

CHAPTER V

BRUNSWICK

ON the eve of sailing for Brunswick, Mrs. Stowe writes to Mrs. Sykes (Miss May): "I am wearied and worn out with seeing to bedsteads, tables, chairs, mattresses, with thinking about shipping my goods and making out accounts, and I have my trunk yet to pack, as I go on board the Bath steamer this evening. I beg you to look up Brunswick on the map; it is about half a day's ride in the cars from Boston. I expect to reach there by the way of Bath by to-morrow forenoon. There I have a house engaged and kind friends who offer every hospitable assistance. Come, therefore, to see me, and we will have a long talk in the pine woods, and knit up the whole history from the place where we left it."

Before leaving Boston she had written to her husband in Cincinnati: "You are not able just now to bear anything, my dear husband, therefore trust all to me; I never doubt or despair. I am already making arrangements with editors to raise money.

"I have sent some overtures to Wright. If he accepts my pieces and pays you for them, take the money and use it as you see necessary; if not, be sure and bring the pieces back to me. I am strong in spirit, and God who has been with me in so many straits will not forsake me now. I know Him well; He is my Father, and though I may be a blind and erring child, He will help me for all that. My trust through all errors and sins is in Him. He who helped poor timid Jacob through all his fears and appre-

hensions, who helped Abraham even when he sinned, who was with David in his wanderings, and who held up the too confident Peter when he began to sink, — He will help us, and his arms are about us, so that we shall not sink, my dear husband.”

She writes from Brunswick the last of May: “After a week of most incessant northeast storm, most discouraging and forlorn to the children, the sun has at length come out. . . . There is a fair wind blowing, and every prospect, therefore, that our goods will arrive promptly from Boston, and that we shall be in our own house by next week. Mrs. Upham¹ has done everything for me, giving up time and strength and taking charge of my affairs in a way without which we could not have got along at all in a strange place and in my present helpless condition. This family is delightful, there is such a perfect sweetness and quietude in all its movements. Not a harsh word or hasty expression is ever heard. It is a beautiful pattern of a Christian family, a beautiful exemplification of religion.” . . .

The events of the first summer in Brunswick are graphically described by Mrs. Stowe in a letter written to her sister in-law, Mrs. George Beecher, in December.

“MY DEAR SISTER, — Is it really true that snow is on the ground and Christmas coming, and I have not written unto thee, most dear sister? No, I don't believe it! I have n't been so naughty — it's all a mistake — yes, written I must have — and written I have, too — in the night-watches as I lay on my bed — such beautiful letters — I wish you had only received them; but by day it has been hurry, hurry, hurry, and drive, drive, drive! or else the calm of a sick-room, ever since last spring.

“I put off writing when your letter first came, because

¹ Wife of Professor Upham of Bowdoin College.

I meant to write you a long letter, — a full and complete one; and so days slid by, — and became weeks, — and my little Charley came . . . etc. and etc.!!! Sarah, when I look back, I wonder at myself, not that I forget any one thing that I should remember, but that I have remembered anything. From the time that I left Cincinnati with my children to come forth to a country that I knew not of almost to the present time, it has seemed as if I could scarcely breathe, I was so pressed with care. My head dizzy with the whirl of railroads and steamboats; then ten days' sojourn in Boston, and a constant toil and hurry in buying my furniture and equipments; and then landing in Brunswick in the midst of a drizzly, inexorable north-east storm, and beginning the work of getting in order a deserted, dreary, damp old house. All day long running from one thing to another, as, for example, thus:—

“Mrs. Stowe, how shall I make this lounge, and what shall I cover the back with first?’

“*Mrs. Stowe.* ‘With the coarse cotton in the closet.’

“*Woman.* ‘Mrs. Stowe, there isn’t any more soap to clean the windows.’

“*Mrs. Stowe.* ‘Where shall I get soap?’

“‘Here, H., run up to the store and get two bars.’

