MARK TWAIN'S PORTRAIT OF THE NEGRO AS COMPARED WITH SELECTED FICTION OF HIS TIME

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of the Department of English

Kansas State Teachers College

Emporia, Kansas

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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August, 1964

Approved for the Major Department

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Dedication

To my parents who encouraged me,

To my family who endured me,

To my students who challenged me,

To Delta Kappa Gamma who endowed me,

This study is graciously dedicated.

Katie Lue Tomlinson

Preface

In 1863, Abraham Lincoln spoke these immortal words: ". . . We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. . . ."

Ironically enough, a period of one hundred years has not been sufficient for this nation to give birth to that freedom. Supposedly, the Proclamation of Emancipation achieved the freedom of the Negro. But 1963, witnessed the Freedom March, and nineteen million U. S. Negroes demanded payment of the century-old promissory note called the Emancipation Proclamation. Still fresh in the memories of all are Little Rock, Arkansas; Oxford, Mississippi; and Prince Edward County, Virginia; in short, the struggle against discrimination has continued and increased in intensity. Man is still infected with racial hate and condescends to bombings to keep "niggers" in their place and to preserve the white way of life.

Recently in Look (March 24, 1964), William Bradford Huie, author of Hiroshima Pilot, exposed in "Death of an Innocent" the base thinking which still exists in the hearts of some of our so-called superior race. Why did the murderer want to kill the children in the Alabama church bombing? Hate is partially, but not completely the answer. Hate

often stems from fear. Was he afraid of their abilities and their aspirations, afraid of what they might do to his ego? A Southern white man who had murdered a colored man once asked the author of the article, "If I ain's better'n a damn nigger, what-the-hell am I better'n of?"

Mr. Huie, in discussing the death of Denise McNair, one of the four children killed in the bombing, states:

> We regard her death as a senseless waste, a loss to the human race. We deeply regret that she was robbed of her future, for we did not fear her aspirations. We wish she could have had the opportunity to live her life at the highest level she was capable of achieving.
>
> We believe that her murderer should be identified, tried and electrocuted. We are also ashamed of our Governor, and we believe he is hurting Alabama and all America.

In regard to the nation's current racial unrest and the social revolt of the Negro, the Newsweek poll in October, 1963, reveals that anti-Negro prejudice is widespread and deep and is not confined to the South. The recent revolt is anti-Jim Crow, not anti-white. The Negro wants an end to discrimination, and he wants many more things that the normal human being enjoys; in the main, he wants

> . . . a better job, better pay, a better home. He wants the right to join the white man--to live next door if he chooses, to work beside him, to send the kids to school with his, to eat at his restaurants and stop at his hotels and pray at his churches. And the negro is hungry for a bigger share in the plenty--for dishwashers and clothes driers as well as human rights.

In view of these facts, Mark Twain was approximately sixty or seventy years ahead of his time in his thinking and treatment of the unfortunate freedmen. Previous writers have pictured the Negro as a happy, satisfied "darky," who was contented with his servitude. It is Mark Twain who becomes a spokesman for the rights of the Negro people and gives them the dignity and humanity that the Negro is seeking today. This research shall embrace Mark Twain's portrait of the Negro and compare it with that of selected fiction of his time, which shall include a sampling of the works of two Southern writers, Joel Chandler Harris and George Washington Cable, and two Northern writers, William Dean Howells and John William DeForest.

I am deeply grateful to Dr. Green D. Wyrick for his assistance in the development of this thesis. I also express my appreciation to Dr. Charles E. Walton and Dr. T. C. Owen for their interest in my English studies.

K. L. T.

Burns, Kansas
August, 1964

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CHAPTER I

THE NEGRO IN TWAIN'S NON-FICTION

Before the Civil War the Negro played a relatively small part in the literature of the South. The Southern people feared that anything one might write about the institution of slavery would be misinterpreted by abolitionists who scrutinized Southern newspapers for antislavery propaganda. Previous to this time, few people realized how rich an asset the Negro was to become to American literature, and few people bothered to write down his folk tales or his songs and ballads. One might surmise that the war had emancipated the Southern writers as well as the slaves, and now because slavery was a thing of the past, one could write much more freely about "the peculiar institution."[1]

In the years preceeding the Civil War, many of this nation's best known writers were apprentices in a printer's shop or newspaper office or had roamed far and wide as reporters or journeyman printers. Most notable among these were Joel Chandler Harris, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain.[2]

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was a Southerner. After the war, he felt that he had to make amends for his heretofore

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[1] J. B. Hubble, Southern Life in Fiction, p. 80.

[2] Ibid., p. 82.

indifference to and support of human bondage. "The whole structure of chattel slavery comes under his scrutiny in his notes which assemble the ammunition for the attacks he was to make in his novels and stories."[3] His sketches, speeches, and notebooks flash his hatred of the institution which he had accepted and even defended in his younger life.[4] William Dean Howells writing of the post-war Twain said, "No man more perfectly sensed and more entirely abhorred slavery."[5]

Twain was entirely satisfied with the termination of slavery by the Civil War. He was ready and eager to have the events, that is facts and meanings, written into history at once. For those who maintained that it was not time yet, and who insisted that one should wait until the passions of war cooled and the clouds of strife had cleared away, Twain had much ridicule. He felt that the time was at hand when man and deeds and motives could best be ascertained in lasting verity. He did not want to wait until facts took on fable.[6]

Twain's father owned slaves, but eventually sold them and hired other slaves by the year.[7] Twain wrote that it was on the farm that he acquired his strong liking for the

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[3]Philip S. Foner, Mark Twain Social Critic, p. 216.

[4]Ibid., p. 198.

[5]William Dean Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 35.

[6]Ibid., p. 36.

[7]Twain, The Autobiography of Mark Twain, p. 3.

Negro race. Beyond the farmhouse were the orchard, the Negro quarters, and the tobacco fields. His first account is that of the bedridden white-headed slave woman who lived in a little log cabin abreast the house. He believed that "She was up-ward of a thousand years old and had talked with Moses. . . ."[8] She was called "Aunt" Hanna, Southern fashion.

In his schoolboy days, Twain had no aversion to slavery and wrote that, if the slaves themselves had any aversion to it, they said nothing. He further stated that in Hannibal the people seldom saw a slave mistreated, and on the farm, never. No one questioned the right of slavery within his hearing. The town's paper printed nothing against it; the ministers preached that it was approved by God as a holy thing, and one could find proof with which to support it in the Bible.[9]

One incident of his childhood stayed vividly in his memory through the slow-drifting years. The Clemens family had a little slave boy from the eastern shores of Maryland. He had been brought away from his family and his friends and sold. Twain describes him as being of cheery spirit, innocent and gentle, and as the noisiest creature ever. His

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[8] Ibid., p. 6.

[9] Ibid., p. 7.

singing, whistling, laughing, yelling, and whooping were devastatingly maddening and unendurable. One day, Twain lost his temper and went raging to his mother complaining of the noise. He remembers that the tears came into her eyes, and with trembling lips she said:

> Poor thing, when he sings it shows that he is not remembering and that comforts me; but when he is still I am afraid he is thinking and I cannot bear it. He will never see his mother again; if he can sing I must not hinder it, but be thankful for it. If you were older, you would understand me; then that friendless child's noise would make you glad.[10]

"A True Story" from Sketches New and Old further substantiates the fact that the Negro was not the carefree creature with no concerns, but an adult who had experienced many heartaches. Twain begins the story with a description of Aunt Rachel, the Negro servant, a cheerful soul who at the end of a day's work was still capable of laughter. When Twain asks how she has lived for sixty years and has never had any trouble, she reveals the tragedy of her life.[11] She explains that she knew about slavery because she was born among the slaves. Twain makes one feel the dignity of the Negro woman and her love for her slave husband and her seven children who are sold one by one. Aunt Rachel describes the heart-rending scene:

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[10] Loc. cit.

[11] Twain, Sketches New and Old, p. 241.

> Dey put chains on us and put us on a stan' as high as dis po'ch . . . An' dey sole my ole man, an' took him away, an' I begin to cry; an' de man say, 'Shet up yo' damn blubberin',' an' hit me on do mouf wid his han'. An' when de las' one was gone but my little Henry, I grab him close up to my breas' so, an' I ris up an' says, 'you sha'n't take him away, I says; 'I'll kill de man dat tetches him!' I says. But my little Henry whisper an' say, 'I gwyne to run away, an' den I work and buy yo' freedom.' Oh, bless de chile, he always so good! But dy got him--dey got him, de men did; but I took and tear de clo'es mos' off 'em an' beat'em over de head wid my chain; an' dey give it to me, too, but I didn't mine dat.[12]

Foner says that Twain evidenced many aspects of the Negro in the story. Things not hitherto mentioned in American literature as the tearing apart of families, the abandoning of the plantation by the slaveholders and their leaving behind their slaves to manage as best they could, the liberation by the Union army and the Negro's participation in the liberation through services, military and otherwise, to the Union army are now used by Twain in the unfolding of the story.[13] One notes the sympathy of the Union officers for Aunt Rachel as she related the story of her Henry, whom she had not seen for twenty-two years. Henry had quit his job at the beginning of the war and had gone in search of his mother. His action typifies what took place during and after the war as numbers of slaves of the

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[12] Ibid., p. 243.

[13] P. S. Foner, op. cit., p. 204.

South searched for their families who were separated during slavery.[14]

The story opened with Aunt Rachel's sitting on the steps below the family. She was their servant. As she warmed to her subject, Twain let her rise, and she ". . . towered above us, black against the stars."[15] One might say that she became a statue of dignity. Aunt Rachel closes the story with: "Oh no, Misto C--, I hain't had no trouble. An' no joy."[16]

Howells regarded the story as a noble study of character. He further claimed that the rugged truth of the story leaves all other stories of slave life far behind and reveals in the author a gift for the simple, dramatic report of reality not equaled by any other American writer.[17]

Twain was said to have realized that the fight for the freedom of the Negro people was not won with the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.[18] In Innocents Abroad (1869), he introduces his Venetian tour guide. Born in South Carolina of slave parents, the Negro guide came to Venice while

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[14]Loc. cit.

[15]Twain, Sketches New and Old, p. 242.

[16]Ibid., p. 246.

[17]Howells, op. cit., p. 124.

[18]Foner, op. cit., p. 216.

quite small. Here, he grew up and received his education. He was able to read, write, and speak four languages: English, French, Italian and Spanish. He was an admirer of art and knew the history of Venice by memory. In all respects, he was a well educated gentleman. Twain says that "Negroes are deemed as good as white people in Venice. Consequently, the guide had no desire to go back to his native land."[19] Twain deems the Negro's judgment to be correct. Surely, he would have been regarded in the "land of the free" inferior to those of much less culture and education. It is clear that Twain understood that the Emancipation Proclamation had not really freed the slaves[20] Thus, it is for their cause that he crusades.

Found in Mark Twain's Notebook is the notation: "1887. Next May write Prof. Francis Wayland that I am ready to pay the young colored man, Charles W. Johnson's way through the Yale Law School."[21] Howells wrote that Twain held himself responsible for the wrong which had been done by the white race in enslaving the black race, and he felt that paying the Negro student's way through Yale was ". . . his part of the reparation due from every white to every

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[19]Twain, The Innocents Abroad, p. 246.

[20]Foner, op. cit., p. 217.

[21]Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 192.

black man."[22] Twain did not know, nor had he ever seen, the student; the fact that Johnson was a Negro was quite enough. About this same time, a colored cadet was expelled from West Point for conduct "unbecoming an officer and gentleman." The usual "shabby philosophy" which holds that a Negro could not feel the claim of honor was circulated. With bitter irony, Clemens remarked, "It was that one part black that undid him. It made him a 'nigger' and incapable of being a gentleman. It was to blame for the whole thing. The fifteen parts white were guiltless."[23] Twain later utilized this incident and idea in his characterization of Tom, in Pudd'nhead Wilson.

On the platform Twain was forceful in expounding his sentiments. Albert Bigelow Paine wrote, "Not to have heard Mark Twain is to have missed much of the value of his utterance."[24] Twain's speeches are loosely identified in three periods. The first division begins with his San Francisco lecture and continues through the years when his words were good-natured foolery. The middle period covers the years when the affairs of men and nations began to make a larger appeal and political abuses and the injustice of class began

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[22]Howells, op. cit., p. 35.

[23]Ibid., p. 36.

[24]Albert Bigelow Paine "Introduction," Mark Twain's Speeches, p. xi.

to stir him to active rebellion and to righteous, even if violent, attitudes of reform. The final group were of the later days when Twain had become the philosopher and sage yet saddened by bereavment and the uncertainty of life.[25] This study will be based on the speeches of the middle period.

One such speech was titled "On Foreign Critics" (ca. 1889). Twain began with the question, "What is a 'real' civilization?" His answer was:

> Let us say, in broad terms, any system which has in it one of these things--to wit, human slavery, despotic government, inequality, numerous and brutal punishments for crime, superstition almost universal, ignorance almost universal--is not a real civilization, and any system which has none of them is . . . . How old is real civilization? The answer is easy and unassailable. A century ago it had not appeared in the world during a single instant since the world was made if you grant these terms--and I don't see why it shouldn't be fair, since civilization must surely mean the humanizing of a people, not a class--there is today but one real civilization in the world, and it is not yet thirty years old. We made the trip and hoisted its flag when we disposed of our slavery.[26]

In the following essay, Twain exposes with irony and satire a culture that is "Christian" in name only. He does likewise in his fictional writing. In the history of the

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[25] Loc. cit.

[26] Ibid., p. 150.

human race, religion has had its share in the changes of civilization.[27] It was Huck, representing the lowest level of society who came to accept Nigger Jim as a brother-being while Miss Watson, the Christian who prayed for Huck, was willing to sell her slave. In "Bible Teaching and Religious Practice"[28] Twain wrote:

> . . . In all the ages the Roman Church has owned slaves, bought and sold slaves, authorized and encouraged her children to trade in them. Long after some Christian peoples had freed their slaves the Church still held on to hers. If any could know, to absolute certainty, that all this was right, and according to God's will and desire, surely it was she, since she was God's specially appointed representative in the earth and sole authorized and infallible expounder of his Bible. There were the texts; there was no mistaking their meaning; she was right, she was doing in this thing what the Bible had mapped out for her to do. So unassailable was her position that in all the centuries she had no word to say against human slavery. Yet now at last, in our immediate day, we hear a Pope saying slave trading is wrong, and we see him sending an expedition to Africa to stop it. . . .[29]

Twain's satirical pen further records the exploits of the Christians in regard to slavery. For two hundred and fifty years, Christian England supported and encouraged slavery with the ministers of her churches looking on, sometimes taking an active hand, or being indifferent. Twain

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[27] Ibid., p. 231.

[28] The essay, published posthumously in 1923, followed a similar one, "As Regards Patriotism," which was written about 1900." Charles Neider (ed.), The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, p. 566.

[29] Ibid., p. 570.

noted that England's parliaments aided and protected the slave traffic with two English kings holding stock in the companies.[30] An English slave hunter was so successful in surprising and burning villages, and maiming, slaughtering, capturing and selling inhabitants, that the delighted queen conferred the chivalric honor of knighthood on him--a rank which had acquired its distinction in Christian effort. The slave hunter chose as his device the figure of a kneeling Negro slave in chains. His work was ". . . to destroy homes, separate families, enslave friendless men and women, and break a myriad of human hearts."[31]

Twain concludes his satirical history by reporting that at long last in England, an illegitimate Christian (a member of a despised and bastard sect) rose against slavery. There was a bitter struggle, but in the end slavery had to go.[32] Finally America began to stir against slavery. Hearts grew soft, and the only place in the land where one could not find pity for the slave was the pulpit; eventually the pulpit yielded.[33]

Revenge, murders, lynching mobs, and the ways of men in packs set forth in "A Scrap of Curious History" are

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[30] Loc. cit.

[31] Loc. cit.

[32] Ibid., p. 571.

[33] Loc. cit.

paralleled in the novels, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'nhead Wilson. One should note that the rejection of Robert Hardy, the New England stranger, foreshadows the rejection of David Wilson, the newcomer, by the villagers of Dawson's Landing.

