

Allen James Lane

**The Blue-Grass Region
of Kentucky, and Other
Kentucky Articles**



James Allen

**The Blue-Grass Region of Kentucky,
and Other Kentucky Articles**

«Public Domain»

Allen J.

The Blue-Grass Region of Kentucky, and Other Kentucky Articles /
J. Allen — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFACE	5
THE BLUE-GRASS REGION	6
UNCLE TOM AT HOME	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

James Lane Allen

The Blue-Grass Region of Kentucky, and Other Kentucky Articles

PREFACE

The articles herein reprinted from Harper's and *The Century* magazines represent work done at intervals during the period that the author was writing the tales already published under the title of *Flute and Violin*.

It was his plan that with each descriptive article should go a short story dealing with the same subject, and this plan was in part wrought out. Thus, with the article entitled "Uncle Tom at Home" goes the tale entitled "Two Gentlemen of Kentucky;" and with the article entitled "A Home of the Silent Brotherhood" goes the tale entitled "The White Cowl." In the same way, there were to be short stories severally dealing with the other subjects embraced in this volume. But having in part wrought out this plan, the author has let it rest – not finally, perhaps, but because in the mean time he has found himself engaged with other themes.

THE BLUE-GRASS REGION

I

One might well name it Saxon grass, so much is it at home in Saxon England, so like the loveliest landscapes of green Saxon England has it made other landscapes on which dwell a kindred race in America, and so akin is it to the type of nature that is peculiarly Saxon: being a hardy, kindly, beautiful, nourishing stock; loving rich lands and apt to find out where they lie; uprooting inferior aborigines, but stoutly defending its new domain against all invaders; paying taxes well, with profits to boot; thriving best in temperate latitudes and checkered sunshine; benevolent to flocks and herds; and allying itself closely to the history of any people whose content lies in simple plenty and habitual peace – the perfect squire-and-yeoman type of grasses.

In the earliest spring nothing is sooner afield to contest possession of the land than the blue-grass. Its little green spear-points are the first to pierce the soft rich earth, and array themselves in countless companies over the rolling landscapes, while its roots reach out in every direction for securer foothold. So early does this take place, that a late hoar-frost will now and then mow all these bristling spear-points down. Sometimes a slow-falling sleet will incase each emerald blade in glittering silver; but the sun by-and-by melts the silver, leaving the blade unhurt. Or a light snow-fall will cover tufts of it over, making pavilions and colonnades with white roofs resting on green pillars. The roofs vanish anon, and the columns go on silently rising. But usually the final rigors of the season prove harmless to the blue-grass. One sees it most beautiful in the spring, just before the seed stalks have shot upward from the flowing tufts, and while the thin, smooth, polished blades, having risen to their greatest height, are beginning to bend, or break and fall over on themselves and their nether fellows from sheer luxuriance. The least observant eye is now constrained to note that blue-grass is the characteristic element of the Kentucky turf – the first element of beauty in the Kentucky landscape. Over the stretches of woodland pasture, over the meadows and the lawns, by the edges of turnpike and lane, in the fence corners – wherever its seed has been allowed to flourish – it spreads a verdure so soft in fold and fine in texture, so entrancing by its freshness and fertility, that it looks like a deep-lying, thick-matted emerald moss. One thinks of it, not as some heavy, velvet-like carpet spread over the earth, but as some light, seamless veil that has fallen delicately around it, and that might be blown away by a passing breeze.

After this you will not see the blue-grass so beautiful. The seed ripens in June. Already the slender seed stalks have sprung up above the uniform green level, bearing on their summits the fuzzy, plummy, purplish seed-vessels; and save the soft, feathery undulations of these as the wind sweeps over them, the beauty of the blue-grass is gone. Moreover, certain robust and persistent weeds and grasses have been growing apace, roughening and diversifying the sward, so that the vista is less charming. During July and August the blue-grass lies comparatively inactive, resting from fructification, and missing, as well, frequent showers to temper the sunshine. In seasons of severe drought it even dies quite away, leaving the surface of the earth as bare and brown as a winter landscape or arid plain. Where it has been closely grazed, one may, in walking over it, stir such a dust as one would raise on a highway; and the upturned, half-exposed rootlets seem entirely dead. But the moderated heats and the gentle rains that usually come with the passing of summer bring on a second vigorous growth, and in the course of several weeks the landscape is covered with a verdure rivalling the luxuriance of spring.

There is something incongruous in this marvellous autumnal rejuvenescence of the blue-grass. All nature appears content and resting. The grapes on the sunward slopes have received their final coloring of purple and gold; the heavy mast is beginning to drop in the forest, followed by the silent

lapse of russet and crimson leaves; the knee-deep aftermath has paled its green in the waiting autumn fields; the plump children are stretching out their nut-stained hands towards the first happy fire-glow on chill, dark evenings; and the cricket has left the sere, dead garden for a winter home at the hearth. Then, lo! as if by some freakish return of the spring to the edge of winter the pastures are suddenly as fresh and green as those of May. The effect on one who has the true landscape passion is transporting and bewildering. Such contrasts of color it is given one to study nowhere but in blue-grass lands. It is as if the seasons were met to do some great piece of brocading. One sees a new meaning in Poe's melancholy thought – the leaves of the many-colored grass.

All winter the blue-grass continues green – it is always *green*, of course, never *blue* – and it even grows a little, except when the ground is frozen. Thus, year after year, drawing needful nourishment from the constantly disintegrating limestone below, flourishes here as nowhere else in the world this wonderful grass.

Even while shivering in the bleak winds of March, the young lambs frolicked away from the distant teats of the ewes, with growing relish for its hardy succulence, and by-and-by they were taken into market the sooner and the fatter for its developing qualities. During the long summer, foaming pails of milk and bowls of golden butter have testified to the Kentucky housewife with what delight the cows have ruminated on the stores gathered each plentiful day. The Kentucky farmer knows that the distant metropolitan beef-eater will in time have good reason to thank it for yonder winding herd of sleek young steers that are softly brushing their rounded sides with their long, white, silky tails, while they plunge their puffing noses into its depths and tear away huge mouthfuls of its inexhaustible richness. Thorough-bred sire and dam and foal in paddocks or deeper pastures have drawn from it form and quality and organization: hardness and solidity of bone, strength of tendon, firmness and elasticity of muscle, power of nerve, and capacity of lung. Even the Falstaff porkers, their eyes gleaming with gluttonous enjoyment, have looked to it for the shaping of their posthumous hams and the padding of their long backbones in depths of snowy lard. In winter mules and sheep and horses paw away the snow to get at the green shoots that lie covered over beneath the full, rank growth of autumn, or they find it attractive provender in their ricks. For all that live upon it, it is perennial and abundant, beautiful and beneficent – the first great natural factor in the prosperity of the Kentucky people. What wonder if the Kentuckian, like the Greek of old, should wish to have even his paradise well set in grass; or that, with a knowing humor, he should smile at David for saying, "He maketh his grass to grow upon the mountains," inasmuch as the only grass worth speaking of grows on his beloved plain!

II

But if grass is the first element in the lovely Kentucky landscape, as it must be in every other one, by no means should it be thought sole or chief. In Dante, as Ruskin points out, whenever the country is to be beautiful, we come into open air and open meadows. Homer places the sirens in a meadow when they are to sing. Over the blue-grass, therefore, one walks into the open air and open meadows of the blue-grass land.

This has long had reputation for being one of the very beautiful spots of the earth, and it is worth while to consider those elements of natural scenery wherein the beauty consists.