“‘There is a man below wants to see Mrs. Stowe about the cistern. Before you go down, Mrs. Stowe, just show me how to cover this round end of the lounge.’

“‘There’s a man up from the depot, and he says that a box has come for Mrs. Stowe, and it’s coming up to the house; will you come down and see about it?’

“‘Mrs. Stowe, don’t go till you have shown the man how to nail that carpet in the corner. He’s nailed it all crooked; what shall he do? The black thread is all used up, and what shall I do about putting gimp on the back of that sofa? Mrs. Stowe, there is a man come with a lot of pails and tinware from Furbish; will you settle the bill now?’

“Mrs. Stowe, here is a letter just come from Boston inclosing that bill of lading; the man wants to know what he shall do with the goods. If you will tell me what to say, I will answer the letter for you.’

“Mrs. Stowe, the meat-man is at the door. Hadn’t we better get a little beefsteak, or something, for dinner?’

“Shall Hatty go to Boardman’s for some more black thread?’

“Mrs. Stowe, this cushion is an inch too wide for the frame. What shall we do now?’

“Mrs. Stowe, where are the screws of the black walnut bedstead?’

“Here’s a man has brought in these bills for freight. Will you settle them now?’

“Mrs. Stowe, I don’t understand using this great needle. I can’t make it go through the cushion; it sticks in the cotton.’

“Then comes a letter from my husband, saying he is sick abed, and all but dead; don’t ever expect to see his family again; wants to know how I shall manage, in case I am left a widow; knows we shall get in debt and never get out; wonders at my courage; thinks I am very sanguine; warns me to be prudent, as there won’t be much to live on in case of his death, etc., etc., etc. I read the letter and poke it into the stove, and proceed. . . .

“Some of my adventures were quite funny; as for example: I had in my kitchen-elect no sink, cistern, or any other water privileges, so I bought at the cotton factory two of the great hogsheads they bring oil in, which here in Brunswick are often used for cisterns, and had them brought up in triumph to my yard, and was congratulating myself on my energy, when lo and behold! it was discovered that there was no cellar door except one in the kitchen, which was truly a strait and narrow way, down a long pair of stairs. Hereupon, as saith John Bunyan,

I fell into a muse, — how to get my cisterns into my cellar. In days of chivalry I might have got a knight to make me a breach through the foundation walls, but that was not to be thought of now, and my oil hogsheads, standing disconsolately in the yard, seemed to reflect no great credit on my foresight. In this strait I fell upon a real honest Yankee cooper, whom I besought, for the reputation of his craft and mine, to take my hogsheads to pieces, carry them down in staves, and set them up again, which the worthy man actually accomplished one fair summer forenoon, to the great astonishment of ‘us Yankees.’ When my man came to put up the pump, he stared very hard to see my hogsheads thus translated and standing as innocent and quiet as could be in the cellar, and then I told him, in a very mild, quiet way, that I got ‘em taken to pieces and put together, — just as if I had been always in the habit of doing such things. Professor Smith came down and looked very hard at them and then said, ‘Well, nothing can beat a willful woman.’ Then followed divers negotiations with a very clever, but (with reverence) somewhat lazy gentleman of jobs, who occupieth a carpenter’s shop opposite to mine. This same John Titcomb, my very good friend, is a character peculiar to Yankeedom. He is part owner and landlord of the house I rent, and connected by birth with all the best families in town; a man of real intelligence, and good education, a great reader, and quite a thinker. Being of an ingenious turn, he does painting, gilding, staining, upholstery jobs, varnishing, all in addition to his primary trade of carpentry. But he is a man studious of ease, and fully possessed with the idea that man wants but little here below; so he boards himself in his workshop on crackers and herring, washed down with cold water, and spends his time working, musing, reading new publications, and taking his comfort. In his shop you shall see a joiner’s bench, hammers, planes, saws,

gimlets, varnish, paint, picture frames, fence posts, rare old china, one or two fine portraits of his ancestry, a book-case full of books, the tooth of a whale, an old spinning-wheel and spindle, a lady's parasol frame, a church lamp to be mended, in short, Henry says Mr. Titcomb's shop is like the ocean; there is no end to the curiosities in it.