The essay, "A Scrap of Curious History" (1894), thrusts one into the Missouri village of Marion City located on the Mississippi River. Twain wrote the essay while in La Bourboule-les-Bains, France, because the assassination of the President of the French Republic, the mob reaction, and the consequences seemed to him to parallel an action in the Missouri village in 1845.[34] At this time, for a man openly to proclaim himself an enemy of Negro slavery was to proclaim himself a madman. The proclamation was blasphemy against the "holiest thing known to a Missourian."[35] Twain related that Robert Hardy became the first abolitionist in the state.[36] He was by trade, a journeyman cooper, and worked in the cooper-shop belonging to the pork-packing establishment which was Marion City's chief pride and source of prosperity.[37] Being a New Englander and a stranger, he was regarded as an inferior person and treated in an unfriend-

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[34] Ibid., p. 518.

[35] Loc. cit.

[36] Loc. cit.

[37] Loc. cit.

audience of one--Twain. He imitated the style of the village clergymen with passion and energy. Twain believed he was "the greatest orator in the United States."[42]

He interrupted his preaching, now and then, to imitate the sound of a bucksaw with his mouth; it kept his master from investigating the progress of his work. Twain listened to the sermons from an open window of a lumber room at the back of the house. One of the Negro's impressive texts was:

> "You tell me whar a man gits his corn-pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is." . . . The black philosopher's idea was that a man is not independent, and cannot afford views which might interfere with his bread and butter. If he would prosper, he must train with the majority; in matters of large moment, like politics and religion, he must think and feel with the bulk of his neighbors, or suffer damage in his social standing and in his business prosperities. He must restrict himself to corn-pone opinions--at least on the surface. He must get his opinions from other people; he must reason out none for himself; he must have no first-hand views.[43]

Twain went on to state that he thought Jerry, in the main, was right, but that he did not go far enough. People are creatures of outside influences; they conform, they imitate, they do not think for themselves. Broadly speaking, corn-pone stands for self-approval. Self-approval comes from the approval of other people. The result is conformity, and in some cases conformity has a business interest--the bread-and-

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[42] Ibid., p. 583.

[43] Ibid., p. 584.

butter interest.[44]

The essay "The United States of Lyncherdom" (1901), is found in Europe and Elsewhere. In an introductory note, Albert Bigelow Paine wrote that the article was not offered for publication, perhaps, because the moment for timeliness had passed; however, one feels that its general timeliness is perennial.[45]

Twain always felt strongly on the subject of lynch law, and when lynchings earned dark headlines, he wrote his trenchant essay on "The United States of Lyncherdom."[46] "Oh, Missouri!" he wrote at the time of a lynching down in the southwestern corner of that state. That great state has erred, and ". . . the handful of her children have given us a character and labeled us with a name."[47] "Lynchers" would be the term applied to all Missouri by the generalizing world.

Near Pierce City, on a Sunday afternoon, a young white woman who had started alone from church was found murdered. In this region of churches and schools, the people lynched three Negroes--two of these were very old. In the fury of their mob reaction, they burned out five Negro households, and inhumanly drove thirty families into the woods.

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[44] Ibid., p. 586.

[45] Twain, Europe and Elsewhere, p. 239.

[46] Louis J. Budd, Mark Twain Social Philosopher, p. 201.

[47] Twain, Europe and Elsewhere, p. 240.

The people of Pierce City had bitter provocations. Twain did not argue this point, but they took the law into their own hands. By their statutes, had the law been allowed to take its course, the victim would certainly have been hanged, since the few Negroes in the region were without authority and without influence with juries.[48]

Twain laid the increased number of lynchings in the 1900's to moral cowardice which, he said, was the commanding feature of the make-up of 9,999 men in 10,000. He observed that, from the beginning of time, no revolt against infamy or oppression has ever been begun except by the one daring man in the 10,000. The others wait timidly and then reluctantly join in under the influence of that man. The abolitionists remember. Public feeling was with them early, but each man was afraid to speak out until he knew that others privately felt as he felt. Then, action took place.[49]

It had been supposed that people enjoyed the spectacle of a lynching. Twain wrote in this account that the supposition could not be true. The vast majority of the people in the South were like those of the North. They were right-hearted and compassionate and would be pained by such spectacle. Only public approval seemed to require their

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[48] Ibid., p. 241.

[49] Ibid., p. 243.

attending such affairs. Twain asks why a crowd stands around smitten to the heart? Why it lifts no hand in protest? And he concludes that people do so because to do otherwise would be unpopular.[50]

Twain illustrates that there is a field for our missionaries; and asks that they look at the telegram from Texas:

> The Negro was taken to a tree and swung in the air. Wood and fodder were piled beneath his body and a hot fire was made. Then it was suggested that the man ought not to die too quickly, and he was let down to the ground while a party went to Dexter, about two miles distant to procure coal oil. This was thrown on the flames and the work completed.[51]

Twain implored missionaries with the martyr spirit to return from China to their motherland in her hour of distress to brave the lynching mob.

Twain was eager to give the Negro his due credit, and he notes this impression of the colored soldier:

> Splendid big negro soldiers; obedient, don't desert, don't get drunk; proud of their vocation, finest and pleasantest soldiers--and Pond says great in battle. Some of these have been in the service ten and fifteen years, and my escort 24 years. They all have the look and bearing of gentlemen. The earliest ones were not educated and could not perform clerical duties; but the later ones can; been in public school. As a rule the army can't sing the "Star-spangled," but Burt ordered these taught, and they can sing it.
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> The band, all colored but the leader, made beautiful music.

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[50] Ibid., p. 244.

[51] Ibid., p. 248.

> Ceremony of fetching the colors. All uncovered when the colors passed by--I did, after first blunder. Another--was asked to throw away my cigar when the colors approached.
>
> Chaplain (colored) is a commissioned officer, approved by the Senate. Is saluted like other officers.
>
> Goodwill. They take pride in it. I think the negro has found his vocation at last.[52]

In his observation, Twain has detected the pleasing and commendable qualities of a real soldier in the Negro--qualities not prevalent in all white soldiers. Surely it was with a pleased attitude that he jotted the above in his notebook.

There is another account in which Twain tells of his arrival at a hotel in Bombay during his tour of India.[53] A door needed fixing. A native servant seemed to be giving it proper attention, but not according to the manager's way of thinking. Without any explanation, the manager gave the servant a cuff and then an arrogant word of command. The native took the shameful treatment without showing resentment. Twain wrote that this incident instantly took him back to his boyhood and the forgotten fact that this was the usual way of explaining one's desires to a slave. Even though he was born to this method of treatment, Twain was always "sorry

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[52] Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 247.

[53] Ibid., p. 271.

for the victim and ashamed for the punisher." He said that his father was a "refined and kindly gentleman" who punished him only twice and never any other member of the family at all, yet he commonly cuffed their harmless slave boy, Lewis, and even gave him a lashing now and then ". . . which terrified the poor thing nearly out of his wits." Twain's father had spent his life among his slaves, and the cuffings were the customs of the times, not of his nature.[54]

In the same part of his notebook he related the incident of having seen a man angerly fling a lump of iron ore at his man-slave because the Negro was awkward. Within an hour the slave was dead. Twain said the man had a right to kill his slave if he wanted to, yet killing seemed a pitiful thing. Nobody in the village approved that murder, but no one said much about it.[55]

Gladys Bellamy wrote that Twain's vision of slavery was ever present in his submerged consciousness. The vision was for him what the London workhouse had been for Dickens. The flame of indignation burned in him to the last, and "the weak being oppressed by the strong" moved him to write.[56]

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[54] Loc. cit.

[55] Loc. cit.

[56] Gladys C. Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, p. 53.

CHAPTER II

THE FICTIONAL PORTRAIT: UNCLE DAN'L, ROXY AND JIM

"The skin of every human being contains a slave."[57]

Mark Twain's personal history became the basis for his novels. With this tool in hand, he became an artist and gave to American literature three Negro characters--Uncle Dan'l, Roxy and Nigger Jim--who live. Their portraits are brought to light through the fiction in which they appear. In Twain's depiction, the Negro becomes a realistic human being who is "consistently a noble character."[58] Through a study of Twain's portrayals, one may ascertain the status of the Negro in early nineteenth century American society.

As one would expect, Mark Twain's novels are filled with descriptions of steamboats on the Mississippi, cotton plantations, great houses, and slave quarters. In addition, he has laid bare the evils of slavery in tender, penetrating scenes. His Negroes dramatically express their longings for freedom and are heroes in their roles. Twain argues that the Negro had never accepted slavery and ". . . was

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57 Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 393.

58 Bernard De Voto, Mark Twain's America, p. 66.

entitled to enjoy the full fruits of democracy."[59]

In his autobiography, Twain described his early feeling toward the Negroes, saying that they were his friends and that those of his own age were "in effect comrades."[60] He clarified this qualification by explaining that color and condition, of which both parties were conscious, rendered complete fusion impossible.[61] He further stated that Uncle Dan'l, a middle-aged slave who had the best mind in the Negro quarters, had served him well for many years. Twain characterized Uncle Dan'l for half a century in his books under the name, Uncle Dan'l, and as "Jim." Twain sent him down the Mississippi on a raft and across the Sahara Desert in a balloon, and Uncle Dan'l ". . . endured it all with patience and friendliness and loyalty which were his birthright."[62] He also attributed to Uncle Dan'l such adjectival tags as faithful, affectionate, honest, simple-hearted, and warmly sympathetic. One encounters him in The Gilded Age and The American Claimant bearing his name, Uncle Dan'l, and as Jim in the immortal book, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

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[59] Philip S. Foner, op. cit., p. 216.

[60] Twain, The Autobiography of Mark Twain, p. 6.

[61] Loc. cit.

[62] Loc. cit.

When Uncle Dan'l and his wife, Aunt Jinny, reached the Mississippi in The Gilded Age (1873), Twain initiated something quite new in fiction.[63] In them, he was bringing to American literature a theme which it had refused before. Apart from Twain, the institution of slavery had no place in the fiction of the nineteenth century.[64]

In the following scene, Twain illustrates the familial aspect of slavery in Uncle Dan'l's simple-hearted devotion to the Hawkins children who had pillowed their heads on his shoulders night after night. At the same time, Twain depicts the religious nature of the Negro. After supper, Aunt Jinny and Uncle Dan'l arranged themselves with the Hawkins children on a log and discussed the marvelous river. The moon rose and sailed through the clouds, brightening the river; a deep silence was broken at intervals by the hoot of an owl, or the crash of a distant caving bank. In simplicity and ignorance, the little company assembled on the log were all like children, awed by the grandeur of the scene before them, and they believed that the air was filled with invisible spirits. A supernatural atmosphere pervaded their talk, and their voices became low and reverent.[65]

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[63] De Voto, op. cit., p. 292.

[64] Loc. cit.

[65] Twain, The Gilded Age, p. 20.

In the darkness, Uncle Dan'l spied a steamboat coming down the river, coughing, smoking, and spitting fire. Stricken with fear, he took it to be "de Almighty" and dropped to his knees and offered his supplications:

> O Lord, we's ben mighty wicked, an' we knows dat we 'serve to go to de bad place, but good Lord, deah Lord, we ain't ready yet, we ain't ready--let des po chil'en hab one mo' chance, jes' one mo' chance . . . . Good Lord, good deah Lord, . . . dese chil'en don't b'long heah, dey's f'm Obedstown whah dey don't know nuffin, an' you knows, yo' own sef, dat dey ain't 'sponsible.[66]

The flaming and churning steamer was abreast of the party. An awful thundering noise suddenly burst forth, drowning the prayer. Uncle Dan'l grabbed a child under each arm and scurried into the woods. Suddenly, ashamed of himself, he stopped and feebly shouted, "Heah I is Lord, Heah I is!" Twain points up the faithfulness of Uncle Dan'l, ". . . whose life was consecrated to the children,"[67] when Uncle Dan'l offered himself in their place. To the surprise and comfort of all, "the Lord" turned a point up the river, the lights winked out, and the coughing ceased. "Deys some folks say dey ain't no 'ficiency in prah. Dis chile would like to know whah we'd 'a' ben now if it warn't fo' dat prah?"[68]

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[66] Ibid., p. 21

[67] De Voto, op. cit., p. 75.

[68] Twain, The Gilded Age, p. 22.

As here evidenced, Twain expresses the closeness of the Negro to his God. Gladys Bellamy said that Twain ". . . understood that to the black race of the time, Heaven was just a few miles away at any given moment."[69] Herein is, also, the revelation of the Negro's conception of a physical God with an out-reaching disposition.[70]

Nineteen years later, old Dan'l and Jinny appear in Twain's The American Claimant as the Sellers's housekeepers. With the years, Twain's portrait had changed. Now Dan'l is a white-headed old man with spectacles and damaged white cotton-gloves; yet, when he appears at the door to admit "Marse" Washington Hawkins, he is, despite the ravages of war, a model of stateliness. In Mrs. Sellers's account of the lives of the couple during the intervening years, Twain exposes the pathetic status after the peace of many slaves:

> "Here's old Dan'l and Jinny, that the sheriff sold South one of the times that we got bankrupted before the war--they came wondering back after the peace, worn out and used up on the cotton plantations, helpless, and not another lick of work left in their old hides for the rest of this earthly pilgrimage--and we so pinched, oh, so pinched for the very crumbs to keep life in us, and he just flung the door wide, and the way he received them you'd have thought they had come straight

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[69] Gladys C. Bellamy, op. cit., p. 299.

[70] Loc. cit.

> down from heaven in answer to prayer . . . .
> They're so poor, and old, and friendless,
> and--"[71]

It is clear that Twain exemplifies in Mulberry Sellers and his wife the feeling of some of the Southerners for their ex-slaves. Mrs. Sellers takes Mulberry aside and protested that they could not feed the old couple. Mulberry replied, "Turn them out?--and they've come to me just as confident and trusting--I must have bought that confidence, and given my note."[72] Mrs. Sellers was ashamed, and with new courage she said softly, "We'll keep them--the Lord will provide."[73] To Washington's inquiry about their helping with the housework, she felt they would if they could, and said that perhaps "the poor old things" think they do some of it. Dan'l waited on the front door and sometimes went on an errand, and both of them pretend to dust. But the fact was that they had to keep a young Negro girl to take care of them, and a Negro woman to do the housework and help with the care of the two old people. "Members of the family is just what they become--the members of the family, in fact. And sometimes master and mistress of the household."[74]

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[71] Twain, The American Claimant, p. 22.

[72] Loc. cit.

[73] Loc. cit.

[74] Ibid., p. 63.

These two, Sellers told Hawkins, were ". . . mighty good and loving and faithful and honest."[75] However, they did just about as they pleased.

Twain's portrait of the ex-slave is completed with Hawkin's comment that Uncle Dan'l and Jinny ought to be happy. Mrs. Sellers told Hawkins that the two quarreled much of the time about religion. Dan'l's being a Dunker Baptist and Jinny a shouting Methodist seemed to be the prevailing reason. They did talk and chatter and play and sing plantation hymns together. They were sincerely fond of each other and thought the world of Mulberry, who put up with their foolishness and spoiled ways. Mrs. Sellers supposed they were happy enough.

Pudd'nhead Wilson, published in 1893, is concerned with the complexities of human nature and civilization as presented in the historical community of Dawson's Landing, which Twain had known intimately.[76] Though Dawson's Landing is an attractive village with white cottages almost concealed by morning-glories, honeysuckle, and climbing roses--a rose-scented spot--sleepy, contented, and comfortable with steamboats passing up and down the river every hour or so,

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75Loc. cit.

76F. R. Leavis, "Mark Twain's Neglected Classic: The Moral Astringency of Pudd'nhead Wilson," Commentary, XXI (February, 1956), p. 133.

". . . it had the canker of slavery eating at its heart."[77] In his treatment of slavery, Twain becomes a defender of the Negro race.