One might say, first, that the landscape possesses what is so very rare even in beautiful landscapes – the quality of gracefulness. Nowhere does one encounter vertical lines or violent slopes; nor are there perfectly level stretches like those that make the green fields monotonous in the Dutch lowlands. The dark, finely sifted soil lies deep over the limestone hills, filling out their chasms to evenness, and rounding their jagged or precipitous edges, very much as a heavy snow at night will leave the morning landscape with mitigated ruggedness and softer curves. The long, slow action of water has further moulded everything into symmetry, so that the low ancient hills descend to the

valleys in exquisite folds and uninterrupted slopes. The whole great plain undulates away league after league towards the distant horizon in an endless succession of gentle convex surfaces – like the easy swing of the sea – presenting a panorama of subdued swells and retiring surges. Everything in the blue-grass country is billowy and afloat. The spirit of nature is intermediate between violent energy and complete repose; and the effect of this mild activity is kept from monotony by the accidental perspective of position, creating variety of details.

One traces this quality of gracefulness in the labyrinthine courses of the restful streams, in the disposition of forest masses, in the free, unstudied succession of meadow, field, and lawn. Surely it is just this order of low hill scenery, just these buoyant undulations, that should be covered with the blue-grass. Had Hawthorne ever looked on this landscape when most beautiful, he could never have said of England that "no other country will ever have this charm of lovely verdure."

Characteristically beautiful spots on the blue-grass landscape are the woodland pastures. A Kentucky wheat field, a Kentucky meadow, a Kentucky lawn, is but a field, a meadow, a lawn, found elsewhere; but a Kentucky sylvan slope has a loveliness unique and local. Rightly do poets make pre-eminently beautiful countries abound in trees. John Burroughs, writing with enthusiasm of English woods, has said that "in midsummer the hair of our trees seems to stand on end; the woods have a frightened look, or as if they were just recovering from a debauch." This is not true of the Kentucky woods, unless it be in some season of protracted drought. The foliage of the Kentucky trees is not thin nor dishevelled, the leaves crowd thick to the very ends of the boughs, and spread themselves full to the sky, making, where they are close together, under-spaces of green gloom scarcely shot through by sunbeams. Indeed, one often finds here the perfection of tree forms. I mean that rare development which brings the extremities of the boughs to the very limit of the curve that nature intends the tree to define as the peculiar shape of its species. Any but the most favorable conditions leave the outline jagged, faulty, and untrue. Here and there over the blue-grass landscape one's eye rests on a cone-shaped, or dome-shaped, or inverted pear-shaped, or fan-shaped tree. Nor are fulness of leafage and perfection of form alone to be noted; pendency of boughs is another distinguishing feature. One who loves and closely studies trees will note here the comparative absence of woody stiffness. It is expected that the willow and the elm should droop their branches. Here the same characteristic strikes you in the wild cherry, the maple, and the sycamore – even in great walnuts and ashes and oaks; and I have occasionally discovered exceeding grace of form in hackberries (which usually look paralytic and as if waiting to hobble away on crutches), in locusts, and in the harsh hickories – loved by Thoreau.

But to return to the woodland pastures. They are the last vestiges of that unbroken primeval forest which, together with cane-brakes and pea-vines, covered the face of the country when it was first beheld by the pioneers. No blue-grass then. In these woods the timber has been so cut out that the remaining trees often stand clearly revealed in their entire form, their far-reaching boughs perhaps not even touching those of their nearest neighbor, or interlacing them with ineffectual fondness. There is something pathetic in the sight, and in the thought of those innumerable stricken ones that in years ago were dismembered for cord-wood and kitchen stoves and the vast fireplaces of old-time negro cabins. In the well kept blue-grass pasture undergrowth and weeds are annually cut down, so that the massive trunks are revealed from a distance; the better because the branches seldom are lower than from ten to twenty feet above the earth. Thus in its daily course the sun strikes every point beneath the broad branches, and nourishes the blue-grass up to the very roots. All savagery, all wildness, is taken out of these pastures; they are full of tenderness and repose – of the utmost delicacy and elegance. Over the graceful earth spreads the flowing green grass, uniform and universal. Above this stand the full, swelling trunks – warm browns and pale grays – often lichen-flecked or moss-enamelled. Over these expand the vast domes and canopies of leafage. And falling down upon these comes the placid sunshine through a sky of cerulean blueness, and past the snowy zones of gleaming cloud. The very individuality of the tree comes out as it never can in denser places. Always the most truly human object in still, voiceless nature, it here throws out its arms to you with imploring tenderness, with

what Wordsworth called "the soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs." One cannot travel far in the blue-grass country without coming upon one of these woodland strips.

Of the artistic service rendered the landscape of this region by other elements of scenery – atmosphere and cloud and sky – much might, but little will, be said. The atmosphere is sometimes crystalline, sometimes full of that intense repose of dazzling light which one, without ever having seen them, knows to be on canvases of Turner. Then, again, it is amber-hued, or tinged with soft blue, graduated to purple shadows on the horizon. During the greater part of the year the cloud-sky is one of strongly outlined forms; the great white cumuli drift over, with every majesty of design and grace of grouping; but there come, in milder seasons, many days when one may see three cloud belts in the heavens at the same time, the lowest far, far away, and the highest brushing softly, as it were, past the very dome of the inviolable blue. You turn your eye downward to see the light wandering wistfully among the low distant hills, and the sweet tremulous shadows crossing the meadows with timid cadences. It is a beautiful country; the Kentucky skies are not the cold, hard, brilliant, hideous things that so many writers on nature style American skies (usually meaning New England skies), as contrasted with skies European. They are at times ineffably warm in tone and tender in hue, giving aerial distances magical and fathomless above, and throwing down upon the varied soft harmonious greens of the landscape below, upon its rich browns and weathered grays and whole scheme of terrene colors, a flood of radiance as bountiful and transfiguring as it is chastened and benign.

But why make a description of the blue-grass region of Kentucky? What one sees may be only what one feels – only intricate affinities between nature and self that were developed long ago, and have become too deep to be viewed as relations or illusions. What two human beings find the same things in the face of a third, or in nature's? Descriptions of scenery are notoriously disappointing to those whose taste in landscape is different, or who have little or no sentiment for pure landscape beauty. So one coming hither might be sorely disappointed. No mountains; no strips of distant blue gleaming water nor lawny cascades; no grandeur; no majesty; no wild picturesqueness. The chords of landscape harmony are very simple; nothing but softness and amenity, grace and repose, delicacy and elegance. One might fail at seasons to find even these. This is a beautiful country, but not always; there come days when the climate shows as ugly a temper as possible. Not a little of the finest timber has been lost by storms. The sky is for days one great blanket of grewsome gray. In winter you laugh with chattering teeth at those who call this "the South," the thermometer perhaps registering from twelve to fifteen degrees below zero. In summer the name is but a half-truth. Only by visiting this region during some lovely season, or by dwelling here from year to year, and seeing it in all the humors of storm and sunshine, can one love it.

III

But the ideal landscape of daily life must not be merely beautiful: it should be useful. With what may not the fertility of this region be compared? With the valleys of the Schuylkill, the Shenandoah, and the Genesee; with the richest lands of Lombardy and Belgium; with the most fertile districts of England. The evidences of this fertility are everywhere. Nature, even in those places where she has been forced for nearly a hundred years to bear much at the hands of a not always judicious agriculture, unceasingly struggles to cover herself with bushes of all sorts and nameless annual weeds and grasses. Even the blue-grass contends in vain for complete possession of its freehold. One is forced to note, even though without sentiment, the rich pageant of transitory wild bloom that *will* force a passage for itself over the landscape: firmaments of golden dandelions in the lawns; vast beds of violets, gray and blue, in dim glades; patches of flaunting sunflowers along the road-sides; purple thistles; and, of deeper purple still and far denser growth, beautiful ironweed in the woods; with many clumps of alder bloom, and fast-extending patches of perennial blackberry, and groups of delicate May-apples, and whole fields of dog-fennel and golden-rod. And why mention indomitable dock and gigantic poke,

burrs and plenteous nightshade, and mullein and plantain, with dusty gray-green ragweed and thrifty fox-tail? – an innumerable company.

