betrayed them. But the better times he hoped for did not come, and one day, when there seemed to be a vacancy in Northern communities which he could fill, he went up North to fill it. Those who have shed bitter tears over his cruel death at the hands of Larree, may be still further grieved to know that Uncle Tom is not in Heaven, but in Canada. He is still preaching as a Methodist at Dawn, a settlement in Canada built up by the fugitives from the deplorable institution of slavery. He is nearly one hundred years of age, but a few weeks since was reported well and rugged. When he left Kentucky he was no longer the Uncle Tom of Mrs. Stowe. Upon his career at that point is welded that of Samuel Peter. Peter was a strictly pious and faithful negro, who, for a slight offense, was hung up by the hands and whipped in turn by the master, overseer, and one of the waiters, until his back was torn to pieces, and he died soon afterward. His last words, addressed to the women who attended him, were: "Tell massa he has killed me at last for nothing; but if God will forgive him I will." These are the words of Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom; and to the fidelity of the narrative, Lewis Clarke, who was witness of the patient life of the pious Henson and of the death of the Christian Peter, testifies. So the tears of sympathetic men and women were not shed over imaginary sufferings.

THE ESCAPE OF ELIZA.

A striking incident of the story, and one which is made the subject of a thrilling tableau in the play, is the crossing of the Ohio, by Eliza, who, with her child in her arms, springs from one floating cake of ice to another, until she reaches the northern shore, while the pursuing slavecatchers come to the Kentucky side of the river just in time to see her accomplish her most hazardous passage. The story of this terrible crossing is not fictitious, though Eliza was not the wife of George Harris as is represented. She came from his neighborhood in Kentucky, was an acquaintance of his, and he has seen her since she escaped. As she started from the Kentucky side on that memorable occasion, she cast aside a garment on the bank in order to deceive her pursuers into the belief that she had made the attempt to cross and had drowned; but before she was over they came in sight and the stratagem was of no avail. Her name other than Eliza Mr. Clarke can not now recall.

Emmeline, who refused to accept the unhalloved love of Legree, on the Louisiana plantation, was a character drawn from life, the original being Della, a sister of George Harris. She was possessed, like many of the octoroons, of remarkable beauty, and fell into the clutches of a rascally brute when sold, with the rest of her brothers and sisters, at the division of her dead grandfather's estate. She, an earnest and sincere Christian, scorned his advances and defied him, in spite of the terrible scourging to which she was submitted in consequence. As he could not overcome her resolution, he sent her in a drove to be sold in New Orleans. Her purchaser there was named Corval, who took her to Mexico, emancipated and married her. Her husband soon died and left her a fortune. She did not long survive him, and endeavored in her will, to direct the disposition of her property for the ransom of her brothers and sisters; but, as slaves could not receive property, directly or indirectly, the money went into the Treasury of the State of Louisiana.

Mr. Clarke is not so clear as to the original of little Eva. There were often her counterparts among children of the slaveholders, who were pained to see, and protested against the hardships inflicted on their father's slaves. So, too, the South warmed with the effervescent Topseys of spotaneous growth, and with the Marks, and Lookers, and Halesys, of which the story treats. Their originals were to be found everywhere, and like the St. Clairs of the story, and Legrees, Miss Ophelia, if at all, were created as the embodiment of certain sentiments, principles, and pursuits, to which the system of slavery gave birth. And here I dismiss them all into shadow-land.