"In all my moving and fussing Mr. Titcomb has been my right-hand man. Whenever a screw was loose, a nail to be driven, a lock mended, a pane of glass set, — and these cases were manifold, — he was always on hand. But my sink was no fancy job, and I believe nothing but a very particular friendship would have moved him to undertake it. So this same sink lingered in a precarious state for some weeks, and when I had *nothing else to do*, I used to call and do what I could in the way of enlisting the good man's sympathies in its behalf.

"How many times I have been in and seated myself in one of the old rocking-chairs, and talked first of the news of the day, the railroad, the last proceedings in Congress, the probabilities about the millennium, and thus brought the conversation by little and little round to my sink! . . . because, till the sink was done, the pump could not be put up, and we could n't have any rain-water. Sometimes my courage would quite fail me to introduce the subject, and I would talk of everything else, turn and get out of the shop, and then turn back as if a thought had just struck my mind, and say: —

"“ Oh, Mr. Titcomb! about that sink? ”

"“ Yes, ma'am, I was thinking about going down street this afternoon to look out stuff for it. ”

"“ Yes, sir, if you would be good enough to get it done as soon as possible; we are in great need of it. ”

"“ I think there's no hurry. I believe we are going to have a dry time now, so that you could not catch any water, and you won't need a pump at present. ”

“These negotiations extended from the first of June to the first of July, and at last my sink was completed, and so also was a new house spout, concerning which I had had divers communings with Deacon Dunning of the Baptist church. Also during this time good Mrs. Mitchell and myself made two sofas, or lounges, a barrel chair, divers bedspreads, pillow cases, pillows, bolsters, mattresses; we painted rooms; we revarnished furniture; we — what *did n't* we do?

“Then came on Mr. Stowe; and then came the eighth of July and my little Charley. I was really glad for an excuse to lie in bed, for I was full tired, I can assure you. Well, I was what folks call very comfortable for two weeks, when my nurse had to leave me. . . .

“During this time I have employed my leisure hours in making up my engagements with newspaper editors. I have written more than anybody, or I myself, would have thought. I have taught an hour a day in our school, and I have read two hours every evening to the children. The children study English history in school, and I am reading Scott's historic novels in their order. To-night I finish the ‘Abbot;’ shall begin ‘Kenilworth’ next week; yet I am constantly pursued and haunted by the idea that I don't do anything. Since I began this note I have been called off at least a dozen times; once for the fish-man, to buy a codfish; once to see a man who had brought me some barrels of apples; once to see a book-man; then to Mrs. Upham, to see about a drawing I promised to make for her; then to nurse the baby; then into the kitchen to make a chowder for dinner; and now I am at it again, for nothing but deadly determination enables me ever to write; it is rowing against wind and tide.

“I suppose you think now I have begun, I am never going to stop, and, in truth, it looks like it; but the spirit moves now and I must obey.

"Christmas is coming, and our little household is all alive with preparations; every one collecting their little gifts with wonderful mystery and secrecy. . . ."

"To tell the truth, dear, I am getting tired; my neck and back ache, and I must come to a close.

"Your ready kindness to me in the spring I felt very much; and *why* I did not have the sense to have sent you one line just by way of acknowledgment, I'm sure I don't know; I felt just as if I had, till I awoke, and behold! I had not. But, my dear, if my wits are somewhat wool-gathering and unsettled, my heart is as true as a star. I love you, and have thought of you often.

"This fall I have felt often *sad*, lonesome, both very unusual feelings with me in these busy days; but the breaking away from my old home, and leaving father and mother, and coming to a strange place affected me naturally. In those sad hours my thoughts have often turned to George; I have thought with encouragement of his blessed state, and hoped that I should soon be there, too. I have many warm and kind friends here, and have been treated with great attention and kindness. Brunswick is a delightful residence, and if you come East next summer, you must come to my new home. George¹ would delight to go a-fishing with the children, and see the ships, and sail in the sailboats, and all that.