Maize, pumpkins, and beans grow together in a field – a triple crop. Nature perfects them all, yet must do more. Scarce have the ploughs left the furrows before there springs up a varied wild growth, and a fourth crop, morning-glories, festoon the tall tassels of the Indian corn ere the knife can be laid against the stalk. Harvest fields usually have their stubble well hidden by a rich, deep aftermath. Garden patches, for all that hoe and rake can do, commonly look at last like spots given over to weeds and grasses. Sidewalks quickly lose their borders. Pavements would soon disappear from sight; the winding of a distant stream through the fields can be readily followed by the line of vegetation that rushes there to fight for life, from the minutest creeping vines to forest trees. Every neglected fence corner becomes an area for a fresh colony. Leave one of these sweet, humanized woodland pastures alone for a short period of years, it runs wild with a dense young natural forest; vines shoot up to the tops of the tallest trees, and then tumble over in green sprays on the heads of others.

A kind, true, patient, self-helpful soil if ever there was one! Some of these lands after being cultivated, not always scientifically, but always without artificial fertilizers, for more than three-quarters of a century, are now, if properly treated, equal in productiveness to the best farming lands of England. The farmer from one of these old fields will take two different crops in a season. He gets two cuttings of clover from a meadow, and has rich grazing left. A few counties have at a time produced three-fourths of the entire hemp product of the United States. The State itself has at different times stood first in wheat and hemp and Indian corn and wool and tobacco and flax, although half its territory is covered with virgin forests. When lands under improper treatment have become impoverished, their productiveness has been restored, not by artificial fertilizers, but by simple rotation of crops, with nature's help. The soil rests on decomposable limestone, which annually gives up to it in solution all the essential mineral plant food that judicious agriculture needs.

Soil and air and climate – the entire aggregate of influences happily co-operative – make the finest grazing. The Kentucky horse has carried the reputation of the country into regions where even the people could never have made it known. Your expert in the breeding of thoroughbreds will tell you that the muscular fibre of the blue-grass animal is to that of the Pennsylvania-bred horses as silk to cotton, and the texture of his bone, compared with the latter's, as ivory beside pumice-stone. If taken to the Eastern States, in twelve generations he is no longer the same breed of horse. His blood fertilizes American stock the continent over. Jersey cattle brought here increase in size. Sires come to Kentucky to make themselves and their offspring famous.

The people themselves are a fecund race. Out of this State have gone more to enrich the citizenship of the nation than all the other States together have been able to send into it. So at least your loyal-hearted Kentuckian looks at the rather delicate subject of inter-State migration. By actual measurement the Kentucky volunteers during the Civil War were found to surpass all others (except Tennesseans) in height and weight, whether coming from the United States or various countries of Europe. But for the great-headed Scandinavians, they would have been first, also, in circumference around the forehead and occiput. Still, Kentucky has little or no literature.

One element that should be conspicuous in fertile countries does not strike the observer here – much beautiful water; no other State has a frontage of navigable rivers equal to that of Kentucky. But there are few limpid, lovely, smaller streams. Wonderful springs there are, and vast stores of water in the cavernous earth below; but the landscape lacks the charm of this element – clear, rushing, musical, abundant. The watercourses, ever winding and graceful, are apt to be either swollen and turbid or insignificant; of late years the beds seem less full also – a change consequent, perhaps, upon the denudation of forest lands. In a dry season the historic Elkhorn seems little more than a ganglion of precarious pools.

IV

The best artists who have painted cultivated ground have always been very careful to limit the area of the crops. Undoubtedly the substitution of a more scientific agriculture for the loose and easy ways of primitive husbandry has changed the key-note of rural existence from a tender Virgilian sentiment to a coarser strain, and as life becomes more unsophisticated it grows less picturesque. When the work of the old-time reaper is done by a fat man with a flaming face, sitting on a cast-iron machine, and smoking a cob pipe, the artist will leave the fields. Figures have a terrible power to destroy sentiment in pure landscape; so have houses. When one leaves nature, pure and simple, in the blue-grass country, he must accordingly pick his way circumspectly or go amiss in his search for the beautiful. If his taste lead him to desire in landscapes the finest evidences of human labor, the high artificial finish of a minutely careful civilization, he will here find great disappointment. On the other hand, if he delight in those exquisite rural spots of the Old World with picturesque bits of homestead architecture and the perfection of horticultural and unobtrusive botanical details, he will be no less aggrieved. What he sees here is neither the most scientific farming, simply economic and utilitarian – raw and rude – nor that cultivated desire for the elements in nature to be so moulded by the hand of man that they will fuse harmoniously and inextricably with his habitations and his work.

The whole face of the country is taken up by a succession of farms. Each of these, except the very small ones, presents to the eye the variation of meadow, field, and woodland pasture, together with the homestead and the surrounding grounds of orchard, garden, and lawn. The entire landscape is thus caught in a vast net-work of fences. The Kentuckian retains his English ancestors' love of enclosures; but the uncertain tenure of estates beyond a single generation does not encourage him to make them the most durable. One does, indeed, notice here and there throughout the country stone-walls of blue limestone, that give an aspect of substantial repose and comfortable firmness to the scenery. But the farmer dreads their costliness, even though his own hill-sides furnish him an abundant quarry. He knows that unless the foundations are laid like those of a house, the thawing earth will unsettle them, that water, freezing as it trickles through the crevices, will force the stones out of their places, and that breaches will be made in them by boys on a hunt whenever and wherever it shall be necessary to get at a lurking or sorely pressed hare. It is ludicrously true that the most terrible destroyer of stone-walls in this country is the small boy hunting a hare, with an appetite for game that knows no geological impediment. Therefore one hears of fewer limestone fences of late years, some being torn down and superseded by plank fences or post-and-rail fences, or by the newer barbed-wire fence – an economic device that will probably become as popular in regions where stone and timber were never to be had as in others, like this, where timber has been ignorantly, wantonly sacrificed. It is a pleasure to know that one of the most expensive, and certainly the most hideous, fences ever in vogue here is falling into disuse. I mean the worm-fence – called worm because it wriggled over the landscape like a long brown caterpillar, the stakes being the bristles along its back, and because it now and then ate up a noble walnut-tree close by, or a kingly oak, or frightened, trembling ash – a worm that decided the destiny of forests. A pleasure it is, too, to come occasionally upon an Osage orange hedge-row, which is a green eternal fence. But you will not find many of these. It is generally too much to ask of an American, even though he be a Kentuckian, to wait for a hedge to grow and make him a fence. When he takes a notion to have a fence, he wants it put up before Saturday night.

If the Kentuckian, like the Englishman, is fond of fencing himself off, like the Frenchman, he loves long, straight roads. You will not find elsewhere in America such highways as the Kentuckian has constructed over his country – broad, smooth, level, white, glistening turnpikes of macadamized limestone. It is a luxury to drive, and also an expense, as one will discover before one has passed through many toll-gates. One could travel more cheaply on the finest railway on the continent. What Richard Grant White thought it worth while to record as a rare and interesting sight – a man on an

English highway breaking stones – is no uncommon sight here. All limestone for these hundreds of miles of road, having been quarried here, there, anywhere, and carted and strewn along the road-side, is broken by a hammer in the hand. By the highway the workman sits – usually an Irishman – pecking away at a long rugged pile as though he were good to live for a thousand years. Somehow, in patience, he always gets to the other end of his hard row.