Unquestionably, the heroine of the story is Roxana, the slave-girl. Only by Twain's definition and social condition was Roxy black. Twain portrays her as being indistinguishable from one whose skin is white:

> She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in her cheeks, her face was full of character and expression, her eyes were brown and liquid, and she had a heavy suit of soft hair which was also brown, but the fact was not apparent because her head was bound about with a checkered handkerchief and the hair was concealed under it. Her face was shapely, intelligent, and comely--even beautiful. She had an easy, independent carriage--when she was among her own caste--and a high and "sassy" way, withal; but of course she was meek and humble enough where white people were.[78]

From her manner of speech, one would have expected her to be black, but she was a ". . . passionate, complex, and beautiful mulatto."[79] Only one-sixteenth of her was black, and that one-sixteenth dominated the other parts and made her a Negro, and as such, she was a salable slave. Feidler pays

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[77] Bellamy, op. cit., p. 386.

[78] Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 12

[79] Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p. 386.

tribute to Roxy by describing her as a ". . . truly living woman distinguished from the wooden images of virtue and bitchery that pass for females in American novels."[80] Her child by Cecil Burleigh Essex, a white Virginia gentleman was even less the wooly-haired, blubber-lipped carica - ture than she. With his blue eyes and flaxen curls, the baby is hardly distinguishable from Thomas 'a Becket Driscoll, who was born the same day to Mrs. Driscoll.[81]

Twain asserts that the slaves were justified in stealing from their masters because the slaveholders had robbed the Negroes of their freedom.[82] They had an unfair showing in the battle of life, and they held it no sin to take provisions from the pantry, or a brass thimble, a cake of wax, a paper of needles, a dollar bill, some small articles of clothing, or any other property of small value. Twain's explanation shows that the fact that they did not consider these reprisals sinful enabled them to go to church and ". . . shout and pray their loudest and sincerest with their plunder in their pockets."[83] Twain points out that even the colored deacon himself could not resist temptation

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[80] Loc. cit.

[81] Loc. cit.

[82] Foner, op. cit., p. 387.

[83] Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 15.

if Providence showed him in a dream, or by other means, where a ham was hanging. Moreover, Twain relates an incident wherein the Negro justifies his action:

> On frosty nights the humane negro prowler would warm the end of a plank and put it up under the cold claws of chickens roosting in a tree; a drowsy hen would step on to the comfortable board, softly clucking her gratitude and the prowler would dump her into his bag, and later into his stomach, perfectly sure that in taking this trifle from the man who daily robbed him of his inestimable treasure--his liberty--he was not committing any sin that God would remember against him in the Last Great Day.[84]

Twain depicts the Negro's lot with savage irony when he introduces Mr. Driscoll, Roxy's master, as ". . . a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals."[85] He could not abide theft, and apparently there was a thief in his house--and it must be one of his Negroes. He called them together; besides Roxy, there were three--a man, a woman, and a twelve year old boy. He threatened to sell the thief, but a denial was voiced by each. None had stolen anything --except maybe a little sugar or cake that ". . . Marse Percy wouldn't mind or miss."[86] The slave was treated rather less kindly than a dog or cat would have been.

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[84] Ibid., p. 16.

[85] Ibid., p. 14.

[86] Loc. cit.

Twain, next, gives an example of Roxy's moral code. He explains that the truth was, all were guilty except Roxy, and that she had been saved in the nick of time by a revival in the colored Methodist Church a fortnight before, at which time and place she "got religion." The very next day after the experience, Twain explains that her master left a couple of dollars lying on a desk, and she happened upon that temptation when she was polishing and exclaimed, "Dad blame dat revival, I wisht it had a be'n put off till tomorrow!"[87] She covered the tempter with a book and another slave got it. Her sacrifice was a matter of religious etiquette, not a thing she intended to become precedent. "A week or two would limber up her piety, . . ."[88] and the next two dollars would be hers! The question comes to mind, was Roxy bad? Was she worse than the general run of her race? Leavis says that ". . . thieving is not just an exhibition of Negro traits, but 'her race' is the human race."[89] Yet a profound terror took possession of Roxy as Percy Driscoll threatened to sell all four slaves down the river. Twain indicates that being sold down the river was equivalent to

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[87] Ibid., p. 15.

[88] Loc. cit.

[89] Leavis, op. cit., p. 128.

being condemned to hell![90] After the confession and supplications of the Negroes, Driscoll closed the gates of hell against them by promising to sell them in the immediate vicinity. Twain notes, then, that pleased with his magnanimity, Driscoll set the incident down in his diary, so that in the years to come, his son might read it and be ". . . moved to deeds of gentleness and humanity."[91]

In the scenes that follow, a magnificent portrait of Roxy emerges. She was stricken with horror at the thought of her child's growing up and being sold down the river! She gathered him to her heart and poured out her love upon him. As she tucked her baby into its cradle, the other child nestled in his sleep and attracted Roxy's attention. She stood over the child a long time communing with herself. The scenes to follow prove Twain's deep understanding of the Negro. He illustrates the desperate state of enslavement to the unfortunate race:

> "What has my po' baby done, dat he couldn't have yo' luck? He hain't done noth'n. God was good to you; why warn't he good to him? Dey can't sell <u>you</u> down de river. I hates yo' pappy; he ain't got no heart--for niggers he hain't, anyways. I hates him, en I could kill him!" She paused awhile, thinking; then she burst into wild sobbings again, . . ."--killin'

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[90] Twain, <u>Pudd'nhead Wilson</u>, p. 16.

[91] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 17.

> him wouldn't save de chile fum goin down de river . . . Come along, honey, along wid mammy; we gwine to jump in de river, den de troubles o' dis worl' is all over--dey don't sell po' niggers down the river over yonder."[92]

Twain arranges his central incident so that Roxy must face temptation beyond her will to resist. Roxana had held at her breast both her own child and that of her master. They were black and white milk-brothers.[93] The father of the white child was able to tell the children apart only by their clothes. Thus, Roxy had no trouble in switching the two in their cradles. In the South there is no absolute distinction of black and white; there is merely an imaginary line--crossed and recrossed by the white man's lust--that made one of two physically identical babies ". . . by a fiction of law and custom a Negro."[94] As Roxy laid the heir of the house in her own child's cradle, her human compassion may be noted as she invokes a compassionate God:

> "I's sorry for you honey; I's sorry, God know I is--but what kin I do? Yo' pappy would sell him to somebody, some time, en den he'd go down de river, sho', en I couldn't, couldn't, couldn't stan' it."[95]

Twain points out Roxy's judgment of moral values by the

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[92] Ibid., p. 19.

[93] Fiedler, op. cit., p. 387.

[94] Loc. cit.

[95] Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 21.

gauge of what white folk do. She began to think, and a comforting thought came to her. ". . . 'Tain't no sin--white folks has done it! It ain't no sin, glory to goodness it ain't no sin!"[96] Roxy reasons that if white folk do a thing then it is right and good; if white folk do not commit nor sanction an act, then it is wrong. She feels secure and justified in the switching of the children in their cradles. Twain shows that she further justified her switch on religious grounds. She gathered out of her memory the dim particulars of what the old Negro preacher had told them, and she felt happy.

Twain shows that there was only one man whom Roxy considered intelligent enough to recognize the deception, and that man was David Wilson, the pudd'nhead. Though he was called a fool by the villagers, Roxy considered him no more foolish than she. In reality both were fools. Roxy resolved to let Wilson fingerprint the babies again, if he did not notice the change no one would notice it, and she would be safe. Mr. Wilson took the fingerprints, labeled and dated them, and put them carefully away. He discovered nothing and Roxy returned home jubilantly, and put her feeling of guilt permanently out of her mind. Twain gives an

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[96] Ibid., p. 22.

over-powering depiction of the irony of Roxy's exchanging the infants in order to save her son from bondage. The very act which brings satisfaction to Roxy is later to be the incriminating evidence which sends her son to the dreadful fate from which she has tried so desperately to save him. Roxy's success in saving Valet de Chambers from being a slave had erected a frightful barrier between child and mother. The child became her accepted and recognized master. In babyhood "Tom" cuffed and banged and scratched the "false little slave" unrebuked. Throughout their boyhood the "false Chambers" was strong beyond his years because he was coarsely fed and worked hard about the house. And "Tom" hated him for his superiorities of physique and pluck, and for his cleverness. Twain, having now completely merged the races, has "Tom" teach Roxy "her place," too. She could not caress or show her love for him because such things from a "nigger" were repulsive to him and she was warned to keep her distance. She saw "her darling" cease being her son and become a monster. She shrank from mother to chattel slave--her son's dog--the victim of his vicious nature.

Occasionally, Twain permits one to look into the secret thoughts of Roxy and to view the ill treatment of the Negro at the hands of a merciless and false aristocrat.

> "He struck me, en I warn't no way to blame--struck me in de face, right before folks. En he's al'ays callin' me nigger-wench, en hussy, en all dem mean names, when I's doin' de very bes' I kin. Oh, Lord, I done so much for him--I lift him away up to what he is--en dis is what I git for it."[97]

At times, Tom happened to be good to Roxy. His being so healed the "sore places" and she was happy. Twain relates, ". . . Happy and proud, for this was her son, her nigger son, lording it among the whites and securely avenging their crimes against her race."[98]

With the death of Percy Driscoll, Roxy was set free. Twain's portrait of her becomes spasmotic, fluctuating between grandeur and lowliness. Roxy decided to ". . . clear out and see the world. . . the ambition of her race and sex."[99] Eight years passed before Roxy reappeared. In her freedom, Twain points out that she was infatuated with adventure and the independence of steamboat life. She became head chambermaid and a favorite with the officers. She had lived a steady life, and banked four dollars each month as a provision for her old age. In Roxy's terms, ". . . she was well fixed--rich."[100] She vowed to be forever

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[97] Ibid., p. 34.

[98] Loc. cit.

[99] Ibid., p. 35.

[100] Ibid., p. 56.

independent of the human race if this could be accomplished by hard work and economy. At the same time she isolated herself from the Negro race just as she had protected her son from the Negro race. However, when she once again becomes homeless and a pauper, Twain makes clear ironically enough, that it is to her Negro friends--lowly comrades of her youth--to whom she turns for the necessities of life. She knows that they will not let her starve. She began to long to see her son. Time had erased the bitterness, and she let her mind dwell on his occasional acts of kindness.

By the time she reached Dawson's Landing, she was her old self again. She knew she would get along and be happy. There were many kitchens where the servants would share their meals with her. Thus, Twain illustrates the slave's concern for his own race. When Roxy heard the announcement that the judge had paid two hundred dollars for Tom's gambling debts, she exclaimed, "Sakes alive, it's 'mos' enough to buy a tol'able good second-hand nigger wid."[101] At last, she ". . . sent to beg him to let his po ole nigger mammy have jes one sight of him and die for joy."[102] Here is Twain's most dramatic presentation of Roxy as she enters the room with the attitude of the born

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[101] Ibid., p. 60.

[102] Ibid., p. 61.

slave--a picture of humbleness and begs for her son's love, but "Tom" wants nothing to do with a "nigger." "My lan', how you is growed, honey! Look at me good; does you 'member old Roxy?--does you know you old nigger mammy, honey?"[103] His reply was a curt, "Cut it short, _____ it, cut it short! What is it you want?"[104] Roxy was hurt to the heart, her breast began to heave, the tears came, and she was moved to appeal to her boy's charity. She offered her supplication and received a heartless rebuke:

> "Oh, Marse Tom, de po' ole mammy is in sich hard luck dese days; en she kinder crippled in de arms en can't work, en if you could gimme a dollah --on'y jes one little dol--"
>
> Tom was on his feet so suddenly that the supplicant was startled into a jump herself. .
>
> "A dollar!--give you a dollar! I've a notion to strangle you! Is <u>that</u> your errand here? Clear out! and be quick about it!"[105]

Twain illustrates that Roxy's appeal to her son's charity for a paltry dollar intensifies his want of money, money which he so desperately needs to pay his gambling debts.

Twain's portrait becomes one of majesty as Roxy looms above Tom. She told Tom the bitter truth of his Negro blood and that he was her <u>son</u>. Despite his protestations at the rejection, she informs him:

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[103] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 62.

[104] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 63.

[105] <u>Loc. cit</u>.

> "Dah's one thing yo's got to stop, Valet de Chambers. You can't call me Roxy, same as if you was my equal. Chillen don't speak to dey mammies like dat. You'll callme ma or mammy, dat's what you'll call me--least ways when dey ain't nobody aroun'. Say it!"[106]

Twain continues this majestic portrayal in a later scene between Roxy and her son. As Roxy sat down on her candle-box, the pride and pomp of her victorious attitude made it a throne. She drew herself up with a queenly toss of her head as she related the story of the high quality of the father who had had ". . . de bigges' funeral dis town ever seed,"[107] and her bearing took to itself a dignity and state that might truly have passed for a queenly one if her surroundings had been a little more in keeping. "Dey ain't another nigger in dis town dat's as high-born as you is. . . . En jes you hold yo' head up as high as you want to--you has de right."[108] To Roxy the white person is high-born and possesses rights and privileges to which the Negro is not entitled. She has given this right and privilege to her son through a white father. Since he is the son of Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, he is a person of the highest quality in Dawson's Landing. Roxy directs Tom to exert his

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[106] Ibid., p. 72.

[107] Ibid., p. 75.

[108] Loc. cit.

heritage. De Voto says that this observation of Twain's emphasizes the grandeur in Roxy.[109] Later that night, "Tom" awoke from his sleep and Twain shows Tom's thinking in this fashion:

> "Why were niggers and whites made? What crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why is this awful difference made between white and black?. . . How hard the nigger's fate seems, this morning!-- Yet until last night such a thought never entered my head."[110]

According to Foner, the answer to Tom's question is that there was no crime committed by the "uncreated first Negro." It was the white man's greed for profit that made what Foner calls ". . . this awful difference between white and black."[111]

There is unsurpassed beauty in Twain's next depiction of the Negro. A motherhood as pure as any could ever possibly be emerged in Roxana, and her heart was touched when she found "Tom" in despair and misery indebted to gamblers. Twain suggests that Roxana felt that Tom was ruined past hope; that his destruction would be immediate and sure, and that he would be an outcast and friendless. She judged that these were reasons enough for a mother to

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[109] De Voto, op. cit., p. 292.

[110] Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 76.

[111] Foner, op. cit., p. 199.

help her child; she loved Tom and told him so. He winced--for she was a "nigger." That he was one himself was a thought which was far from reconciling him to that despised race. Nevertheless, with these following words Twain has Roxy offer herself to be sold into slavery to save Tom:

> "Ain't you my child? En does you know anything that a mother won't do for her child? Dey ain't noghin' a white mother won't do for her chile. Who made 'em so? De Lord done it. En who made de niggers? De Lord made 'em. In de inside, mothers is all de same. De good Lord made 'em so. I's gwyne to be sole into slavery, en in a year you's gwyne to buy yo' ole manny free again."[112]

Tom's reply, "It's lovely of you, mammy,"[113] was more than reward enough for Roxy. It would heal Roxy's heartaches as she was enduring a life of slavery and abuse. Twain has her go away heart-broken after lavishing tears and caresses upon Tom. In her mother's heart she was proud and glad that she could make such a sacrifice. Twain, now, emphasizes extreme pity. On the boat, Roxy sits and cries far into the night. "She passed many a snag whose 'break' could have told her a thing to break her heart, . . . but her thoughts were elsewhere."[114] At last, she is made conscious of the deception

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[112]Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 143.

[113]Loc. cit.

[114]Ibid., p. 146.

of a guilty son to a sacrificing mother, and she is petrified. "Oh, de good Lord God have mercy on po' sinful me--I's sole down de river!"[115] And Roxy realizes her son's betrayal. Here, Twain portrays "Tom," when he was supposedly white, as a Judas to Roxy, his own mother. Roxy held herself responsible for this act. As the novel ends, "Tom," guilty of murder, but yet a valuable slave was sold down the river. Ironically, the real heir could not cover the vulgar, uncouth manners of a slave, with money and fine clothes. Thus, he ". . . succumbs to the degrading influences of slavery."[116] Roxy was heartbroken and her laughter ceased, but she found solace in her church which assured her peace. Twian indicates that she has to find equality beyond the travail of this earth, and stresses that her piety was no sham, but was a strong and sincere one.