"Give Aunt Harriet's love to him, and tell him when he gets to be a painter to send me a picture.

"Affectionately yours,

"H. STOWE."

Her spirit was still unsatisfied. In spite of striving and incessant devotion, there was yet a deeper cry in her for humanity, which had not found expression. Few women had suffered more or had enjoyed more than she;

¹ Her brother George's only child.

her experience was ripe for others, and her joy was large enough to give hope to the down-trodden.

Upon her way to Brunswick she stopped, as we have said, at the house of her brother in Boston, Dr. Edward Beecher. Daniel Webster's seventh of March speech was still ringing in the ears of the people. The hated Compromise had been defended by their idol, and he was cast into the dust. "Ichabod," Whittier cried, "so fallen, so lost! 'When honor dies the man is dead.'"

The hearts of men were aflame at the Fugitive Slave Act, which was then being debated and finally passed by the Congress of that year. The conversation turned upon this topic, and heart-rending scenes were described of families broken up, men frozen by flight in winter through rivers and pathless forests on their way to Canada. After Mrs. Stowe reached Brunswick Mrs. Edward Beecher wrote to her sister: "Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something to make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is."

One of Mrs. Stowe's children remembers well the scene in the little parlor in Brunswick when the letter alluded to was received. Mrs. Stowe herself read it aloud to the assembled family, and when she came to the passage, "I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is," Mrs. Stowe rose up from her chair, crushing the letter in her hand, and with an expression on her face that stamped itself on the mind of her child, said: "I will write something. I will if I live."

In December, Mrs. Stowe sent a message to her sister: "Tell Katy I thank her for her letter and will answer it. As long as the baby sleeps with me nights I can't do much at anything, but I will do it at last. I will write that thing if I live.

"What are folks in general saying about the slave law,

and the stand taken by Boston ministers universally, except Edward?

"To me it is incredible, amazing, mournful!! I feel as if I should be willing to sink with it, were all this sin and misery to sink in the sea. . . . I wish father would come on to Boston, and preach on the Fugitive Slave Law, as he once preached on the slave-trade, when I was a little girl in Litchfield. I sobbed aloud in one pew and Mrs. Judge Reeves in another. I wish some Martin Luther would arise to set this community right."

She also writes to Professor Stowe at Christmas time and cheers him up by telling him of stories she had been writing for the "Era," and other papers, in which he figures as a farmer, the facts being drawn from life!! But the New Year had not arrived when she records days of terrible cold, which made it almost impossible to hold a pen.

December 29. "We have had terrible weather here. I remember such a storm when I was a child in Litchfield. Father and mother went to Warren, and were almost lost in the snowdrifts.

"Sunday night I rather watched than slept. The wind howled, and the house rocked just as our old Litchfield house used to. The cold has been so intense that the children have kept begging to get up from table at meal-times to warm feet and fingers. Our air-tight stoves warm all but the floor, — heat your head and keep your feet freezing. If I sit by the open fire in the parlor my back freezes; if I sit in my bedroom and try to write my head aches and my feet are cold. I am projecting a sketch for the 'Era' on the capabilities of liberated blacks to take care of themselves. Can't you find out for me how much Willie Watson has paid for the redemption of his friends, and get any items in figures of that kind that you can pick up in Cincinnati? . . . When I have a headache and feel

sick, as I do to-day, there is actually not a place in the house where I can lie down and take a nap without being disturbed. Overhead is the school-room, next door is the dining-room, and the girls practice there two hours a day. If I lock my door and lie down, some one is sure to be rattling the latch before fifteen minutes have passed. . . . There is no doubt in my mind that our expenses this year will come two hundred dollars, if not three, beyond our salary. We shall be able to come through, notwithstanding, but I don't want to feel obliged to work as hard every year as I have this. I can earn four hundred dollars a year by writing, but I don't want to feel that I must, and when weary with teaching the children, and tending the baby, and buying provisions, and mending dresses, and darning stockings, sit down and write a piece for some paper.