One cannot sojourn long without coming to conceive an interest in this limestone, and loving to meet its rich warm hues on the landscape. It has made a deal of history: limestone blue-grass, limestone water, limestone roads, limestone fences, limestone bridges and arches, limestone engineering architecture, limestone water-mills, limestone spring-houses and homesteads – limestone Kentuckians! Outside of Scripture no people was ever so founded on a rock. It might be well to note, likewise, that the soil of this region is what scientists call sedentary – called so because it sits quietly on the rocks, not because the people sit quietly on it.

Undoubtedly the most picturesque monuments in the blue-grass country are old stone water-mills and old stone homesteads – landmarks each for separate trains of ideas that run to poetry and to history. The latter, built by pioneers or descendants of pioneers, nearly a hundred years ago, stand gray with years, but good for nameless years to come; great low chimneys, deep little windows, thick walls, mighty fireplaces; situated usually with keen discretion on an elevation near a spring, just as a Saxon forefather would have placed them centuries ago. Haply one will see the water of this spring issuing still from a recess in a hill-side, with an overhanging ledge of rock – the entrance to this cavern being walled across and closed with a gate, thus making, according to ancient fashion, a simple natural spring-house and dairy.

Something like a feeling of exasperation is apt to come over one in turning to the typical modern houses. Nowhere, certainly, in rural America, are there, within the same area, more substantial, comfortable homesteads. They are nothing if not spacious and healthful, frame or brick, two stories, shingle roofs. But they lack characteristic physiognomy; they have no harmony with the landscape, nor with each other, nor often with themselves. They are not beautiful when new, and can never be beautiful when old; for the beauty of newness and the beauty of oldness alike depend on beauty of form and color, which here is lacking. One longs for the sight of a rural Gothic cottage, which would harmonize so well with the order of the scenery, or for a light, elegant villa that should overlook these light and elegant undulations of a beautiful and varied landscape. It must be understood that there are notable exceptions to these statements even in the outlying districts of the blue-grass country, and that they do not apply to the environs of the towns, nor to the towns themselves.

Nowhere does one see masses of merely beautiful things in the country. The slumbering art of interior decoration is usually spent upon the parlor. The grounds around the houses are not kept in the best order. The typical rural Kentucky housewife does not seem to have any compelling, controlling sense of the beautiful. She invariably concedes something to beauty, but not enough. You will find a show of flowers at the poorest houses, though but geranium slips in miscellaneous tins and pottery. But you do not generally see around more prosperous homes any such parterres or beds as there is money to spend on, and time to tend, and grounds to justify.

A like spirit is shown by the ordinary blue-grass farmer. His management strikes you as not the pink of tidiness, not the model of systematic thrift. Exceptions exist – many exceptions – but the rule holds good. One cannot travel here in summer or autumn without observing that weeds flourish where they harm and create ugliness; fences go unrepaired; gates may be found swinging on one hinge. He misuses his long-cultivated fields; he cuts down his scant, precious trees. His energy is not tireless, his watchfulness not sleepless. Why should they be? Human life here is not massed and swarming. The occupation of the soil is not close and niggard. The landscape is not even compact, much less crowded. There is room for more, plenty for more to eat. No man here, like the ancient Roman prætor, ever decided how often one might, without trespass, gather the acorns that fall from his neighbors' trees. No woman ever went through a blue-grass harvest field gleaning. Ruth's vocation is unknown. By nature

the Kentuckian is no rigid economist. By birth, education, tradition, and inherited tendencies he is not a country clout, but a rural gentleman. His ideal of life is neither vast wealth nor personal distinction, but solid comfort in material conditions, and the material conditions are easy: fertility of soil, annual excess of production over consumption, comparative thinness of population. So he does not brace himself for the tense struggle of life as it goes on in centres of fierce territorial shoulder-pushing. He can afford to indulge his slackness of endeavor. He is neither an alert aggressive agriculturist, nor a landscape gardener, nor a purveyor of commodities to the green-grocer. If the world wants vegetables, let it raise them. He declines to work himself to death for other people, though they pay him for it. His wife is a lady, not a domestic laborer; and it is her privilege, in household affairs, placidly to surround herself with an abundance which the lifelong female economists of the North would regard with conscientious indignation.

In truth, there is much evidence to show that this park-like country, intersected by many beautiful railroads, turnpikes, and shaded picturesque lanes, will become less and less an agricultural district, more and more a region of unequalled pasturage, and hence more park-like still. One great interest abides here, of course – the manufacture of Bourbon whiskey. Another interest has only within the last few years been developed – the cultivation of tobacco, for which it was formerly thought that the blue-grass soils were not adapted. But as years go by, the stock interests invite more capital, demand more attention, give more pleasure – in a word, strike the full chord of modern interest by furnishing an unparalleled means of speculative profit.

Forty years ago the most distinguished citizens of the State were engaged in writing essays and prize papers on scientific agriculture. A regular trotting track was not to be found in the whole country. Nothing was thought of the breeding and training of horses with reference to development of greater speed. Pacing horses were fashionable; and two great rivals in this gait having been brought together for a trial of speed, in lieu of a track, paced a mighty race over a river-bottom flat. We have changed all that. The gentlemen no longer write their essays. Beef won the spurs of knighthood. In Kentucky the horse has already been styled the first citizen. The great agricultural fairs of the State have modified their exhibits with reference to him alone, and fifteen or twenty thousand people give afternoon after afternoon to the contemplation of his beauty and his speed. His one rival is the thoroughbred, who goes on running faster and faster. One of the brief code of nine laws for the government of the young Kentucky commonwealth that were passed in the first legislative assembly ever held west of the Alleghanies dealt with the preservation of the breed of horses. Nothing was said of education. The Kentuckian loves the memory of Thomas Jefferson, not forgetting that he once ran racehorses. These great interests, not overlooking the cattle interest, the manufacture of whiskey, and the raising of tobacco, will no doubt constitute the future determining factors in the history of this country. It should not be forgotten, however, that the Northern and Eastern palate becomes kindly disposed at the bare mention of the many thousands of turkeys that annually fatten on these plains.

V

"In Kentucky," writes Professor Shaler, in his recent history, "we shall find nearly pure English blood. It is, moreover, the largest body of pure English folk that has, speaking generally, been separated from the mother country for two hundred years." They, the blue-grass Kentuckians, are the descendants of those hardy, high-spirited, picked Englishmen, largely of the squire and yeoman class, whose absorbing passion was not religious disputation, nor the intellectual purpose of founding a State, but the ownership of land and the pursuits and pleasures of rural life, close to the rich soil, and full of its strength and sunlight. They have to this day, in a degree perhaps equalled by no others living, the race qualities of their English ancestry and the tastes and habitudes of their forefathers. If one knows the Saxon nature, and has been a close student of Kentucky life and character, stripped bare of the accidental circumstances of local environment, he may amuse himself with laying the two

side by side and comparing the points of essential likeness. It is a question whether the Kentuckian is not more like his English ancestor than his New England contemporary. This is an old country, as things go in the West. The rock formation is very old; the soil is old; the race qualities here are old. In the Sagas, in the Edda, a man must be over-brave. "Let all who are not cowards follow me!" cried McGary, putting an end to prudent counsel on the eve of the battle of the Blue Licks. The Kentuckian winced under the implication then, and has done it in a thousand instances since. Over-bravery! The idea runs through the pages of Kentucky history, drawing them back into the centuries of his race. It is this quality of temper and conception of manhood that has operated to build up in the mind of the world the figure of the typical Kentuckian. Hawthorne conversed with an old man in England who told him that the Kentuckians flayed Tecumseh where he fell, and converted his skin into razor-strops. Collins, the Kentucky Froissart, speaking of Kentucky pioneers, relates of the father of one of them that he knocked Washington down in a quarrel, and received an apology from the Father of his Country on the following day. I have mentioned this typical Hotspur figure because I knew it would come foremost into the mind of the reader whenever one began to speak with candor of Kentucky life and character. It was never a true type: satire bit always into burlesque along lines of coarseness and exaggeration. Much less is it true now, except in so far as it describes a kind of human being found the world over.