Twain has Roxy seem to assume that the blackness of the skin carried with it a moral weakness. As she taunts her son, so the white blood in her veins screams constantly to her, "You're a Negro." Yet, she makes no secret of being desired by the white aristocratic gentlemen. She apparently takes pride in illegitimacy and miscegenation and refuses

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[115] Loc. cit.

[116] Hugh M. Gloster, Negro Voices in American Fiction, p. 14.

to be courted by the black Jasper. She blames her Negro blood for Tom's downfall. Twain appears to believe that the color of the skin should not be a measuring stick for human qualities, as it seems to be in white society and as Roxy assumed. If Roxy's son turned out bad, which unquestionably he did, his fall should not be charged to the small tinge of Negro blood. Partially, if not wholly, Twain attributes it to the fact that in Tom's role as the master--the superior being--he was pampered and spoiled and smothered with a lavish, and sometimes unwise, mother-love. It is ironical of Twain's handling of the situation that "Roxy's maternal devotion plays against Tom's heartless egotism."[117] Roxy is as noble as anybody. Twain has portrayed her as noble and human and good--an unforgettable character. In agreement with Leavis, she is a "triumphant vindication of life itself."[118] De Voto says that ". . . literature may make another essay of slavery--but is unlikely to go beyond the superstition, affection, malice, and loyalty of this woman."[119]

Twain's next giant portrait of the Negro is certainly Nigger Jim, the co-hero of The Adventures of Huckleberry

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[117] Leavis, "Introduction," Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 24.

[118] Loc. cit.

[119] De. Voto, op. cit., p. 291.

Finn. He is, perhaps, the best example in nineteenth century fiction of the Negro slave--illiterate and superstitious, yet yearning deeply for freedom. Jim is introduced into the story as a figure of physical dignity--Miss Watson's "big nigger" silhouetted in the kitchen door with the light behind him.[120] In the early chapters of the book, Twain uses superstition as a symbol of difference between the Negro and the white characters.[121] For example, Jim owned a hair ball from the fourth stomach of an ox, with which he could do magic, and he could read dreams and was versed in signs. One must remember that this character was a vulnerable comic Negro in the beginning of Twain's novel. As the plot advances, however, so does Twain's portrayal of Jim's nobility and humanness gather momentum.

Twain carefully explains why Jim must escape, and Huck's reaction to a "runaway" slave. Jim, suspecting that he was about to be "sold down the river" escaped to Jackson's Island. Huck Finn, having faked his own murder, did the same. When the two encounter each other on the island, Huck is glad to see Jim and was not lonesome anymore. He promised not to tell on Jim for running away,

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[120] Bellamy, op. cit., p. 293.

[121] Daniel G. Hoffman, "Jim's Magic: Black or White?," American Literature, XXXII (March, 1960-January, 1961), p. 47.

even though he would be called a low-down abolitionist and be despised for keeping mum. Jim explained to Huck:

> Well, you see, it 'us dis way. Ole missus--dat's Miss Watson--she pecks on me all de time, en treats me pooty rough, but she awluz said she wouldn' sell me down to Orleans. But I noticed dey was a nigger trader roun' de place considable lately, en I begin to get oneasy. Well, one night I creeps to de do' pooty late, en de do' warn't quite shet, en I hear ole missus tell de widder she gwyne to sell me down to Orleans, but she didn' want to, but she could git eight hund'd dollars for me, en it 'us sich a big stack o' money she couldn' resis'. De widder she try to git her to say she wouldn' do it, but I never waited to hear de res'. I lit out mighty quick, I tell you.[122]

Twain points out ironically, that it is Miss Watson, prattling of mercy, prayer, and such, who treats Jim severely, and who, in spite of her promise not to separate him from his family, cannot herself resist the money.[123]

William Dean Howells relates that no American of Northern birth or breeding could have imagined, as did Twain, the spiritual struggle which Huck experiances in deciding to aid Jim in his escape to freedom.[124] Twain saw in the possibilities of the character of Huck an opportunity to show the tremendous task of overcoming the conventions of

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[122]Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 60

[123]Kenneth S. Lynn, Huckleberry Finn Text, Sources, and Criticism, p. 215.

[124]Howells, op. cit., p. 172.

a slave society. He begins by having Huck regard Jim very much as a white Southerner would regard a slave. Gradually Huck discovers that Jim is a human being deserving of his protection, friendship, and love. The gradual change which Twain shows that is taking place within Huck is accompanied by a struggle which the author sees between the ideology and mores of a slave society and the humanity of the boy.[125]

Huck, as Twain depicts him, enlists himself in the quest for freedom when he ventures to the island and informs Jim that a searching party is on its way. "'Git up and hump yourself, Jim!' he cries. 'They're after us!'"[126] Leo Marx thinks that what is particularly important, here, is Twain's use of us. Huck employs the pronoun to identify himself with Jim in the flight from slavery.[127] No one is after Huck; no one, other than Jim, knows he is alive. Here, then, Twain begins the combined effort for Jim's freedom.

In Chapter XVI soon after the start down the river, Twain portrays Huck wrestling with opposed feelings: a sense that he is being "mean" to Miss Watson for not turning in her escaping slave, and an awareness of Jim's dependence and trust. As Jim describes his plans to buy his wife once

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[125] Foner, op. cit., p. 205.

[126] Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 86.

[127] Quoted in Lynn, op. cit., p. 204.

he is free, the two of them work together to buy their two children out of slavery, or get an ab'litionist to steal them if their master won't sell them, Twain lets ". . . all Huck's Southern rearing come to the fore."[128]

> It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dare to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was free. It was according to the old saying, "Give a nigger an inch an he'll take an ell." . . . Here was this nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children--children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm.[129]

Huck's conscience bothered him until he finally resolved to paddle ashore to tell on Jim, and as he paddles off, Twain makes Huck aware of Jim's gratitude for helping him gain freedom once Huck and Jim reach Cairo. Jim says, "Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on'y white genl'man dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim."[130] Huck felt sick. He got back on the raft feeling depressed because he knew that he had done wrong in protecting Jim. Yet, Jim voices his gratefulness, "I tell you chile, I 'spec it save' ole Jim--ole Jim ain't going to forget you for dat, honey."[131]

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[128]Foner, op. cit., p. 207.

[129]Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 124.

[130]Ibid., p. 125.

[131]Ibid., p. 128.

Jim is attempting to rejoin his family; he lavishes his paternal affections and love on Huck, calling him honey and doing everything he can for him in a paternal way.[132] In such wise, Twain identifies Jim as a father image.

After Jim and Huck were separated from each other in the fog, Twain then has Huck return to the raft to find Jim sitting there asleep. When Jim awakens, Huck deceives him by pretending to have been there all the time. Huck tries to make Jim believe that all of the troubles have been a dream, and even has Jim interpret the dream. When Huck asks what is the significance of the leaves and rubbish on the raft as well as the smashed oar, Jim looks at this trash and then at Huck without smiling, and, deeply hurt, replies:

> What do dey stan' for? I's gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back ag'in, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could 'a' got down on my knees en kiss you foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed."[133]

Twain's concept of the pathos and dignity of Jim is obvious in this passage. Lionel Trilling says that Twain here has touched the pride of human affection--the pride of true

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[132] Lynn, op. cit., p. 214.

[133] Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 119.

dignity in the Negro. Huck's pride of status, that of being a white man, vanishes[134] and he breaks entirely with Southern tradition and humbles himself and is glad that he did. Twain incorporates this attitude into the following passage which he assigned to Huck in the novel:

> It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way.[135]

Clearly, Twain has transformed Jim into the symbol of a moral guide, a father, and director.

On another occasion, Twain permitted Huck to believe that Jim was a "mighty good nigger." The episode occurs when Huck awakens just at daybreak on the raft to hear Jim moaning. Huck does not "let on," but he knows the reason for Jim's sorrow. Jim is thinking about his wife and children, and he is blue and homesick. Here, Twain manifests in Jim a longing for freedom and a reunion with his family. Twain has Huck conclude:

> I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural but I reckon it's so. He was often moaning . . . and saying, "Po' little 'Lizabeth! po' little Johnny! it's mighty hard; I spec' I ain't ever gwyne to see you no mo', no mo!"[136]

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[134] Quoted in Lynn, op. cit., p. 195.

[135] Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 121.

[136] Ibid., p. 215.

In the case of Twain's concept of Pap and Huck as representative members of a white family, Huck's remark takes on the qualities of an ironic statement. However, Twain illustrates, as well, Jim's grief and sadness of being separated from his family.

Twain further comments upon Jim's love for family in the passage involving Jim's story of little Lizabeth told to Huck. One recalls that after Lizabeth's recovery from scarlet fever, Jim had ordered her to shut the door. When she refused, Jim gave her a slap sending her sprawling. Upon his discovery that the child was deaf, Jim grabbed her in his arms and cried:

> "Oh, de po' little thing! De Lord God Almighty fo'give po' ole Jim, koze he never gwyne to fo'give hisself as long's he live! Oh, she was plumb deef en dumb, Huck, plumb deef en dumb-- en I'd ben a-treat'n her so!"[137]

Here, Twain consciously makes it impossible for a reader to deny the human remorse which Jim feels upon his discovery of the child's affliction.

Twain's supreme test of Huck occurs when the "king" and "duke" have made Jim a slave again for all his life, ". . . and amongst strangers, too, for forty dirty dollars."[138] Jim's freedom terminated in his being put into chains on the

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[137] Ibid., p. 216.

[138] Ibid., p. 294.

Phelps farm. Huck began to think that, since Jim could not achieve freedom, he had better be a slave at home where his family was. Huck decided to write a letter to Tom Sawyer informing Miss Watson where Jim was. For two reasons, Huck gave up the letter writing. Miss Watson, being angry because of Jim's ungratefulness, would sell him straight down the river again, and if she did not, everybody would naturally despise an ungrateful "nigger." Jim would feel "onery and disgraced." And "it would get all around that Huck Finn helped a nigger to get his freedom."[139] Here, Twain portrays the struggle between Huck's traditions and ". . . what he feels in his heart."[140] Huck became disturbed; he tried to pray, but found that he could not. He wrote the letter to Miss Watson and felt cleansed of sin, but he could not forget all of the goodness and tenderness of Jim who had shown himself so profoundly grateful. He thought over the trip down the river. Jim was always good, Huck remembered, and when he thought again of the letter, he tore it up. He resolved to let Jim go free. Thus, Twain Portrays ". . . humanity triumphing over conscience."[141] Huck declared, ". . . All right then, I'll go to hell,"[142]

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[139] Loc. cit.

[140] Bellamy, op. cit., p. 343.

[141] Archibald Henderson, Mark Twain, p. 185.

[142] Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. 297.

and for a starter, he was determined to steal Jim out of slavery, again.

Tom Sawyer arrived at the farm with his plan, derived from romantic novels, for Jim's rescue. Huck endures much to stay near Jim and to work for his release. On the night of the escape when the three reach the raft, Twain ennobles Jim. Huck exclaimed, "Now, old Jim, you're a free man again, and I bet you won't ever be a slave no more."[143] Everyone was "glad" as could be, but Tom Sawyer was the ". . . gladdest because he had a bullet in the calf of his leg."[144] Tom insisted that they hurry and release the raft. Huck and Jim were thinking and consulting. After they had thought a minute, Huck said, "Say it Jim."[145] Twain brings the portrait to a greater intensity in Jim's reply:

> Well, den dis is de way it looks to me, Huck. Ef it wuz him uz bein' sot free, en one er de boys wuz to get shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine 'bout a doctor f'r to save dis one'? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat? You bet he wouldn't! Well den is Jim gwyne to say it? No say--I doan' budge a step 'dout a doctor; not if it's forty year!"[146]

In Jim's refusal to set the raft loose and his determination to do just what Tom Sawyer, who represents the higher level

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[143] Ibid., p. 380.

[144] Loc. cit.

[145] Ibid., p. 381.

[146] Loc. cit.

of society, would have done under the same circumstances, Twain's portrayal of nobleness rises to a high peak. Jim gives precedence to Tom's need for the doctor over his own escape to freedom. Twain makes Jim worthy of the evaluation that Huck gives to him when he says, "I knowed Jim was white inside."[147]

In the following situation, Twain exemplifies the attitude of many Southerners toward the Negro. Some wanted to hang Jim so that all the "niggers" around wouldn't be trying to run away as "Jim done." But the others reasoned:

> . . . don't do it, it wouldn't answer at all; he ain't our nigger and his owner would turn up and make us pay for him, sure. So that cooled them down a little, because the people that's always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hain't done just right is always the very ones that ain't the most anxious to pay for him when they've got their satisfaction out of him.[148]

Twain makes his supreme appeal for the Negro's value to society in the episode which follows by having someone, other than Huck, become aware of Jim's noble qualities. It is the doctor who recognized the humanity in Jim when in need of help to cut the bullet from Tom's leg. When he said, "I've got to have help somehow . . . out crawls this nigger from somewheres and says he'll help, and he done it,

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[147] Loc. cit.

[148] Ibid., p. 393.

too, and done it very well."[149] The doctor praised Jim. "I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuler, and yet he was resking his freedom to do it."[150] The doctor liked Jim and said he was a gentleman. He told people that ". . . a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars --and kind treatment, too."[151] Twain depicts Jim's being praised by society for this unselfish act, but at the same time, he has Jim locked up again. Although the doctor and others seemed amazed at Jim's risking capture to aid the wounded Tom, Huck felt no surprise at all. ". . . I thought he had a good heart in him and was a good man the first time I see him."[152]

When Tom had become better and had learned that Jim did not get away, he rose in his bed and said, ". . . They hain't no right to shut him up! Turn him loose! he ain't no slave. He's as free as any creture that walks this earth!"[153] Furthermore, old Miss Watson had died two months before and in her remorse of having to sell Jim down the river set him free in her will. Jim was legally free.

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[149] Ibid., p. 394.

[150] Loc. cit.

[151] Ibid., p. 395.

[152] Loc. cit.

[153] Ibid., p. 399.

Free for what? Twain shows, to be a Negro again. And Twain asks one to ponder the questions: What is emancipation? How is freedom won?

Huck and Jim brought to their raft a human creed--the creed of brotherhood, and on the raft they had an opportunity to practice that creed. In this fact Twain aims a criticism at the existing social order.[154] On the raft, everybody felt right and satisfied and kind toward the others, and Huck believed that was the good life. For Jim, the river had a great symbolic meaning--freedom; in fact, "The Road to Freedom" has been suggested as a subtitle for the book.[155] It has been conjectured that, perhaps, Twain felt that freedom in a civilized society was maintained only by one's conforming to patterns.[156] True to the pattern of present times, the Negro has not gained the freedom that was promised by the Emancipation Proclamation. Could Twain's Phelps farm episode be prophetic of today's society? Is there to be a second emergence of the Negro from slavery--the slavery of repression?

Twain has presented Nigger Jim in a towering portrait, gaining for Jim respect and admiration and an acceptance as

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[154] Lynn, op. cit., p. 206.

[155] Bellamy, op. cit., p. 342.

[156] Ibid., p. 347.

a brother human being whose heartaches all can surely share. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, the inner goodness of Huck and Jim manifests itself in a living Christian theme of "Love thy Neighbor."[157] Neither character is complete without the other. One comes to agree with Louis J. Budd who said that Twain ". . . stressed innate dignity and created a shrewd, loyal, generous Jim who deserved more respect than perhaps any Negro preceding him in American fiction."[158] One may further agree with Budd's statement ". . . intentionally or not when Twain made Huck and his brown companion share bed and grub with growing mutual trust, he resisted the rising tide of Jim-Crowism."[159]

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[157]Hoffman, op. cit., p. 54.

[158]Budd, op. cit., p. 94.

[159]Ibid., p. 103.

CHAPTER III

THE SOUTHERN PORTRAIT BY HARRIS AND CABLE

To Uncle Remus
The Lord who made the day and night,
He made the Black man and the White;
So, in like view,
I hold it true
That he hain't got no favorite--
unless it's you.
--James Whitcomb Riley[160]

Joel Chandler Harris, the creator of Uncle Remus, like his inimitable character, Brer Rabbit, too, was ". . . born and bred in the brier patch"[161] in middle Georgia. Here, in 1848, he was born, and here he spent his adventurous youth, amusingly detailed in his book, On the Plantation.[162] In his introduction, Harris insisted that a reader must sift fact from fiction and label the result to suit himself.[163]

In 1862, J. A. Turner, a man of education and literary ambition, began the publishing of The Countryman, a weekly literary periodical of essays, sketches, poems, agricultural articles, and miscellany.[164] From the standpoint of

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[160] Julia Collier Harris, The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris, p. 422.