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"Ever since we left Cincinnati to come here the good hand of God has been visibly guiding our way. Through what difficulties have we been brought! Though we knew not where means were to come from, yet means have been furnished every step of the way, and in every time of need. I was just in some discouragement with regard to my writing; thinking that the editor of the 'Era' was overstocked with contributors, and would not want my services another year, and lo! he sends me one hundred dollars, and ever so many good words with it. Our income this year will be seventeen hundred dollars in all, and I hope to bring our expenses within thirteen hundred."

Twenty-five years afterwards Mrs. Stowe wrote to her son Charles of this period of her life: "I well remember the winter you were a baby and I was writing 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' My heart was bursting with the anguish excited by the cruelty and injustice our nation was showing to the slave, and praying God to let me do a little,

and to cause my cry for them to be heard. I remember many a night weeping over you as you lay sleeping beside me, and I thought of the slave mothers whose babes were torn from them."

In April the first chapter of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was dispatched to Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, the editor of the "National Era" in Washington. In July, Mrs. Stowe wrote as follows:—

BRUNSWICK, July 9, 1851.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, Esq.:

Sir, — You may perhaps have noticed in your editorial readings a series of articles that I am furnishing for the "Era" under the title of "Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly."

In the course of my story the scene will fall upon a cotton plantation. I am very desirous, therefore, to gain information from one who has been an actual laborer on one, and it occurred to me that in the circle of your acquaintance there might be one who would be able to communicate to me some such information as I desire. I have before me an able paper written by a Southern planter, in which the details and *modus operandi* are given from his point of sight. I am anxious to have something more from another standpoint. I wish to be able to make a picture that shall be graphic and true to nature in its details. Such a person as Henry Bibb, if in the country, might give me just the kind of information I desire. You may possibly know of some other person. I will subjoin to this letter a list of questions, which in that case you will do me a favor by inclosing to the individual, with the request that he will at earliest convenience answer them.

For some few weeks past I have received your paper through the mail, and have read it with great interest,

and desire to return my acknowledgments for it. It will be a pleasure to me at some time when less occupied to contribute something to its columns. I have noticed with regret your sentiments on two subjects, — the church and African colonization, . . . with the more regret because I think you have a considerable share of reason for your feelings on both these subjects; but I would willingly, if I could, modify your views on both points.

In the first place you say the church is “pro-slavery.” There is a sense in which this may be true. The American church of all denominations, taken as a body, comprises the best and most conscientious people in the country. I do not say it comprises none but these, or that none such are found out of it, but only if a census were taken of the purest and most high-principled men and women of the country, the majority of them would be found to be professors of religion in some of the various Christian denominations. This fact has given to the church great weight in this country, — the general and predominant spirit of intelligence and probity and piety of its majority has given it that degree of weight that it has the power to decide the great moral questions of the day. Whatever it unitedly and decidedly sets itself against as moral evil it can put down. In this sense the church is responsible for the sin of slavery. Dr. Barnes has beautifully and briefly expressed this on the last page of his work on slavery, when he says: “Not all the force out of the church could sustain slavery an hour if it were not sustained in it.” It then appears that the church has the power to put an end to this evil and does not do it. In this sense she may be said to be pro-slavery. But the church has the same power over intemperance, and Sabbath-breaking, and sin of all kinds. There is not a doubt that if the moral power of the church were brought up to the New Testament standpoint it is sufficient to put an

end to all these as well as to slavery. But I would ask you, Would you consider it a fair representation of the Christian church in this country to say that it is pro-intemperance, pro-Sabbath-breaking, and pro everything that it might put down if it were in a higher state of moral feeling? If you should make a list of all the abolitionists of the country, I think that you would find a majority of them in the church, — certainly some of the most influential and efficient ones are ministers.