But I was saying that old race qualities are apparent here, because this is a people of English blood with hereditary agricultural tastes, and because it has remained to this day largely uncommingled with foreign strains. Here, for instance, is the old race conservatism that expends itself reverentially on established ways and familiar customs. The building of the first great turnpike in this country was opposed on the ground that it would shut up way-side taverns, throw wagons and teams out of employment, and destroy the market for chickens and oats. Prior to that, immigration was discouraged because it would make the already high prices of necessary articles so exorbitant that the permanent prosperity of the State would receive a fatal check. True, however, this opposition was not without a certain philosophy; for in those days people went to some distant lick for their salt, bought it warm from the kettle at seven or eight cents a pound, and packed it home on horseback, so that a fourth dropped away in bitter water. Coming back to the present, the huge yellowish-red stage-coach rolls to-day over the marbled roads of the blue-grass country. Families may be found living exactly where their pioneer ancestors effected a heroic settlement – a landed aristocracy, if there be such in America. Family names come down from generation to generation, just as a glance at the British peerage will show that they were long ago being transmitted in kindred families over the sea. One great honored name will do nearly as much in Kentucky as in England to keep a family in peculiar respect, after the reason for it has ceased. Here is that old invincible race ideal of personal liberty, and that old, unreckoning, truculent, animal rage at whatever infringes on it. The Kentuckians were among the very earliest to grant manhood suffrage. Nowhere in this country are the rights of property more inviolable, the violations of these more surely punished: neither counsel nor judge nor any power whatsoever can acquit a man who has taken fourpence of his neighbor's goods. Here is the old land-loving, land-holding, home-staying, home-defending disposition. This is not the lurching, tourist race that, to Mr. Ruskin's horror, leaves its crumbs and chicken-bones on the glaciers. The simple rural key-note of life is still the sweetest. Now, after the lapse of more than a century, the most populous town contains less than twenty thousand white souls. Along with the love of land has gone comparative content with the annual increase of flock and field. No man among them has ever got immense wealth. Here is the old sense of personal privacy and reserve which has for centuries intrenched the Englishman in the heart of his estate, and forced him to regard with inexpugnable discomfort his neighbor's boundaries. This would have been a densely peopled region, the farms would have been minutely subdivided, had sons asked and received permission to settle on parts of the ancestral estate. This filling in and too close personal contact would have satisfied neither father nor child, so that the one has generally kept his acres intact, and the other, impelled by the same

land-hunger that brought his pioneer forefather hither, has gone hence into the younger West, where lie broader tracts and vaster spaces. Here is the old idea, somewhat current still in England, that the highest mark of the gentleman is not cultivation of the mind, not intellect, not knowledge, but elegant living. Here is the old hereditary devotion to the idea of the State. Write the biographies of the Kentuckians who have been engaged in national or in local politics, and you have largely the history of the State of Kentucky. Write the lives of all its scientists, artists, musicians, actors, poets, novelists, and you find many weary mile-stones between the chapters.

Enter the blue-grass region from what point you choose – and you may do this, so well traversed is it by railways – and you become sensitive to its influence. If you come from the North or the East, you say: "This is not modern America. Here is something local and unique. For one thing, nothing goes fast here." By-and-by you see a blue-grass race-horse, and note an exception. But you do not also except the rider or the driver. The speed is not his. He is a mere bunch of mistletoe to the horse. Detach him, and he is not worth timing. Human speed for the most part lies fallow. Every man starts for the goal of life at his own natural gait, and if he sees that it is too far off for him to reach it in a lifetime, he does not run the faster, but has the goal moved nearer him. The Kentuckians are not provincial. As Thoreau said, no people can long remain provincial who have a propensity for politics, whittling, and rapid travelling. They are not inaccessible to modern ideas, but the shock of modern ideas has not electrified them. They have walled themselves around with old race instincts and habitudes, and when the stream of tendency rushes against this wall, it recoils upon itself instead of sweeping away the barrier.

The typical Kentuckian regards himself an American of the Americans, and thinks as little of being like the English as he would of imitating the Jutes. In nothing is he more like his transatlantic ancestry than in strong self-content. He sits on his farm as though it were the pole of the heavens – a manly man with a heart in him. Usually of the blond type, robust, well formed, with clear, fair complexion, that grows ruddier with age and stomachic development, full neck, and an open, kind, untroubled countenance. He is frank, but not familiar; talkative, but not garrulous; full of the genial humor of local hits and allusions, but without a subtle nimbleness of wit; indulgent towards purely masculine vices, but intolerant of petty crimes; no reader of books nor master in religious debate, faith coming to him as naturally as his appetite, and growing with what it feeds upon; loving roast pig, but not caring particularly for Lamb's eulogy; loving his grass like a Greek, not because it is beautiful, but because it is fresh and green; a peaceful man with strong passions, and so to be heartily loved and respected or heartily hated and respected, but never despised or trifled with. An occasional barbecue in the woods, where the saddles of South Down mutton are roasted on spits over the coals of the mighty trench, and the steaming kettles of burgoo lend their savor to the nose of the hungry political orator, so that he becomes all the more impetuous in his invectives; the great agricultural fairs; the race-courses; the monthly county court day, when he meets his neighbors on the public square of the nearest town; the quiet Sunday mornings, when he meets them again for rather more clandestine talks at the front door of the neighborhood church – these and his own fireside are his characteristic and ample pleasures. You will never be under his roof without being touched by the mellowest of all the virtues of his race – simple, unsparing human kindness and hospitality.

The women of Kentucky have long had reputation for beauty. An average type is a refinement on the English blonde – greater delicacy of form, feature, and color. A beautiful Kentucky woman is apt to be exceedingly beautiful. Her voice is low and soft; her hands and feet delicately formed; her skin pure and beautiful in tint and shading; her eyes blue or brown, and hair nut brown or golden brown; to all which is added a certain unapproachable refinement. It must not for a moment be supposed, however, that there are not many genuinely ugly women in Kentucky.

UNCLE TOM AT HOME

I

On the outskirts of the towns of central Kentucky, a stranger, searching for the picturesque in architecture and in life, would find his attention arrested by certain masses of low frame and brick structures, and by the multitudes of strange human beings that inhabit them. A single town may have on its edges several of these settlements, which are themselves called "towns," and bear separate names either descriptive of some topographical peculiarity or taken from the original owners of the lots. It is in these that a great part of the negro population of Kentucky has packed itself since the war. Here live the slaves of the past with their descendants; old family servants from the once populous country-places; old wagon-drivers from the deep-rutted lanes; old wood-choppers from the slaughtered blue-grass forests; old harvesters and ploughmen from the long since abandoned fields; old cooks from the savory, wasteful kitchens; old nurses from the softly rocked and softly sung-to cradles. Here, too, are the homes of the younger generation, of the laundresses and the barbers, teachers and ministers of the gospel, coachmen and porters, restaurant-keepers and vagabonds, hands from the hemp factories, and workmen on the outlying farms.

You step easily from the verge of the white population to the confines of the black. But it is a great distance – like the crossing of a vast continent between the habitats of alien races. The air seems all at once to tan the cheek. Out of the cold, blue recesses of the midsummer sky the sun burns with a fierceness of heat that warps the shingles of the pointed roofs and flares with blinding brilliancy against some whitewashed wall. Perhaps in all the street no little cooling stretch of shade. The unpaved sidewalks and the roadway between are but indistinguishable parts of a common thoroughfare, along which every upspringing green thing is quickly trodden to death beneath the ubiquitous play and passing of many feet. Here and there, from some shielded nook or other coign of vantage, a single plummy branch of dog-fennel may be seen spreading its small firmament of white and golden stars close to the ground; or between its pale green stalks the faint lavender of the nightshade will take the eye as the sole emblem of the flowering world.