[161] Caroline Ticknor, "Glimpses of the Author of 'Uncle Remus'--Joel Chandler Harris," Bookman, XXVII (August, 1908), p. 551.

[162] Loc. cit.

[163] Joel Chandler Harris, On the Plantation, p. vii

[164] James W. Lee, "Joel Chandler Harris," Century, LXXVII (April, 1909), p. 891.

distinction, it was, perhaps, the only weekly ever published from the heart of the woods.[165] Turner advertised for an active, intelligent boy who wanted to learn the printing trade. Harris, who was twelve years old, applied for the position and was accepted.[166] Since The Countryman, a small publication, required only a few hours a day for typesetting, the editor urged Joel to use his spare time browsing in the Turner library.[167] Thus, Harris was surrounded with books. On the plantation he encountered the old-time Negro who recognized him as a member of the household and treated him as a full-fledged aristocrat. It became his habit to talk with the older Negroes, who were not required to do regular field work, and to listen to their wonderful, picturesque tales.[168] It is from these associations that Harris paints a picture of the old-time Negro whom he had known intimately. His picture embraces the ". . . childish ignorance of the race and yet its subtle cunning, its quaint humor, its pathos, its philosophy . . . its depth of character."[169] Harris views life through the eyes of a ". . .

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[165] Loc. cit.

[166] Loc. cit.

[167] Loc. cit.

[168] Ibid., p. 893.

[169] Fred L. Pattee, A History of American Literature since 1870, p. 304.

benevolent, aged Negro who instructs the world. . ."[170] through his humerous tales. Harris displays great sympathy for the Negro and on occasion voices his plea for the cause of the race.

It is, perhaps, for the creation of his character, Uncle Remus, that Harris is best known. Uncle Remus became so nearly a real person, not only to Harris but to many who knew and loved his stories, that one realizes with difficulty that he is only a character of the author's imagination. Many of Harris's friends called him "Uncle Remus."[171] Harris based his character on Uncle George Terrell, who was a good teller of tales, and, also, maker of delicious ginger-cakes and a drink called persimmon beer. There were Uncle Bob Capers and other less distinguished story tellers. Uncle Remus was a composite of these old men.[172]

Perhaps Pattee's statement concerning Harris's Uncle Remus is most informative. He made the Negro a living creature. Pattee wrote, and he embodied the results of his studies in a single Negro personality to which he gave the

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[170] H. E. Spiller, et. al., Literary History of the United States, II, p. 748.

[171] Ray Stannard Baker, "Joel Chandler Harris," Outlook, LXXVIII (November 5, 1904), p. 595.

[172] Hildegarde Hawthorne, "Books and Reading, Joel Chandler Harris--'Uncle Remus'," St. Nicholas, XLII (March, 1915), p. 453.

breath of life. And under the portrait of Uncle Remus, should be inscribed: "One of the few original characters which America has added to the world's gallery."[173]

In Uncle Remus's physical appearance, Harris indicates that he is superior to the other servants.

> The figure of the old man, as he stood smiling upon the crowd of negroes, was picturesque in the extreme. He seemed to be taller than all the rest; and, notwithstanding his venerable appearance, he moved and spoke with all the vigor of youth. He had always exercised the authority over his fellow-servants. He had been the captain of the corn-pile, the stoutest at the log-rolling, the swiftest with the hoe, the neatest with the plough, and the plantation hands still looked upon him as their leader. (from Nights With Uncle Remus)[174]

Stella Brooks insists that Uncle Remus is ". . . not a Character but a Portrait. . . . an individual--a distinctive personality--one of the immortal 'real folks' of literature.[175] She regards story-telling as an art and Uncle Remus as an artist.[176]

Harris portrays Uncle Remus as the confidential family servant, who was aware of his importance. He was

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[173]Pattee, op. cit., p. 48.

[174]Quoted in Stella Brewer Brooks, Joel Chandler Harris Folklorist, p. 48.

[175]Stella Brewer Brooks, "Joel Chandler Harris Folklorist," American Literature, XXIII, (May, 1951), p. 206.

[176]Stella Brewer Brooks, Joel Chandler Harris Folklorist, p. 48.

influential with his master and mistress. He had taken care of "Miss Sally" (his mistress) when she was a child, and still regarded her in the same respect. Because of Uncle Remus's relationship with the family, the other Negroes found it to their advantage to treat him with great consideration.[177]

Harris gives his own explanation about the Uncle Remus stories:

> If the reader not familiar with plantation life will imagine that the myth-stories of Uncle Remus are told night after night to a little boy by an old Negro who appears to be venerable enough to have lived during the period which he describes--who has nothing but pleasant memories of the discipline of slavery--and who has all the prejudices of caste and pride of family that were the natural result of the system; if the reader can imagine all this, he will find little difficulty in appreciating and sympathizing with the air of affectionate superiority which Uncle Remus assumes as he proceeds to unfold the mysteries of plantation lore to a little child who is the product of that practical reconstruction which has been going on to some extent since the war in spite of the politicians.[178]

Harris points out the status of the Negro in the stories. He says that scientific investigation is not needed to show why the Negro selects Brer Rabbit, the weakest and most harmless of all animals, as his hero.[179] In the victories

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[177] Ibid., p. 49.

[178] Joel C. Harris, The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus, p. xxvii.

[179] Ibid., p. xxv.

in contests with the bear, the wolf, and the fox, ". . . it is not virtue that triumphs, but helplessness; it is not malice, but mischievousness."[180] As Pattee points out, Brer Rabbit is the Negro in thinnest disguise; the helplessness of the Negro is prefigured in the helplessness of the rabbit who, surrounded by brutality and greater force, wins in the end by cunning or skillful deception.[181]

In the Remus stories, Harris expresses that which is so much a part of him. From his boyhood on the Turner plantation, he had been fond of hearing and telling the cabin stories of the ante-bellum Negro.[182] The stories were ". . . the slow fruitage of the wonder, the humor and the pathos of a race of primitive storytellers."[183] No one knows for how long the stories had been told in varying forms in the jungles of Africa. Slaves had brought them hither, and they flowered, ". . . being cultivated with unconscious skill in the humble Negro cabins of the cotton and cane fields."[184] Harris gives, not merely a story about a rabbit and a fox, but stories that pulsate with human life

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[180] Loc. cit.

[181] Pattee, op. cit., p. 304.

[182] Bakes, op. cit., p. 595.

[183] Loc. cit.

[184] Loc. cit.

and emotion. With lifelike reality, he has sketched the Negro who told these stories. With skill, he has expressed the Negro's thoughts and feelings.[185]

Mink, the runaway slave, was one of Harris's favorite characters that serves as an example of his belief that, when given the opportunity, the Negro can be capable and responsible. Harris's sympathies were always with Mink rather than with the overseer who treated Mink cruelly. For example, when the army was marching through Georgia, Harris describes how the horses and mules of the plantation were driven to a field in which there was a large swamp.[186] Joe took Butterfly, his horse, to the very middle of the swamp and tethered him where he could get plenty of water to drink and young cane to eat. Later, a Federal group, aided by some of the Negroes, found the horses and mules and drove them off. Joe, then, was saddened by the loss of Butterfly. The next morning, Butterfly came galloping up to the printing office carrying Mink, who was no longer a runaway.[187] Mink aptly related, "I seed you put 'im out in de swamp dar Mars' Joe, an' den I seed some er de yuther niggers gwine dar 'long

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[185] Ibid., p. 596.

[186] Joel C. Harris, On the Plantation, p. 225.

[187] Ibid., p. 231.

wid dem Yankees mens . . . . He mayn't be ez fat ez he wuz but he des ez game ez he yever is been."[188] Joe and the editor were pleased. Mink became one of the tenants on the plantation, and later bought a little farm of his own, where he "prospered and thrived."[189] In this manner, Harris illustrates the trustworthiness and goodness of the Negro. Harris looked back to the war period and saw the faithfulness of the trusted "darky"; he saw him taking care of his master's family while the master was away fighting. Harris thought that such faithfulness was worthy of recognition; consequently, about the white head of the old slave, he ". . . wove a halo of fame and glory."[190] He illustrates that concept as Uncle Remus describes the reconstruction in his "Story of the war."[191] Harris adds, for the benefit of the curious, that the story was almost literally true.[192] In summarized form, the story tells of Mars Jeems coming home to see his mother and sister, Sally. Uncle Remus, seeing a yankee take aim at Mars Jeems as he rode by on a

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[188] Ibid., p. 232.

[189] Loc. cit.

[190] Henry E. Harmon, "Joel Chandler Harris," Bookman, LXL (June, 1925), p. 435.

[191] Joel C. Harris, Uncle Remus, His Songs and Sayings, p. 214.

[192] Ibid., p. viii.

prancing filly, shut his eyes and shot. The Union soldier lost an arm in the fray, but Uncle Remus and Miss Sally nursed him back to health. Miss Sally married the Yankee, and Uncle Remus reasoned that Miss Sally's arms and his own brawny ones were replacement enough for the soldier's lost arm.[193] To the inquiry, "Do you mean to say that you shot the Union soldier, when you knew he was fighting for your freedom?,"[194] Uncle Remus replied, "I des disremembered all 'bout freedom and lammed aloose."[195] Harris has shown that the love and family devotion held by many of the old slaves in the South, as in this case, were stronger than the desire for freedom.

Though Harris glorifies the plantation regime,[196] he paints the other side of the picture, as well. Hubble says that "Harris could understand as few slaveholders could, the slave's desire for freedom."[197] He illustrates Harris's understanding in the following accounts. The Federal army plunged through the peaceful plantation driving before it herds of cows, horses, mules, and wagons loaded with bateaux.

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[193] Ibid., p. 215.

[194] Loc. cit.

[195] Loc. cit.

[196] Jay B. Hubble, The South in American Literature 1607-1900. p. 798.

[197] Ibid., p. 785.

Finally, Joe Maxwell (who was, in reality, Harris himself) came to the realization that he was not dreaming. He saw that their horses and mules were gone and many of the Negro cabins were empty. Some of the older Negroes were in their places, but some of the younger ones who were not on good terms with their masters had followed the Federal army. Those who remained were informed by Turner, the plantation owner, that they were free, and, thus, the old gave way to the new.[198]

The following incident appeared in The Countryman as given here, although it has had many adaptations.[199] Harris indicates that some of the slaves gave their lives to be free:

> In a corner of the fence, not far from the road, Joe found an old Negro woman shivering and moaning. Near her lay an old Negro man, his shoulders covered with an old ragged shawl.
>
> "Who is that lying there?" asked Joe.
>
> "He dead, suh! But, bless God, he died free!"
>
> It was a pitiful sight, and a pitiable ending of the old couple's dream of freedom. Harbart and the other Negroes buried the old man, and the old woman was made comfortable in one of the empty cabins; she never ceased to bless "little Marster," as she called Joe. . . . Old as she was, she and her husband had followed the army for many a weary mile on the road to freedom. The old man found it in the fence corner, and a few weeks later the old woman found it in the humble cabin.[200]

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[198] Joel C. Harris, On the Plantation, p. 230.

[199] Ibid., p. 231.

[200] Loc. cit.

At "Turnwold," Harris witnessed the tragedy described above. The two old slaves, in their strong desire for freedom had left their master and followed Sherman's army. Pathetically enough, each died after only a few days of longed-for freedom.[201]

Harris lived through the time of the ante-bellum days and the years of reconstruction. He saw and understood the Negro of both periods.[202] Arthur Quinn says that "Harris could not help seeing the absurdity of the attempts of the Northern enthusiast to advance the Negro faster than his abilities warranted."[203] Harris illustrates the fact in Uncle Remus's view of education for the Negro:

> ". . . Dey better be home pickin' up chips. W'at a nigger gwine l'arn outen books? I kin take a bar'l stave an' fling mo' sense inter a nigger in one minute dan all de schoolhouses betwixt des en de State er Midgigin. . . . Wid one bar'l stave I kin fa'rly lif de vail er ignunce.
>
> "Then you don't believe in education?
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> ". . . I ain't larnt nuthin' in books, en yit I kin count all de money I gits. No use talkin', boss. Put a spellin'-book in a niggers han's, en right den en dar' you loozes a plow-hand. I done had de speunce un it."[204]

Harris loved his colored friends and tried with all his

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[201] Hubble, The South in American Literature 1607-1900, p. 785.

[202] Harmon, op. cit., p. 435.

[203] Arthus H. Quinn, American Fiction, an Historical and Critical Survey, p. 283.

[204] Joel C. Harris, On the Plantation, p. 261.

power to interpret clearly their quaint wisdom and homely fun for the pleasure of the rest of the world.[205] Mark Twain was appreciative of Harris's art that was manifest in his creation of old Negro Remus, and contended that Uncle Remus was lovable and delightful; adding that ". . . he and the little boy, and their relations with each other, are high and fine literature and worthy to live for their own sakes."[206] It is Uncle Remus's province not to present problems to be solved; it was his mission to charm and to amuse.[207]

It is clear, then, that Harris's task was to portray the good qualities of the ante-bellum Negro and to forget the evil.[208] There is no trace of sectional hatred in Harris's work.[209]

Harris left no long masterpiece, but through the personality of Uncle Remus, he taught a lesson of honesty, justice, and mercy.[210] Yet, one feels that Harris had a tendency to glorify plantation life, as did Hubble, who

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[205]Hawthorne, op. cit., p. 453.

[206]Bellamy, op. cit., p. 149.

[207]Ticknor, op. cit., p. 531.

[208]Baker, op. cit., p. 601.

[209]Loc. cit.

[210]Pattee, op. cit., p. 308.

said, "The Negroes have never had much enthusiasm about Uncle Remus; he seems to them too subservient to the whites."[211]

Cable

> ". . . In our hearts you rank with the great philanthropist who made humanity their business when American liberty was mocked by the clank of bondsmen's chains."[212]
> --a tribute by three Negroes in Kansas City.

The birthplace of George Washington Cable was a rambling frame house surrounded by magnolias, orange and fig trees, and flowering shrubs that thrive in semitropical New Orleans.[213] The New Orleans which Cable first saw from the foot of Canal Street was a city of extremes and contrasts--the most European city in the United States. It exhibited qualities of the new world along with characteristics of the transplanted old world.[214] Here lived the Creoles. It should be clearly understood that the word, Creole, as Cable uses it, designates a person of French and Spanish ancestry, who may or may not have colored blood.[215] Shirley Ann Grau points out that ". . . the white men of New Orleans often

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[211]Hubble, The South in American Literature 1607-1900, p. 794.

[212]Arlin Turner, George W. Cable a Biography, p. 205.

[213]Ibid., p. 3.

[214]Ibid., p. 6.

[215]Shirley Ann Grau, Foreword to Old Creole Days, p. viii.

kept quadroon mistresses, and the children of such unions, quite logically thought of themselves as Creoles also."[216] The Negroes were found at the edge of the city where they ". . . held their pagan orgies and paid homage to the voudou queens."[217] It is this New Orleans that Cable used as a setting for his novel, The Grandissimes, published serially (1879) and as a volume in the following year.

The Grandissimes is a novel in which Cable exposes many facets of life in the cresent city. However, one's main concern is for the episodes involving the Negro. In the plot, Cable presents the tragedy of the Negro in an effective manner. At the same time, he makes a ". . . powerful attack on the traditional Southern attitude toward the slave."[218] Cable, the son and grandson of slaveholders, had encountered the slaves in the Cable household, an interesting account of which is given in his biography. At one time, the slaves there had numbered eight, two of whom were characters in a story which had impressed Cable deeply, and was told by Cable as follows:

> The children had one nurse named Jane (a "bright mulatress," according to the conveyance record, sixteen years old when bought for $600.00

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[216] Loc. cit.