I am a minister's daughter, and a minister's wife, and I have had six brothers in the ministry (one is in heaven); I certainly ought to know something of the feelings of ministers on this subject. I was a child in 1820 when the Missouri question was agitated, and one of the strongest and deepest impressions on my mind was that made by my father's sermons and prayers, and the anguish of his soul for the poor slave at that time. I remember his preaching drawing tears down the hardest faces of the old farmers in his congregation.

I well remember his prayers morning and evening in the family for "poor, oppressed, bleeding Africa," that the time of her deliverance might come; prayers offered with strong crying and tears, and which indelibly impressed my heart and made me what I am from my very soul, the enemy of all slavery. Every brother I have has been in his sphere a leading anti-slavery man. One of them was to the last the bosom friend and counselor of Lovejoy. As for myself and husband, we have for the last seventeen years lived on the border of a slave State, and we have never shrunk from the fugitives, and we have helped them with all we had to give. I have received the children of liberated slaves into a family school, and taught them with my own children, and it has been the influence that we found in the church and by the altar that has made us do all this. Gather up all the sermons that have been pub-

lished on this offensive and unchristian Fugitive Slave Law, and you will find that those against it are numerically more than those in its favor, and yet some of the strongest opponents have not published their sermons. Out of thirteen ministers who meet with my husband weekly for discussion of moral subjects, only three are found who will acknowledge or obey this law in any shape.

After all, my brother, the strength and hope of your oppressed race does lie in the church, — in hearts united to Him of whom it is said, "He shall spare the souls of the needy, and precious shall their blood be in his sight." Everything is against you, but Jesus Christ is for you, and He has not forgotten his church, misguided and erring though it be. I have looked all the field over with despairing eyes; I see no hope but in Him. This movement must and will become a purely religious one. The light will spread in churches, the tone of feeling will rise, Christians North and South will give up all connection with, and take up their testimony against, slavery, and thus the work will be done.

The great story was at last finished in "The National Era," April, 1852. She had put her life-blood, her prayers, and her tears into the work; yet she had no reason to know that her labors were to find response in the world.

"After sending the last proof-sheet to the office," she says, "I sat alone reading Horace Mann's eloquent plea for the young men and women, then about to be consigned to the slave warehouse of Bruin & Hill in Alexandria, Virginia, — a plea impassioned, eloquent, but vain, as all other pleas on that side had ever proved in all courts hitherto. It seemed that there was no hope, that nobody would hear, nobody would read, nobody pity; that this frightful system, that had already pursued its victims

into the free States, might at last even threaten them in Canada."

She began to reflect if she had done all in her power, and sitting down again at her desk, she wrote letters to Prince Albert, to the Duke of Argyll, to the Earls of Carlisle and Shaftesbury, to Macaulay, Dickens, and others whom she knew to be interested in the cause of anti-slavery. These she ordered to be sent to their several addresses, accompanied by the very earliest copies of her book that should be printed.

Very soon she was assured of the success of her sketches in book form. The whole year's work in "The National Era" brought her only three hundred dollars; but Mr. Jewett, a Boston publisher, having offered to bring it out immediately in one volume, three thousand copies were sold the first day of publication.

She began to reflect how the subject had lain dormant in her mind since she was a child, how she had been led step by step to do her work, and a sense of detachment grew upon her daily.

The modesty of Mrs. Stowe's demeanor throughout the altogether extraordinary experience which came to her after the publication of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is to be understood only by looking upon her life from her own standpoint. She was pursued by the thought that the freedom of the slaves was not yet accomplished, and although the hearts of good men were hot with desire to achieve this end, no one could see how the great result was to be won. She had done something, she said to herself; God had stirred the hearts of men through her, but what more could be done! This was her constant cry, her ever present thought. Letters of congratulation poured in upon her and were gratefully received. The well known men and women, both of Europe and America, responded to her appeal, but she was entirely spent, and could not see the

LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
Harriet Beecher Stowe

EDITED BY ANNIE FIELDS



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