A negro town! Looking out the doors and windows of the cabins, lounging in the door-ways, leaning over the low frame fences, gathering into quickly forming, quickly dissolving groups in the dusty streets, they swarm. They are here from milk-white through all deepening shades to glossy blackness; octoroons, quadroons, mulattoes – some with large liquid black eyes, refined features, delicate forms; working, gossiping, higgling over prices around a vegetable cart, discussing last night's church festival, to-day's funeral, or next week's railway excursion, sleeping, planning how to get work and how to escape it. From some unseen old figure in flamboyant turban, bending over the wash-tub in the rear of a cabin, comes a crooned song of indescribable pathos; behind a half-closed front shutter, a Moorish-hued *amosoro* in gay linen thrums his banjo in a measure of ecstatic gayety preluding the more passionate melodies of the coming night. Here a fight; there the sound of the fiddle and the rhythmic patting of hands. Tatters and silks flaunt themselves side by side. Dirt and cleanliness lie down together. Indolence goes hand in hand with thrift. Superstition dogs the slow footsteps of reason. Passion and self-control eye each other across the narrow way. If there is anywhere resolute virtue, round it is a weltered muck of low and sensual desire. One sees the surviving types of old negro life here crowded together with and contrasted with the new phases of "colored" life – sees the transitional stage of a race, part of whom were born slaves and are now freemen, part of whom have been born freemen but remain so much like slaves.

It cannot fail to happen, as you walk along, that you will come upon some cabin set back in a small yard and half hidden, front and side, by an almost tropical jungle of vines and multiform foliage: patches of great sunflowers, never more leonine in tawny magnificence and sun-loving repose; festoons of white and purple morning-glories over the windows and up to the low eaves; around the porch and above the door-way, a trellis of gourd-vines swinging their long-necked, grotesque yellow fruit; about the entrance flaming hollyhocks and other brilliant bits of bloom, marigolds and petunias – evidences of the warm, native taste that still distinguishes the negro after some centuries of contact with the cold, chastened ideals of the Anglo-Saxon.

In the door-way of such a cabin, sheltered from the afternoon sun by his dense jungle of vines, but with a few rays of light glinting through the fluttering leaves across his seamed black face and white woolly head, the muscles of his once powerful arms shrunken, the gnarled hands folded idly in his lap – his occupation gone – you will haply see some old-time slave of the class of Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom. For it is true that scattered here and there throughout the negro towns of Kentucky are representatives of the same class that furnished her with her hero; true, also, that they were never sold by their Kentucky masters to the plantations of the South, but remained unsold down to the last days of slavery.

When the war scattered the negroes of Kentucky blindly, tumultuously, hither and thither, many of them gathered the members of their families about them and moved from the country into these "towns;" and here the few survivors live, ready to testify of their relations with their former masters and mistresses, and indirectly serving to point a great moral: that, however justly Mrs. Stowe may have chosen one of their number as best fitted 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 tragical fate. For it was not the *character* of Uncle Tom that she greatly idealized, as has been so often asserted; it was the category of events that were made to befall him.

As citizens of the American Republic, these old negroes – now known as "colored gentlemen," surrounded by "colored ladies and gentlemen" – have not done a great deal. The bud of liberty was ingrafted too late on the ancient slave-stock to bear much fruit. But they are interesting, as contemporaries of a type of Kentucky negro whose virtues and whose sorrows, dramatically embodied in literature, have become a by-word throughout the civilized world. And now that the war-cloud is lifting from over the landscape of the past, so that it lies still clear to the eyes of those who were once the dwellers amid its scenes, it is perhaps a good time to scan it and note some of its great moral landmarks before it grows remoter and is finally forgotten.

II

These three types – Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom, and the Shelbys, his master and mistress – were the outgrowth of natural and historic conditions peculiar to Kentucky. "Perhaps," wrote Mrs. Stowe in her novel, "the mildest form of the system of slavery is to be seen in the State of Kentucky. The general prevalence of agricultural pursuits of a quiet and gradual nature, not requiring those periodic seasons of hurry and pressure that are called for in the business of more southern districts, makes the task of the negro a more healthful and reasonable one; while the master, content with a more gradual style of acquisition, had not those temptations to hard-heartedness which always overcome frail human nature, when the prospect of sudden and rapid gain is weighed in the balance with no heavier counterpoise than the interests of the helpless and unprotected." These words contain many truths.

For it must not be forgotten, first of all, that the condition of the slave in Kentucky was measurably determined by certain physical laws which lay beyond the control of the most inhuman master. Consider the nature of the country – elevated, rolling, without miasmatic districts or fatal

swamps; the soil in the main slave-holding portions of the State easily tilled, abundantly yielding; the climate temperate and invigorating. Consider the system of agriculture – not that of vast plantations, but of small farms, part of which regularly consisted of woodland and meadow that required little attention. Consider the further limitations to this system imposed by the range of the great Kentucky staples – it being in the nature of corn, wheat, hemp, and tobacco, not to yield profits sufficient to justify the employment of an immense predial force, nor to require seasons of forced and exhausting labor. It is evident that under such conditions slavery was not stamped with those sadder features which it wore beneath a devastating sun, amid unhealthy or sterile regions of country, and through the herding together of hundreds of slaves who had the outward but not the inward discipline of an army. True, one recalls here the often quoted words of Jefferson on the raising of tobacco – words nearly as often misapplied as quoted; for he was considering the condition of slaves who were unmercifully worked on exhausted lands by a certain proletarian type of master, who did not feed and clothe them. Only under such circumstances could the culture of this plant be described as "productive of infinite wretchedness," and those engaged in it as "in a continual state of exertion beyond the powers of nature to support." It was by reason of these physical facts that slavery in Kentucky assumed the phase which is to be distinguished as domestic; and it was this mode that had prevailed at the North and made emancipation easy.

Furthermore, in all history the condition of an enslaved race under the enslaving one has been partly determined by the degree of moral justification with which the latter has regarded the subject of human bondage; and the life of the Kentucky negro, say in the days of Uncle Tom, was further modified by the body of laws which had crystallized as the sentiment of the people, slave-holders themselves. But even these laws were only a partial exponent of what that sentiment was; for some of the severest were practically a dead letter, and the clemency of the negro's treatment by the prevailing type of master made amends for the hard provisions of others.

It would be a difficult thing to write the history of slavery in Kentucky. It is impossible to write a single page of it here. But it may be said that the conscience of the great body of the people was always sensitive touching the rightfulness of the institution. At the very outset it seems to have been recognized simply for the reason that the early settlers were emigrants from slave-holding States and brought their negroes with them. The commonwealth began its legislation on the subject in the face of an opposing sentiment. By early statute restriction was placed on the importation of slaves, and from the first they began to be emancipated. Throughout the seventy-five years of pro-slavery State-life, the general conscience was always troubled.

The churches took up the matter. Great preachers, whose names were influential beyond the State, denounced the system from the pulpit, pleaded for the humane and Christian treatment of slaves, advocated gradual emancipation. One religious body after another proclaimed the moral evil of it, and urged that the young be taught and prepared as soon as possible for freedom. Antislavery publications and addresses, together with the bold words of great political leaders, acted as a further leaven in the mind of the slave-holding class. As evidence of this, when the new constitution of the State was to be adopted, about 1850, thirty thousand votes were cast in favor of an open clause in it, whereby gradual emancipation should become a law as soon as the majority of the citizens should deem it expedient for the peace of society; and these votes represented the richest, most intelligent slave-holders in the State.