[217] Turner, op. cit., p. 6.

[218] Ibid., p. 93.

> on January 13, 1845), who made a habit of frightening them when their mother was not present. Another nurse, their favorite, was Martha (bought for $500.00 at the age of eleven on May 25, 1847, the same day another, Mary Anne, thirty-two, was sold for $600.00). Jane, it came out later, had killed her own child, and hated kindly Martha because she knew her secret. In time, Jane beat Martha cruelly. Following that, the other slaves went in a body to give Rebecca [George's mother] a full report, no one daring to be an informer without the backing of the others. Jane was sold down the river, as the saying was, to work in the rice fields, but she remained in the minds of the children as a personification of evil.[219]

The Grandissimes is developed around the great and terrible story of Bras-Coupé, which Cable wrote out of indignation after having come across a copy of the ancient Black Code for governing slaves.[220] It is in this story that he presents the cause of the Negro most impressively.[221] The plot, in simple detail, starts in Africa, where Bras-Coupé had been a prince among his people. In a war, he was captured and shipped to New Orleans, where Agricola Fusilier, business manager of the Grandissime estate, bought and resold him to Don José Martinez, who, in turn, took him to his plantation, gave him a clean garment, a whitewashed cabin (finer than Bras-Coupé's palace at home), and clean food.

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[219] Ibid., p. 12.

[220] Ibid., p. 94.

[221] Turner, op. cit., p. 94.

When Bras-Coupé fell sick, healing doses were administered to him and he recovered.[222]

Bras-Coupé in French meant "the Arm Cut Off." The enslaved prince, Bras-Coupé, in assuming the name, did not mean that his tribe, in losing him, had lost its strong right arm. Rather, Bras-Coupé meant that the arm no longer able to shake the spear or swing the sword would never be lifted again.[223] Obviously, Cable portrays in him a type of all slaves, ". . . turning into flesh and blood the truth that all slavery is maiming."[224]

One day, Bras-Coupé was taken to the field, given a hoe, and made to understand that he was to work with common Negroes. But he refused to work, and scenes of violence followed. The prince lifted the nearest slave into the air and killed him; another, he threw into the branches of a willow and tossed a woman over his head into a draining-ditch and made a bound for freedom; but he fell to his knees when shot by the overseer. When the incident was reported to Don José, the master, the overseer laid all of the blame on the man whom death had removed from correction and the

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[222]George W. Cable, The Grandissimes, p. 170.

[223]Ibid., p. 171.

[224]Loc. cit.

overseer asserted that Bras-Coupé was an animal that could not be whipped. To satisfy his questioning mind and with a great sacrifice of dignity, Don José rode to the quarters, where Bras-Coupé was brought out--chains on his feet and wrists and an iron yoke about his neck. In this scene, Cable has truly portrayed the bestial treatment of the slave.

In another scene, Cable has the overseer reply to the señor that Bras-Coupé was a Jaloff and a prince, and warned that, if he were whipped, he would die. The dauntless captive and his fearless master recognized in each other physical courage, and Don José requested an interpreter.[225] When Agricola was appointed, he was insulted. "I, Agricola Fusilier, stand an interpreter to a Negro? H-sir!"[226] Herein, Cable indicates that a Creole could not lower himself to the level of the Negro.

Cable presents his Negro women characters with understanding. He indicates, also, that when a slave showed too much potential, he must be repressed. On the lonely plantation at the Cannes Brulees, where Aurore Nancanou, a young Creole, lived without brothers or sisters, she, according to custom, had been given a little quadroon slave-

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[225] Ibid., p. 173.

[226] Loc. cit.

maid as a constant companion and playmate.[227] The maid was remarkable in many ways. At fourteen, she was of a barbaric and magnetic beauty ". . . that startled the beholder like the unexpected drawing out of a jeweled sword."[228] Aurora became a lady, and her playmate, a lady's maid. Of the two, Cable portrays the maid as the one with the ruling spirit. Consequently, a disposition had to be made, and her services were given to Agricola. She later gained her freedom and was noted for her skill as a hairdresser, but, most of all, for the voudou rites which she practiced. Here Cable begins his portrait of the beautiful mulatto sorceress, Palmyre, who was sent by Agricola to the plantation as interpretess. The two hated each other. Agricola hated her for her intelligence, for the high favor in which she was held by her mistress, and for her invincible spirit since he considered himself to be the object of her silent hate.[229]

Adorned with scarlet beads and feathers, Palmyre commanded Bras-Coupé's admiration. No sooner did he turn his tiger glance upon her than the fire of his eyes died out, for he had fallen in love with Palmyre and, thereafter,

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[227] Ibid., p. 59.

[228] Ibid., p. 60.

[229] Ibid., p. 173.

allowed himself to be ruled by her. He desired to marry her, and on their wedding night, got drunk. Forgetting he was a slave, Bras-Coupé, knocked down his master, and scenes of flight and brutality followed. Cable exposes the treatment of the Negro stipulated in the old French code, still in force, which read:

> The runaway slave who shall continue to be so for one month from the day of his being denounced to the officers of justice, shall have his ears cut off and shall be branded with the flower de luce on the shoulder; and on a second offence of the same nature, persisted in during one month of his being denounced, he shall be hamstrung, and be marked with the flower de luce on the other shoulder. On the third offence he shall die.[230]

Bras-Coupé ran away on two occasions, and Agricola insisted that the slave be taught his place, pointing out Article 27 of the same code which read, "The slave who, having struck his master, shall have produced a bruise shall suffer capital punishment."[231] Bras-Coupe was guilty of all offenses, but Don José spared the life of the captive, who was delivered to the law to suffer the consequences for attempting to be a free man. Palmyre pleaded for him. Cable's treatment of these given incidents is underscored by the cost Palmyre made to intercede, knowing as she did that his death would make her free and that, if Bras-Coupé lived, she must

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[230] Ibid., p. 190

[231] Ibid., p. 191

be his wife. The scene approaches the status of tragic irony.

The torture of Bras-Coupé was unbearable. Cable relates it in the following manner:

> In the midst of the ancient town in a part which is now crumbling away, stood the Calaboza, with its humid vaults, grated cells, iron cages and its whips; and there, soon enough, they strapped Bras-Coupé face downward and laid on the lash. And yet not a sound came from the mutilated but unconquered African to annoy the ear of the sleeping city.[232]

The slave took the lashing in brave silence. The next morning at sunrise, he was brought to the plantation and put on the porch of the thoughtful overseer. Palmyre burst into tears and sank beside him. "On a soft bed of dry grass, rested the helpless form of the captive giant, a cloth thrown over his galled back, his ears shorn from his head, and the tendons behind his knees severed."[233] Cable emphasizes that the faithful and sympathetic Palmyre was ever with him.

Don José next demanded that Bras-Coupé lift the curse, which he was thought to have inflicted, but Bras-Coupé merely smiled. On the next evening, Palmyre whispered to Bras-Coupé that the master was dead and that, as he was dying, had

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[232] Loc. cit.

[233] Loc. cit.

asked that Bras-Coupé forgive him. A scene follows which illustrates Cable's use of Christian symbolism. Don José's wife brought her babe, knelt beside the bed of sweet grass, and laid the infant within the hollow of the slave's arm. Bras-Coupé gazed upon it; the child and its mother smiled; and she put her hand upon the runaway slave's face. "The first tears of his life, the dying testimony of his humanity, gushed from his eyes and rolled down his cheek upon the infant's hand."[234] The curse was lifted. Thus, as the infant Christ came to save the world from sin, this child purged Bras-Coupé of evil.

Cable completes the scene by having Palmyre seek out the priest. To the many tender questions, asked by the good father, Bras-Coupé gave no answers until the holy man asked, "Do you know where you are going?" His brightening eyes answered. All listened for the answer from the death bed. With an upward smile, he whispered, "To--Africa."[235] One conjectures that to Bras-Coupé, after the inhuman treatment which he endured, "To--Africa" surely meant "to heaven." Cable completes the ghastly picture of the torture and death of Bras-Coupé herein. Though Cable was of Southern birth, Vedder says, "No abolitionist ever scourged the

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[234] Ibid., p. 193.

[235] Loc. cit.

institution of slavery with words more fiery than those that tell that hideous tale."[236]

Cable permits several of the characters ironically and conventionally, to assert that the slaves are ". . . the happiest beings on earth."[237] However, he refutes the assertion in the portrayal of the Negress Clemence who survived being hurled into the draining-ditch by Bras-Coupé and became the *marchande des calas*. This decrepit old slave reflects as she is hobbling along the street and singing of the pies she has for sale:

> White folks is werry kine. Dey wants us to b'lieb we happy--dey *wants to b'lieb* we is. W'y you know, dey 'bleeged to b'lieb it--fo' dey own cyumfut. 'Tis de sem weh wid de preache's; dey buil' we ow own sep'ate meet'n-houses; dey b'leebs us lak it de bess, an' dey *knows* dey lak it de bess.[238]

Cable believed that a crime is committed when men and women are robbed of their cares and showed that man is prone to observe benignly a dwarfed class of society as "free from care."[239] He relates the cares of the old negress:

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[236]Henry C. Vedder, *American Writers of Today*, p. 271.

[237]Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[238] Cable, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

[239]*Loc. cit.*

> . . . the feelings handed down to Clemence had come through ages of African savagery; through fires that do not refine, but that blunt and blast and blacken and char; starvation, gluttony, drunkenness, thirst, drowning, nakedness, dirt, fetichism, debauchery, slaughter, pestilence and the rest --she was their heiress; they left her the cinders of human feelings . . . . She remembered, with pride, the price her mother had brought at auction . . . .She had had children, assorted colors . . . some in the Grandissime households or field-gangs, . . . some not accounted for. Husbands--like the Samaritan woman's.[240]

Although Cable attributes to Clemence song and laughter, he also emphasizes her sorrows and cares.

Through Cable's description, one witnesses again the bestial treatment inflicted upon the Negro. Clemence was caught in a trap when she served as agent of Palmyre carrying voudou curses to Agricola. "She fell, a snarling, struggling, groaning heap, to the ground,"[241] and in her wild pain tried hopelessly to draw the jaws of the trap away from her leg. "Hands, teeth, the free foot, the writhing body, every combination of available forces failed to spread the savage jaws, though she strove until hands and mouth were bleeding."[242] As Captain Jean-Baptiste, one of the Grandissime clan, released her, she insisted that the

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[240] Loc. cit.

[241] Ibid., p. 312.

[242] Ibid., p. 313.

bundle she carried was nothing but her "wash'n t'ings."[243] He disengaged a small black coffin from the old dress in which it was wrapped, removed the lid, and saw resting on the cushioned bottom, a myrtlewax image, painted and moulded, of a Negro's bloody arm severed at the shoulder. It was ". . . a brss-coupé--with a dirk grasped in its hand."[244] Cable editorializes on this action:

> It seems to be one of the self-punitive characteristics of tyranny, whether the tyrant be a man, a community, or a caste, to have a pusillanimous fear of its victim. It was not when Clemence lay in irons, it is barely now, that our South is casting off a certain apprehensive tremor, generally latent, but at the slightest provocation active, and now and then violent, concerning her "blacks." This fear, like others similar elsewhere in the world, has always been met by the same one antidote --terrific cruelty to the tyrant's victim. So we shall presently see the Grandissime ladies deeming themselves compassionate, urging their kinsmen to "give the poor wretch a sound whipping and let her go." Ah! what atrocities are unconsciously perpetrating North and South now, in the name of mercy or defence, which the advancing light of progressive thought will presently show out in their enormity?[245]

Morning brought the topic of the abysmal treachery and ingratitude of Negro slaves to the tongues of the whole tribe of Grandissimes, and as Cable states, they believed, this morning, in the total depravity--of the Negro. In the

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[243] Loc. cit.

[244] Ibid., p. 314.

[245] Ibid., p. 315.

face of this belief, the ladies put forth their pleas of mercy for Clemence. However, the Grandissimes were disappointed in Agricola. Why should he suggest delays and stammer over their proposed measures of punishment as extreme?[246] Cable gives an account of the false justice in the speech of Agricola to Professor Joseph Frowenfeld:

> H-really, Professor we must agree that a trifle like that ought not to make old Agricola Fusilier nervous. But I find it painful, sir, very painful. I can lift up this right hand, Joseph, and swear I never gave a slave--man or woman--a blow in my life butaccording to my notion of justice. And now to find my life attempted by former slaves of my own household, and taunted with the righteous hamstringing of a dangerous runaway? But they apprehended the miscreants; one is actually in hand and justice will take its course; trust the Grandissimes for that--though, really, Joseph, I counselled leniency.[247]

When Professor Frowenfeld asks Raoul to tell honore Grandissime, Agricola thunders, "Sir, how dare you insinuate that my kinsmen may deal otherwise than justly?"[248] To Joseph's inquiry as to whether they would treat her exactly as if she were white and had threatened the life of a slave, Agricola had to reply, "No-no, sir!"[249] Ironically, the Grandissimes--the younger and some of the harsher senior

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[246] Ibid., p. 317.

[247] Ibid., p. 318.

[248] Loc. cit.

[249] Loc. cit.

members of their family did let justice take its course. They took old Clemence down to the swamps. At the base of a water-willow tree, she sat motionlessly, silently, ghostly sick awaiting death, and despite her pleadings for her life they dropped a rawhide noose over her head. With a cry of terror, she wildly tried to lift it off. Pathetically, she implored:

> You'd oughteh tek me and put me in a calaboose, an' let de law tek 'is co'se. You's all nice gen'l-men--. . . an' you sorter owes it to you' sev's fo to not do no sich nasty wuck as hangin' a po' ole nigga wench; deed you does . . . Even if I is a nigga! You cyan' jus' murdeh me hyeh in de woods! . . . I tell de judge on you! You ain' got no mo' biznis to do me so 'an if I was a white 'oman! . . . Look down, oh God, look down an' stop dis yeh foolishness! Oh, God, fo de love of Jesus! . . . Oh, yes, deh's a judgmen' day! Den it wont be a bit o' use to you to be white! Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, fo', fo', de, de, love o' God! Oh![250]

The frantic ples of Clemence not to be hanged was ignored. They drew her up but did not kill her.

No one can envision a more heartless episode than that which Cable next describes. It was Jean-Baptist who proposed to let her go--to give her a run for her life. She walked rapidly with unsteady feet toward the fields. "Run, if you don't, I'll shoot this minute!"[251] She ran faster. A pistol-shot rang out, and old Clemence leaped

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[250] Ibid., p. 323.

[251] Loc. cit.

into the air and fell to the ground dead. Agricola had counselled for leniency, but the above action was the course that justice took in the hands of his kinsmen. Cable exposes the moral weakness of the Grandissime clan in this account of the vicious murder of the Negress Clemence.[252] In her death, Cable dramatizes all of the hopelessness of her existence.[253] Pattee labels the murder of Clemence ". . . sheer horror and brutal, and unsparing realism."[254]

Cable, also, establishes the fact that the free quadroons were the saddest slaves of all, and the reason for their sadness is given by Frowenfeld:

> . . .Your men, for a little property, and your women, for a little amorous attention, let themselves be shorn even of the virtue of discontent, and for a paltry bait of sham freedom they have consented to endure tyrannous contumely which flattens them into the dirt like grass under a slab. I would rather be a runaway in the swamps than content myself with such a freedom. As your class stands before the world today--free in form but slaves in spirit--you are--. . .--a warning to philanthropists![255]

Cable portrays Palmyre's counterpart in Honore Grandissime, another quadroon, and the son of Numa. Numa Grandissime was a man of rank, who had two sons, the older

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[252]Margaret Bloom, "George W. Cable, A New Englander in the South," The Bookman, LXXIII (June, 1931), p. 402.

[253]Pattee, op. cit., p. 250.

[254]Loc. cit.

[255]Ibid., p. 196.

illegitimate and colored, the younger legitimate and white, and each bore the name of Honore. Numa educated both of his sons and gave the larger share of his property to the older one, perhaps, as Cable states, to ease a feeling of guilt and to avoid discrimination.[256] The dark Honore saw Palmyre and loved her. He sent a written offer to buy Palmyre at any price so that she might be free to marry him.[257] A threat to kill whosoever should give Palmyre to a black man hung over Agricola's head and would have been cause enough for refusal. However, he resorted to his old braggart line of retreat, and Cable illustrates Agricola's rebuke of the quadroon:

> . . . You did this for impudence, to make a show of your wealth. You intended it as an insinuation of equality. I overlook the impertinence for the sake of the man [Numa] whose white blood you carry; but h-mark you, if ever you bring your Parisian airs and self-sufficient face on a level with mine again, h'I will slap it.[258]

Cable relates that, in spite of wealth and an education in Paris, Honore was miserable because of racial status.[259] He was a business partner of his white half-

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[256] Gloster, op. cit., p. 13.

[257] Cable, op. cit., p. 185.

[258] Ibid., p. 186.

[259] Loc. cit.

brother and haunted him ". . . as the dark invisible side of the moon haunts the light.[260] Finally, in despair of winning Palmyre, he drowned himself; however, before doing so, he violently stabbed Agricola, who had struck him in the face with a cane for refusing to take off his hat.[261] Here, Cable is concerned with the wrongs done to the tragic near-white mulattoes.[262]

The Grandissimes, a gallery, rather than a single piece of art, therefore, presents a series of lurid pictures. The picture of Bras-Coupé, the African king, who would not willingly submit to slavery, is a painting of torturous death and brutality.[263] Cable does not enter the story but allows the weight of the story to emphasize his moral judgment. Cable's novel convicted slavery and its supporting code.[264] One sees in the old Negro, Clemence, the same portrayal which Twain gave to Aunt Rachel in a "A True Story." In spite of her outward show of happiness, her heartaches and bruises have been many. Until the time of

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[260] Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition, p. 173.

[261] Loc. cit.

[262] Turner, op. cit., p. 93.

[263] Pattee, op. cit., p. 93.

[264] Turner, op. cit., p. 94.

her atrocious murder, the portraits of the two women are very much alike.

The uncanny, voodoo side of the Negro is encountered in Cable's character, Palmyre. Pattee has this statement of Cable's treatment of this character:

> His characterization of the voodoo quadroon woman Palmyre with her high Latin, Jaloff-African ancestry, her "barbaric and magnetic beauty that startled the beholder like the unexpected drawing out of a jeweled sword," her physical perfection --lithe of body as a tigress and as cruel, witching and alluring, yet a thing of horror, "a creature that one would want to find chained" -- it fingers at one's heart and makes one fear.[265]

The Grandissimes is a book written with an undertone of fear--a fear that comes from the force of race repression.[266] Cable portrayed the facts of race and caste. He protested against the times--against the South of the War. He wrote the editors of Scribners Monthly that he meant The Grandissimes ". . . as truly a political work as ever it has been called.[267] Arvin has the following comment to make about the novel:

> The three forms that human antagonism takes in the novel--familial, political, racial--are all seen as involving a confusion of emotions,

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[265]Pattee, op. cit., p. 250

[266]Loc. cit.

[267]Edmond Wilson, "Citizen of the Union," The New Republic, LVII (February 13, 1929), p. 352.

> attractions as well as division, love as well as hatred. The central token of this is the relation between the "Two Honores" (their names are identical)--the white Honore, the Creole gentleman, and the quadroon Honore, his declassed and alienated half brother . . . . as there is in the essentially sisterly relation between Aurore Nancanou and the quadroon Palmyre . . . Cable had an intuition of the inescapable and profound dependence upon each other--a dependence like that of inimical brothers--of the two races.[268]

Cable was haunted by racial strife, sectional hatreds, and bitterness. His The Grandissimes ends with a marriage that seals a reconciliation of the sections.[269] As for the reconciliation of the races, which Cable hinted at, time alone can tell.

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[268] Newton Arvin, "Introduction," The Grandissimes, p. x.

[269] Loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

THE NORTHERN PORTRAIT BY DE FOREST AND HOWELLS

". . . man is made in the image of his maker."[270]

John William De Forest was born in Seymour, Connecticut, 1926. He served an apprenticeship as a young writer. Illness prevented his enrollment at Yale, and as an alternative, he traveled extensively in the Near East, in England, and on the Continent. During this time, he experimented in writing.[271] With the oncoming of the Civil War, De Forest enlisted in the First Company of the 12th Connecticut Volunteers which was active in campaigns around Port Hudson and in the occupation of New Orleans; thus, "De Forest the writer . . . became De Forest the soldier."[272] Of the distinguished American novelists of this era, it was De Forest alone who ". . . suffered the harsh but vitalizing experience,"[273] which was to become the reality of his novel, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867).

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[270] John William De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, p. 238.

[271] Stanley T. Williams, "Introduction," A Volunteer's Adventures, p. vii.

[272] Loc. cit.

[273] Loc. cit.

Everett Carter points out that De Forest's central motive in fiction was to tell the truth, as he saw it, of the War and its aftermath.[274] De Forest rebelled against the sentimentalizing of the South.[275] In his Miss Ravenel's Conversion, Lillie Ravenel, who was reared in the South and beguiled ". . . by its dream of magnolias and moonlight,"[276] is the heroine. The author symbolizes the two civilizations, that of the North and that of the South, in the characters, Colburne, a Yankee lawyer, and Colonel Carter, a dashing Virginian. One may conveniently examine De Forest's literary treatment of the Negro in the novel. The character of Dr. Ravenel is used by the author to expound the opinions about slavery that lie outside the story.[277] De Forest was aware of the danger in the sentimentality involved in the problem of white and black, for ". . . either the Southerner stereotyped the Negro as a sub-human, or the Northerner sentimentalized him into a noble savage."[278] Both views were unrealistic. It is through Dr. Ravenel that one comprehends

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[274]Everett Carter, Howells and the Rise of Realism, p. 77.

[275]Loc. cit.

[276]Ibid., p. 78.

[277]Gordon S. Haight, "Introduction," Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, p. vii.

[278]Carter, op. cit., p. 78.

De Forest's argument ". . . that the Negro is a human being with special problems of culture as well as economic poverty."[279] To De Forest, neither the South nor the North was blameless for the War. He understood both points of view, and to him, the war was more than a crusade to abolish slavery; it was a conflict of cultures.[280]

Miss Ravenel's Conversion opens in New Boston in the little Yankee State of Barataria, a fictitious name used by De Forest to avoid misrepresenting, insulting, or burlesquing any self-satisfied community.[281] Lillie Ravenel and her father, fugitives from New Orleans, have come to New Boston because her father's abolitionist views have made it impossible for them to live in comfort in New Orleans after the War has begun. De Forest initially exposes the treatment of the Negro through Dr. Ravenel's explanation to Colburne that

> New Orleans is An excellent place for a dissecting class, by the way. So many negroes are whipped to death, so many white gentlemen die in their boots, as the saying is, that we rarely lack for subjects.[282]

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[279] Loc. cit.

[280] Haight, op. cit., p. vii.

[281] Ibid., p. ix.

[282] De Forest, op. cit., p. 5.

Thus, one side of the culture is established. Dr. Ravenel was a Southerner who had been born in South Carolina and lived in New Orleans for twenty-five years. De Forest prompts Dr. Ravenel to justify his present position by saying, "My body was born amidst slavery, but my conscience soon found the underground railroad."[283] The doctor was thankful that he had never owned a slave. De Forest, then, contrasts the father's feeling in the character of Lillie, who was a rebel. Louisiana was her Louisiana wherein she had a nice old mauma, or black nurse. Lillie longed to return to the South.

Like Twain, De Forest points out the Negro's desire for freedom. In his novel, as in his autobiography, De Forest describes the acclamations of joy with which the Negroes greeted the liberating army. Colburne (who was a characterization of De Forest himself) wrote to Dr. Ravenel:

> We are no welcome tourist, in Louisiana at least not to white inhabitants; . . . But to the negroes we evidently appear as friends and redeemers. Such joyous gatherings of dark faces, such deep-chested shouts of welcome and deliverance, such a waving of green boughs and white vestiments, and even of pickaninnies--such a bending of knees and visible praising of God for his long-expected and at-last-realized mercy, salutes our eyes from morn till night, as makes me grateful to Heaven for this hour of holy triumph. How glorious will be that time, now near at hand, when our re-united country will be free of the shame and curse of slavery![284]

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[283] Ibid., p. 52.

[284] Ibid., p. 112.

De Forest discloses that the gratitude of the Negro was contrasted in mutterings of "Damned Yankee!" by the whites.[285]

Lillie and her father did return to her beloved South, and she gave her heart to Colonel Carter whom her father considered a man about town. Ravenel knew Carter's kind. He seemed to recollect men of this type by the dozen, and it is in these men that De Forest portrays the lust and vice of slavery:

> Those who lived to grow old had slave-born children, whom they either shamelessly ignored and perhaps sold at the auction block. They were drunkards, gamblers, adulterers, murderers. Of such was the kingdom of Hell. And this man, to whom his [Dr. Ravenel's] only child, his Lillie, had entrusted her heart, was, he feared, he almost knew, one of the same class, although not, it was to be hoped, so deeply stained with the brutish forms of vice which flowed directly from slavery.[286]

Consequently, De Forest shows that the evils of slavery affect not only the Negro, but society as a whole.

De Forest indicates, furthermore, that the Negroes placed their trust in Lincoln, and he relates their hope, while at the same time, he exposes the sad conditions of the past:

> They believe that 'the year of jubilo am come.' . . . Before this year closes, many of these poor creatures will receive what they never

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[285] Loc. cit.

[286] Ibid., p. 189.

> did before--wages for their labor. For the first time in their lives they will be led to realize the idea of justice. Justice, honesty, mercy, and nearly the whole list of Christian virtues have hitherto been empty names to them, . . . They never saw them practiced; at least they never felt their influence. . . . society lied to them by calling them men and treating them as beasts; it played the hypocrite to them by preaching to them the Christian virtues, and never itself practising them; it played the thief by taking all the earnings of their labor, except just enough to keep soul and body together so that they might labor more.[287]

Thus, as De Forest shows, the Negro has been a victim of an unjust culture.

Through Dr. Ravenel, De Forest states the obligation of society to the Negro:

> Our conscience, the conscience of the nation, will not be cleared when we have merely freed the negroes. We must civilize and Christianize them. And we must begin this by teaching the great elementary duty of man in life--that of working for his own subsistence.[288]

De Forest warns that society will need to civilize and Christianize the Negro before he will be able to accept his place as a valuable citizen.

With the above views instilled in him, Dr. Ravenel undertook a philanthropic experiment of organized Southern labor. At the plantation assigned to Ravenel for his work, Lillie set up a "nigger school." Her father insisted that

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[287] Ibid., p. 230.

[288] Loc. cit.

she first teach them and herself to spell Negro with only one g. De Forest crusades for the Negro through Ravenel, who urged that Lillie not reproach the Negro for being stupid, explaining that the ". . . great Republic, North and South has been devoted to keeping them stupid for nearly a century."[289] He insisted that

> Negro children are just as intelligent as white children until they find out they are black. Now we will never tell them that they are black; we will never hint to them that they are born our inferiors. You will find them bright enough if you won't knock them on the head. Why, you couldn't read yourself till you were seven years old.[290]

De Forest, hereby, emphasizes the humanity of the Negro and hints that it is society that has caused the feeling of inferiority in the race. De Forest urges kindness when Ravenel says to Lillie, "Be courteous, my dear, to everything that is human. We owe that much respect to the fact that man is made in the image of his maker."[291] Lillie promised, "I will teach the negroes to read--I will try to do good--and to be good."[292] De Forest herein appeals to the Christian viewpoint.

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[289] Ibid., p. 236.

[290] Ibid., p. 237.

[291] Ibid., p. 238.

[292] Ibid., p. 239.

The only Negro character of any consequence created in this novel by De Forest is Major Scott, the head man, or overseer, of the work gang on the plantation. De Forest portrays Scott with careful realism noting his ". . . cheerful laziness and troubles with the Seventh Commandment as well as his heroic death."[293] On the first morning when the Negroes failed to be up and around as the Doctor had instructed them to be, De Forest places the blame on Scott, who has failed to set an example. De Forest's sympathetic treatment is clearly noted in Dr. Ravenel's speech to impress upon the group that the true dignity of freedom did not rest in laziness:

> A lazy man is sure to be a poor man, and a poor man is never quite a freeman . . . We must all work to get any thing or deserve any thing. In old times you used to work from hope, and not from fear . . . .[294]

Thus, De Forest encourages industry in the Negro and, again, makes a defensive plea through Dr. Ravenel, who says to Lillie that

> The negroes were ignorant of their duty and often thoughtless of it, but they were at bottom zealous to do right, and honestly disposed toward people who paid them for their labor. And here the author ventures to introduce the historical doubt as to whether any other half-barbarous race was ever blessed and beautified with such a lovingly grateful spirit as descended, like the flames of

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293Haight, op. cit., p. viii

294De Forest, op. cit., p. 242.

> the day of Pentecost, upon the bondsmen of America when their chains were broken by the just hands of the great Republic. Impure in life by reason of their immemorial degradation, first as savages and then as slaves, they were pure in heart by reason of their fervent joy and love.[295]

Herein, De Forest claims bondage as the reason for the Negro's shiftlessness, and stresses the Negro's gratitude when the chains were severed. Out of their thankfulness, as De Forest indicates, the Negroes did much work that summer.

De Forest illustrates that too much was expected from the Negro who had been repressed and kept in a brutish state from his birth. Major Scott, the self-elected spiritual overseer of the colored community, like some white Christians, did not have the ability to keep the whole Decalogue. De Forest relates that he was even more liable than King David to overthrow the Seventh Commandment. Scott explained his weakness, "Ef I'd been married right strong, like 'spectable white folks is, I wouldn't got into this muss an' fatched down shame on 'ligion."[296] De Forest makes clear that Ravenel's disappointment in hoping for a moral miracle was, perhaps, due to his hoping for too much too soon. The Chaplain with whom Ravenel discussed the affair doubted whether the Major would have fallen into this sin

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[295] Ibid., p. 244.

[296] Ibid., p. 247.

had he been truly regenerated, to which remark Ravenel protested, ". . . renewing a man's heart is only a partial reformation, unless you illuminate his mind."[297] Because of examples set by the Negro's superiors, De Forest was disposed to let Ravenel regard Scott as a very fair example of a Christian.

De Forest illustrates that the abolitionists realized that some of the Negroes were lazy and possessed human frailities. At this time, a letter was received from Colburne which had some relation to the Reconstruction experiment of Dr. Ravenel. It was written in a style of affected gaiety and read, in part, as follows:

> I am as much an Abolitionist as ever, but not so much of a 'nigger-worshipper.' I don't know but that I shall yet become an advocate of slavery. I frequently think that my boy Henry will fetch me to it. He is an awful boy. He dances and gambles all night and then wants to sleep all day . . . . He might earn two or three times as much on the levee at New Orleans; but the lazy creature would rather not earn anything; he likes to get his living gratis as he does with me . . . . You can make yourself as truly respectable as any white man, Henry!
>
> 'Ya-as' he said hesitatingly, as if he thought the result hardly worth the trouble; for which opinion I hardly blame him, considering the nature of a great many white men of this country. . . .
>
> Now when you have freed with your own right hand as many of these lazy bumpkins as I have, you will feel at liberty to speak of them with the

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297 Ibid., p. 248.

> same disrespectful levity. Wendell Phillips says that the negro is the only man in America that can afford to fold his arms and quietly await his future. That is just what the critter is doing and just what puts me out of patience with him.[298]

Dr. Ravenel felt that Colburne was too impatient. De Forest makes justification for Ravenel's thinking in the statement, "God has chosen to allow himself a hundred years to free the negro. We must not grumble if He chooses to use up a hundred more in civilizing him."[299]

Regardless of what one may have felt for Major Scott in previous encounters, he displayed great courage when the plantation was abandoned by the other Negroes before the attack and he chose to stay with Marse Revenel. In this portrayal, De Forest brings forth his Negro as a superb human being. Scott was ready to die for his liberty and that of his benefactors. "Of physical courage the fellow had little; but in moral courage he was at this moment sublime."[300] And he was determined not to be "cotched alive." He prayed. He and his enemy fired at the same time; both fell. On the lips of the Negro was "My God!" and on the lips of the Rebel was a curse of "Damnation!"