In general the laws were perhaps the mildest. Some it is vital to the subject not to pass over. If slaves were inhumanly treated by their owner or not supplied with proper food and clothing, they could be taken from him and sold to a better master. This law was not inoperative. I have in mind the instance of a family who lost their negroes in this way, were socially disgraced, and left their neighborhood. If the owner of a slave had bought him on condition of not selling him out of the county, or into the Southern States, or so as not to separate him from his family, he could be sued for violation of contract. This law shows the opposition of the better class of Kentucky masters to

the slave-trade, and their peculiar regard for the family ties of their negroes. In the earliest Kentucky newspapers will be found advertisements of the sales of negroes, on condition that they would be bought and kept within the county or the State. It was within chancery jurisdiction to prevent the separation of families. The case may be mentioned of a master who was tried by his Church for unnecessarily separating a husband from his wife. Sometimes slaves who had been liberated and had gone to Canada voluntarily returned into service under their former masters. Lest these should be overreached, they were to be taken aside and examined by the court to see that they understood the consequences of their own action, and were free from improper constraint. On the other hand, if a slave had a right to his freedom, he could file a bill in chancery and enforce his master's assent thereto.

But a clear distinction must be made between the mild view entertained by the Kentucky slave-holders regarding the system itself and their dislike of the agitators of forcible and immediate emancipation. A community of masters, themselves humane to their negroes and probably intending to liberate them in the end, would yet combine into a mob to put down individual or organized antislavery efforts, because they resented what they regarded an interference of the abolitionist with their own affairs, and believed his measures inexpedient for the peace of society. Therefore, the history of the antislavery movement in Kentucky, at times so turbulent, must not be used to show the sentiment of the people regarding slavery itself.

III

From these general considerations it is possible to enter more closely upon a study of the domestic life and relations of Uncle Tom and the Shelbys.

"Whoever visits some estates there," wrote Mrs. Stowe, "and witnesses the good-humored indulgence of some masters and mistresses and the affectionate loyalty of some slaves, might be tempted to dream of the oft-fabled poetic legend of a patriarchal institution." Along with these words, taken from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I should like to quote an extract from a letter written me by Mrs. Stowe under date of April 30, 1886:

"In relation to your letter, I would say that I never lived in Kentucky, but spent many years in Cincinnati, which is separated from Kentucky only by the Ohio River, which, as a shrewd politician remarked, was dry one-half the year and frozen the other. My father was president of a theological seminary at Walnut Hills, near Cincinnati, and with him I travelled and visited somewhat extensively in Kentucky, and there became acquainted with those excellent slave-holders delineated in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I saw many counterparts of the Shelbys – people humane, conscientious, just and generous, who regarded slavery as an evil and were anxiously considering their duties to the slave. But it was not till I had finally left the West, and my husband was settled as professor in Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, that the passage of the fugitive-slave law and the distresses that followed it drew this from me."

The typical boy on a Kentucky farm was tenderly associated from infancy with the negroes of the household and the fields. His old black "Mammy" became almost his first mother, and was but slowly crowded out of his conscience and his heart by the growing image of the true one. She had perhaps nursed him at her bosom when he was not long enough to stretch across it, sung over his cradle at noon and at midnight, taken him out upon the velvety grass beneath the shade of the elm-trees to watch his first manly resolution of standing alone in the world and walking the vast distance of some inches. Often, in boyish years, when flying from the house with a loud appeal from the incomprehensible code of Anglo-Saxon punishment for small misdemeanors, he had run to those black arms and cried himself to sleep in the lap of African sympathy. As he grew older, alas! his

first love grew faithless; and while "Mammy" was good enough in her way and sphere, his wandering affections settled humbly at the feet of another great functionary of the household – the cook in the kitchen. To him her keys were as the keys to the kingdom of heaven, for his immortal soul was his immortal appetite. When he stood by the biscuit bench while she, pausing amid the varied industries that went into the preparation of an old-time Kentucky supper, made him marvellous geese of dough, with farinaceous feathers and genuine coffee-grains for eyes, there was to him no other artist in the world who possessed the secret of so commingling the useful with the beautiful.

The little half-naked imps, too, playing in the dirt like glossy blackbirds taking a bath of dust, were his sweetest, because perhaps his forbidden, companions. With them he went clandestinely to the fatal duck-pond in the stable lot, to learn the art of swimming on a walnut rail. With them he raced up and down the lane on blooded alder-stalk horses, afterwards leading the exhausted coursers into stables of green bushes and haltering them high with a cotton string. It was one of these hatless children of original Guinea that had crept up to him as he lay asleep in the summer grass and told him where the best hidden of all nests was to be found in a far fence corner – that of the high-tempered, scolding guinea-hen. To them he showed his first Barlow knife; for them he blew his first home-made whistle. He is their petty tyrant to-day; to-morrow he will be their repentant friend, dividing with them his marbles and proposing a game of hopscotch. Upon his dialect, his disposition, his whole character, is laid the ineffaceable impress of theirs, so that they pass into the final reckoning-up of his life here and in the world to come.

But Uncle Tom! – the negro overseer of the place – the greatest of all the negroes – greater even than the cook, when one is not hungry. How often has he straddled Uncle Tom's neck, or ridden behind him afield on a barebacked horse to the jingling music of the trace-chains! It is Uncle Tom who plaits his hempen whip and ties the cracker in a knot that will stay. It is Uncle Tom who brings him his first young squirrel to tame, the teeth of which are soon to be planted in his right forefinger. Many a time he slips out of the house to take his dinner or supper in the cabin with Uncle Tom; and during long winter evenings he loves to sit before those great roaring cabin fireplaces that throw their red and yellow lights over the half circle of black faces and on the mysteries of broom-making, chair-bottoming, and the cobbling of shoes. Like the child who listens to "Uncle Remus," he, too, hears songs and stories, and creeps back to the house with a wondering look in his eyes and a vague hush of spirit.

Then come school-days and vacations during which, as Mrs. Stowe says, he may teach Uncle Tom to make his letters on a slate or expound to him the Scriptures. Then, too, come early adventures with the gun, and 'coon hunts and 'possum hunts with the negroes under the round moon, with the long-eared, deep-voiced hounds – to him delicious and ever-memorable nights! The crisp air, through which the breath rises like white incense, the thick autumn leaves, begemmed with frost, rustling underfoot; the shadows of the mighty trees; the strained ear; the heart leaping with excitement; the negroes and dogs mingling their wild delight in music that wakes the echoes of distant hill-sides. Away! Away! mile after mile, hour after hour, to where the purple and golden persimmons hang low from the boughs, or where from topmost limbs the wild grape drops its countless clusters in a black cascade a sheer two hundred feet.

Now he is a boy no longer, but has his first love-affair, which sends a thrill through all those susceptible cabins; has his courtship, which gives rise to many a wink and innuendo; and brings home his bride, whose coming converts every youngster into a living rolling ball on the ground, and opens the feasts and festivities of universal joy.

Then some day "ole Marster" dies, and the negroes, one by one, young and old, file into the darkened parlor to take a last look at his quiet face. He had his furious temper, "ole Marster" had, and his sins – which God forgive! To-day he will be buried, and to-morrow "young Marster" will inherit his saddle-horse and ride out into the fields.

Thus he has come into possession of his negroes. Among them are a few whose working days are over. These are to be kindly cared for, decently buried. Next are the active laborers, and, last, the generation of children. He knows them all by name, capacity, and disposition; is bound to them by life-long associations; hears their communications and complaints. When he goes to town, he is charged with commissions, makes purchases with their own money. Continuing the course of his father, he sets about making them capable, contented workmen. There shall be special training for special aptitude. One shall be made a blacksmith, a second a carpenter, a third a cobbler of shoes. In all the general industries of the farm, education shall not be lacking. It is claimed that a Kentucky negro invented the hemp-brake. As a result of this effective management, the Southern planter, looking northward, will pay him a handsome premium for his blue-grass slave. He will have no white overseer. He does not like the type of man. Besides, one is not needed. Uncle Tom served his father in this capacity; let him be.

Among his negroes he finds a bad one. What shall he do with him? Keep him? Keeping him makes him worse, and moreover he corrupts the others. Set him free? That is to put a reward upon evil. Sell him to his neighbors? They do not want him. If they did, he would not sell him to them. He sells him into the South. This is a statement, not an apology. Here, for a moment, one touches the terrible subject of the internal slave-trade. Negroes were sold from Kentucky into the Southern market because, as has just been said, they were bad, or by reason of the law of partible inheritance, or, as was the case with Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom, under constraint of debt. Of course, in many cases, they were sold wantonly and cruelly; but these, however many, were not enough to make the internal slave-trade more than an incidental and subordinate feature of the system. The belief that negroes in Kentucky were regularly bred and reared for the Southern market is a mistaken one. Mrs. Stowe herself fell into the error of basing an argument for the prevalence of the slave-trade in this State upon the notion of exhausted lands, as the following passage from *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* shows:

"In Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky slave-labor long ago impoverished the soil almost beyond recovery and became entirely unprofitable."

Those words were written some thirty-five years ago and refer to a time long prior to that date. Now, the fact is that at least one-half the soil of Kentucky has never been under cultivation, and could not, therefore, have been exhausted by slave-labor. At least a half of the remainder, though cultivated ever since, is still not seriously exhausted; and of the small portion still left a large share was always naturally poor, so that for this reason slave-labor was but little employed on it. The great slave-holding region of the State was the fertile region which has never been impoverished. To return from this digression, it may be well that the typical Kentucky farmer does not find among his negroes a bad one; for in consequence of the early non-importation of slaves for barter or sale, and through long association with the household, they have been greatly elevated and humanized. If he must sell a good one, he will seek a buyer among his neighbors. He will even ask the negro to name his choice of a master and try to consummate his wish. No purchaser near by, he will mount his saddle-horse and look for one in the adjoining county. In this way the negroes of different estates and neighborhoods were commonly connected by kinship and intermarriage. How unjust to say that such a master did not feel affection for his slaves, anxiety for their happiness, sympathy with the evils inseparable from their condition. Let me cite the case of a Kentucky master who had failed. He could pay his debts by sacrificing his negroes or his farm, one or the other. To avoid separating the former, probably sending some of them South, he kept them in a body and sold his farm. Any one who knows the Kentuckian's love of land and home will know what this means. A few years, and the war left him without anything. Another case is more interesting still. A master having failed, actually hurried his negroes off to Canada. Tried for defrauding his creditors, and that by slave-holding jurors, he was acquitted. The plea of his counsel, among other arguments, was the master's unwillingness to see his old and faithful servitors scattered and suffering. After emancipation old farm hands sometimes

refused to budge from their cabins. Their former masters paid them for their services as long as they could work, and supported them when helpless. I have in mind an instance where a man, having left Kentucky, sent back hundreds of dollars to an aged, needy domestic, though himself far from rich; and another case where a man still contributes annually to the maintenance of those who ceased to work for him the quarter of a century ago.

The good in human nature is irrepressible. Slavery, evil as it was, when looked at from the remoteness of human history as it is to be, will be adjudged an institution that gave development to certain noble types of character. Along with other social forces peculiar to the age, it produced in Kentucky a kind of farmer, the like of which will never appear again. He had the aristocratic virtues: highest notions of personal liberty and personal honor, a fine especial scorn of anything that was mean, little, cowardly. As an agriculturist he was not driving or merciless or grasping; the rapid amassing of wealth was not among his passions, the contention of splendid living not among his thorns. To a certain carelessness of riches he added a certain profuseness of expenditure; and indulgent towards his own pleasures, towards others, his equals or dependents, he bore himself with a spirit of kindness and magnanimity. Intolerant of tyranny, he was no tyrant. To say of such a man, as Jefferson said of every slave-holder, that he lived in perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions and unremitting despotism, and in the exaction of the most degrading submission, was to pronounce judgment hasty and unfair. Rather did Mrs. Stowe, while not blind to his faults, discern his virtues when she made him, embarrassed by debt, exclaim: "If anybody had said to me that I should sell Tom down South to one of those rascally traders, I should have said, 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?'"

IV

But there was another person who, more than the master, sustained close relationship to the negro life of the household – the mistress. In the person of Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Stowe described some of the best traits of a Kentucky woman of the time; but perhaps only a Southern woman herself could do full justice to a character which many duties and many burdens endued with extraordinary strength and varied efficiency.

She was mistress of distinct realms – the house and the cabins – and the guardian of the bonds between the two, which were always troublesome, often delicate, sometimes distressing. In those cabins were nearly always some poor creatures needing sympathy and watch-care: the superannuated mothers helpless with babes, babes helpless without mothers, the sick, perhaps the idiotic. Apparel must be had for all. Standing in her door-way and pointing to the meadow, she must be able to say in the words of a housewife of the period, "There are the sheep; now get your clothes." Some must be taught to keep the spindle and the loom going; others trained for dairy, laundry, kitchen, dining-room; others yet taught fine needle-work. Upon her fell the labor of private instruction and moral exhortation, for the teaching of negroes was not forbidden in Kentucky.

She must remind them that their marriage vows are holy and binding; must interpose between mothers and their cruel punishment of their own offspring. Hardest of all, she must herself punish for lying, theft, immorality. Her own children must be guarded against temptation and corrupting influences. In her life no cessation of this care year in and year out. Beneath every other trouble the secret conviction that she has no right to enslave these creatures, and that, however improved their condition, their life is one of great and necessary evils. Mrs. Stowe well makes her say: "I have tried – tried most faithfully as a Christian woman should – to do my duty towards these poor, simple, dependent creatures. I have cared for them, instructed them, watched over them, and known all their little cares and joys for years... I have taught them the duties of the family, of parent and child, and husband and wife... I thought, by kindness and care and instruction, I could make the condition of mine better than freedom." Soberly overburdened and heroic mould of woman! Fulfilling each day a round of intricate duties, rising at any hour of the night to give medicine to the sick, liable at any

time, in addition to the cares of her great household, to see an entire family of acquaintances arriving unannounced, with trunks and servants of their own, for a visit protracted in accordance with the large hospitalities of the time. What wonder if, from sheer inability to do all things herself, she trains her negroes to different posts of honor, so that the black cook finally expels her from her own kitchen and rules over that realm as an autocrat of unquestioned prerogatives?

Mistresses of this kind had material reward in the trusty adherence of their servants during the war. Their relations throughout this period – so well calculated to try the loyalty of the African nature – would of themselves make up a volume of the most touching incidents. Even to-day one will find in many Kentucky households survivals of the old order – find "Aunt Chloe" ruling as a despot in the kitchen, and making her will the pivotal point of the whole domestic system. I have spent nights with a young Kentuckian, self-willed and high-spirited, whose occasional refusals to rise for a half-past five o'clock breakfast always brought the cook from the kitchen up to his bedroom, where she delivered her commands in a voice worthy of Catherine the Great. "We shall have to get up," he would say, "or there'll be a row!" One may yet see old negresses setting out for an annual or a semi-annual visit to their former mistresses, and bearing some offering – a basket of fruits or flowers. I should like to mention the case of one who died after the war and left her two children to her mistress, to be reared and educated. The troublesome, expensive charge was faithfully executed.

Here, in the hard realities of daily life, here is where the crushing burden of slavery fell – on the women of the South. History has yet to do justice to the noblest type of them, whether in Kentucky or elsewhere. In view of what they accomplished, despite the difficulties in their way, there is nothing they have found harder to forgive in the women of the North than the failure to sympathize with them in the struggles and sorrows of their lot, and to realize that *they*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.