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[298] Ibid., p. 253.

[299] Loc. cit.

[300] Ibid., p. 290.

De Forest fought in the Civil War and wrote, so to speak, Miss Ravenel's Conversion during that time. One might expect such a book to convey a strong plea for the abolition of slavery and an expression for the hopes for the future of the Negro, but these desires are temperately expressed.[301] De Forest portrays the Negro sympathetically yet with careful realism.[302] To Major Scott, his Negro creation, he attributed a cheerful laziness. He clothed him in infidelity, letting him forget to keep the Seventh Commandment even though he was the supposed exemplar of purity and the spiritual leader of the colored community. Scott sometimes fell in his wrestlings with the sin of lying, too.[303] In contrast to Uncle Tom who was pure fiction and of whom Dr. Ravenel said, "There never was such a slave and there never will be,"[304] Major Scott was given allowances because the degrading influences of bondage must give to a slave some taint of lowness.[305] One may overlook Scott's moral weaknesses because of the triumphant manliness with which he went to death.

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[301] Gordon S. Haight (ed.), John William De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, p. viii.

[302] Loc. cit.

[303] De Forest, Miss Ravenel's Conversion, p. 246.

[304] Ibid., p. 248.

[305] Loc. cit.

In one respect De Forest was like Twain; the realistic picture that he presented of his times was fifty years ahead of the American reader. That, too, may have been the principal reason for his unpopularity.[306] Howells pointed out that De Forest was distinctly a man's novelist in an age when readers were predominantly feminine.[307] Thus, his novel has, until recently, remained obscure.

Howells

". . . nothing that God has made is contemptible.[308]

At the age of ten, William Dean Howells went to work in his father's printing office because it was part of his father's philosophy that everyone should ". . . fulfull a use."[309] Here, Howells talked literature and philosophy with his father, and his masters were the authors he came to know through his reading.[310]

Howells wrote out of the "free," but bitterly prejudiced, state of Ohio. His family had been Free Soilers and Abolitionists and had suffered for their beliefs before

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[306] Haight, op. cit., p. viii.

[307] Ibid., p. xviii.

[308] Howells, Criticism and Fiction, p. 15.

[309] Delmar G. Cooke, William Dean Howells, A Critical Study, p. 11.

[310] Ibid., p. 15.

the Civil War.[311] Howells was abroad during the time of the War and, consequently, had no experience with the conflict.[312] Since it was his contention that one should write about that which he knew, Howells avoided the issue of slavery for sometime. He encouraged De Forest, Cable, and Twain in their writings.[313] When Howells finally turned to writing of the Negro, he picked up De Forest's theme.[314] In the novelette, An Imperative Duty (1891), Howells exposes the ". . . evils of the American treatment of its black minority.[315] He presents also the social dilemma of a white woman who suddenly discovers that she carries a ". . . taint of blackness"[316] in her veins.

The woman who made the discovery was Rhoda Aldgate, the niece of Mrs. Meredith. The story is seen from the viewpoint of Dr. Edward Olney, who had met Rhoda in Italy and remembered her as a dark beauty ". . . with rich complexion of olive, . . . and . . . hair crinkling away to either temple.[317] Howells prepares Olney for the partici-

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311 Howells, An Imperative Duty, p. xiv.

312 Carter, op. cit., p. 83.

313 Loc. cit.

314 Loc. cit.

315 Ibid., p. 84.

316 Loc. cit.

317 Howells, An Imperative Duty, p. 147.

pation in the drama of racial tensions by having him observe the contrast between the Negroes and the white of the lower class in Boston.[318] When Dr. Olney attended Mrs. Meredith, who was suffering a nervous disturbance, the ignorance of an Irish bellboy channeled conversation to the minority races.

Olney said that the Negroes had given him a distinct pleasure whenever he met them. He mentioned that they seemed to be the only people who had any heart for life left, and they ". . . seemed hopeful and happy even in their rejection by their fellowmen."[319] Mrs. Meredith's query as to whether he would intermarry led to a discourse on social and Christian equality in which Howells relates the irony of Christian treatment of the Negro:

> But short of that [intermarrying] I don't see why one shouldn't associate with them. There are terms a good deal short of the affection we lavish on dogs and horses that I fancy they might be very glad of. We might recognize them as fellow-beings in public, if we don't in private; but we ignore, if we don't repulse them at every point--from our business as well as our bosoms. Yes, it strikes one as very odd on getting home--very funny, very painful. You would think we might meet on common ground before our common God--but we don't. They have their own churches, and I suppose it would be as surprising to find one of them at a white communion-table as it would to find one at a white dinner-party.[320]

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[318] Carter, op. cit., p. 94.

[319] Howells, An Imperative Duty, p. 153.

[320] Ibid., p. 154.

At this point, Howells identifies Olney's religious beliefs. He was agnostic, but Howells relates that Olney ". . . could be as censorious of the Christians who denied Christ in the sacraments, as if he had been a better sort."[321] Olney added that perhaps the Negroes would be welcome in the Catholic Church since the Catholics seemed to have kept the ideal of Christian equality.

Yet, Howells portrays in Olney a turmoil of emotion --disgust, when Mrs. Meredith gasped out, "My niece is of Negro descent."[322] Dr. Olney found himself disliking the notion of Rhoda's having Negro blood in her veins. "Before he felt pity, he felt repulsion; his own race instinct expressed itself in a merciless rejection of her beauty, her innocence, her helplessness because of her race."[323] Finally, he mastered the impulse with a tender indignation. Mrs. Meredith questioned Olney about his sincerity as to the things he had said on the previous night about "that wretched race." He answered, "I do abhor the cruel stupidity that makes any race treat another as outcast."[324]

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[321] Loc. cit.

[322] Ibid., p. 164.

[323] Ibid., p. 165.

[324] Loc. cit.

Howells, hereby, portrays Olney as sympathetic toward the Negro.

Howells portrays Mrs. Meredith relating, hysterically, the Negro characteristics which she detects in Rhoda:

> I can hear it in her voice at times--it's a black voice! I can see it in her looks! I can feel it in her character--so easy, so irresponsible, so fond of what is soft and pleasant! . . . She cannot forecast consequences; she's a creature of the present hour; she's like them all! I think in some occult, dreadful way she feels her affinity with them, and that's the reason why she's so attracted by them, so fond of them. It's her race calling her![325]

Howells makes one aware of the fact that the qualities, which Mrs. Meredith considers black, are those which may be attributed to a person of any race or color. In Olney, Howells creates a feeling that, perhaps, there are times when one has a right to live a lie, but Mrs. Meredith protested vehemently, "It is better to die--to kill--than to lie."[326] The door opened, and Rhoda walked in--she had come back for her gloves. She stooped and kissed her aunt, Mrs. Meredith, who seemed to Olney no better than a murderess for having revealed the fact. In Rhoda's comment, Howells conveys deep irony. "And I suppose I have interrupted you in the full flow of symptoms! I can imagine what a

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[325] Ibid., p. 171.

[326] Loc. cit.

perfectly delightful time you were having with Mr. Olney!"[327]

To Rhoda's question, "Who was my grandfather?"[328] Howells lets the story unfold:

> "I know very little about him, Rhoda," said Mrs. Meredith, seeking to rest in this neutral truth. "Your father never told me much, except that he was a Creole, and--and rich; and--respected, as those things went there, among his people--"
>
> "Was he some old slaver, like those in Mr. Cable's book? I shouldn't care for that! But that would have been his fault, and wouldn't have been any disgrace; and you said--And my grandmother--who was she?"
>
> "She was--not his wife."[329]

The girl was silent and motionless when Mrs. Meredith said, "She was his slave."[330] Howells implies that one would have to stop a moment and exchange places with Rhoda to realize the extent of this electrifying announcement, and her reaction was

> "And you mean to say--to tell me--that--I am--black?"
>
> "Oh, no poor child! You are as white as I am --as any one. No one would ever think--"
>
> "But I have that blood in me? It is the same thing!" An awful silence followed again, and then the girl said: "And you let me grow up thinking I

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[327] Ibid., p. 172.

[328] Ibid., p. 183.

[329] Ibid., p. 184.

[330] Loc. cit.

> was white, like other girls, when you knew--You let me pass myself off on myself and every one else, for what I wasn't! Oh, Aunt Caroline, what are you telling me this ghostly thing for? It isn't true! You couldn't have let me live on all these years thinking I was a white person, when--you could have told me from the beginning as soon as I could understand anything."[331]

Rhoda could not believe this horrible revelation, in trying to reason that it was not true, she thought perhaps there was something in the medicine which Dr. Olney had given her aunt. Howells portrays an hysterical moment, when the girl dropped her head on her aunt's knee and sobbed wildly:

> "I don't know what you're doing this for. It can't be true--it can't be real. Shall I never wake from it, and have you back? You were all I had in the world, and now if you were not what I thought you, so true and good, I haven't even you any more. Oh, oh, oh!"[332]

Mrs. Meredith related that she had always ". . . prayed for light to see her duty and strength to do it."[333] She kept repeating a babble of words as Rhoda sobbed on. Suddenly, Rhoda inquired about her mother, "Was she my father's slave too?"[334] She was told that slavery was a thing of the past at that time, and that her father was too

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[331] Ibid., p. 185.

[332] Ibid., p. 186.

[333] Loc. cit.

[334] Loc. cit.

good a man--he had married her mother, though he knew that it would ruin him.

Howells illustrates that Rhoda's problem, after learning of her ancestry, was that of choosing the right course to follow. The dictates of a Puritan conscience urged her to identify herself with the Negro race.[335] It was in the evening, but Rhoda went out alone and made her way to the Negro section of the town. As she walked among the colored folk of "all tints and types,"[336] she wondered how many generations would carry her back in hue to the blackest of those loathsome old women. She thought, "Perhaps I have relations among them."[337] Howells points out that a new agony of interest in the race possessed Rhoda, and the Negro seemed to claim her. She never knew before

> how hideous they were, with their flat wide-nostriled noses, their out-rolled thick lips, their mobile, bulging eyes set near together, their retreating chins and foreheads, and their smooth, shining skin; they seemed burlesques of humanity, worse than apes, . . .[338]

In Howells's portrayal, Rhoda refused to accept the loss of her former self, and her pride was reasserted.

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335 Carter, op. cit., p. 85.

336 Howells, An Imperative Duty, p. 192.

337 Ibid., p. 193.

338 Ibid., p. 191.

However, Howells indicates that reality forced Rhoda into despair. As a means of reconciliation, she surrounded herself with black people by attending the evening meeting in the Negro church. The old Negro woman assured Rhoda that the Lord could do anything. Rhoda implored, "Can He change your skin? Can He make black white?"[339] The old colored woman answered, "I reckon He don't think it's worthwhile, if He can make me willing to be black so easy."[340] Howells hereby illustrates that the Negro accepts the blackness of his skin. It is the white person who resents color. In the following scene, the author portrays Rhoda's repulsion. The night was warm, and as the exhalations of the Negro bodies thickened the air, it seemed

> to her that she began to taste the odor and these poor people, whom their Creator has made so hideous by the standards of all other creatures roused a cruel loathing in her, which expressed itself in a frantic refusal of their claim upon her. In her heart she cast them off with vindictive hate. "Yes," she thought, "I should have whipped them, too. They are animals; they are only fit to be slaves."[341]

Howells makes it understood that Rhoda began to hate the Negroes because the deepest antipathies are for that which one feels one has wronged. Rhoda felt that she had rejected

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[339] Ibid., p. 195.

[340] Loc. cit.

[341] Ibid., p. 197.

her race.[342] Dr. Olney had not come of slaveholders nor had his people ever ". . . injured those poor creatures."[343] Therefore he did not hate the Negroes nor ". . . their infinitestimal part"[344] in Rhoda.

Howells makes it clear that, when Rhoda was struck by the revelation that previous acts of miscegenation had made her a Negro, Dr. Olney had tried to find solutions to the psychological problems which threatened to destroy her. To Olney's question of why she tormented herself, she answered:

> I can't help it. It's burnt into me. It's branded me one of <u>them</u>. I <u>am</u> one. No, I can't escape. And the best way is to go and live among them and own it. Then perhaps I can learn to bear it, and not hate them so. But I <u>do</u> hate them. I do, I do! I can't help it. . . .[345]

Thus, one notes Howell's psychological concern that dominates the book along with the imperative sense of obligation to <u>duty</u>. Rhoda, in her agony, could not accept her Negro ancestry. She locked the secret in her heart, and with her husband's avowal never to reveal the fact, the two escaped to Italy--a land of dark skinned people. Yet, Howells emphasized that Rhoda never completely escaped from the tantalizing

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[342] Carter, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 86.

[343] Howells, <u>An Imperative Duty</u>, p. 230

[344] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 233.

[345] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 233.

effects of her Negro ancestry. However, he admonishes that ". . . the sting and sin go out of the race problem if persons, of whatever color, accept the mere facts of their common humanity."[346]

Howells states that if Olney had ever had any regret of marrying Rhoda, it was

> that the sunny-natured antetypes of her mother's race had not endowed her with more of the heaven-born cheerfulness with which it meets contumely and injustice. His struggle was with that hypochondria of the soul into which the Puritanism of her father's race [white] has sickened in her, and which so often seems to satisfy its crazy claim upon conscience by enforcing some aimless act of self-sacrifice.[347]

Howells has the following to say concerning Rhoda's plight:

> The proud, pure girl who had been told that her mother was slave-born and sin-born, had lived as carefully sheltered from the guilt and shame that are in the world as tender love and pitying fear could keep her; but so much of the sad fact of evil had somehow reached her that she stood in a sudden glare of the reality. She understood, and she felt all scathed within by the intelligence, by whatever the cruelest foe could have told her with the most unsparing fulness, whatever the fondest friend could have wished her not to know. The swiftness of these mental processes no words can suggest; we can portray life, not living.[348]

Howells, because of his ever-present sense of humanity, portrays pity for the Negro. An Imperative Duty ". . . was

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[346] Ibid., p. xv.

[347] Ibid., p. 230.

[348] Ibid., p. 137.

Howells' contribution to the disabusing of America's mind of the false and deadly stereotypes and stock reactions to the problem of the Negro in America."[349] One is conscious of a similarity in Rhoda Aldgate and Twain's Roxana. Like Roxy, Rhoda is one-sixteenth Negro. Both struggle with the color problem. Rhoda, however, never approaches Roxy in grandeur and nobleness.

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[349]Carter, op. cit., p. 87.

CHAPTER V

THE ARTIST WITHOUT PEER

Of the novelists studied, Mark Twain presented the most vivid and lifelike portrayals of the Negro in American fiction. In his preface to The Innocents Abroad, Twain wrote, "I am sure I have written honestly, whether wisely or not."[350] It is noted that Twain held a close friendship and association with Harris, Cable, and Howells, also that Howells encouraged and praised De Forest. Accordingly, one might expect an intermingling of ideas.

It was Twain who brought to American literature a genuine Negro dialect, an instrument of art.[351] He may have had an equal in the rendition of Negro speech; however, there are those who are not willing to grant that Harris was an equal.[352] Harris was interested in that which was good, hopeful, and wholesome in human nature.[353] Although he is remembered for his benevolent Uncle Remus, Harris painted the other side of the picture, too. Twain regarded Cable as a valuable post-war writer. The two traveled and

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[350] Twain, The Innocents Abroad, p. ix.

[351] De. Voto (ed.), The Portable Mark Twain, p. 27.

[352] Ibid., p. 28.

[353] Baker, op. cit., p. 601.

lectured together. Twain often introduced Cable on the platform as "my little brother," which, in a literary sense he was.[354] In the writer's opinion, De Forest, in his entreaty for the humanity of the Negro, more nearly approached Twain. Like Twain, De Forest was fifty years ahead of the American reader. The novels of both Cable and De Forest were objectionable to the public and, consequently, have been forgotten until recently. Howells, in a small way, gave an effective portrayal. His novel, perhaps, was less direct and less dramatic. Certainly one cannot depreciate the works of these men in any sense of the word. Each has presented, in a minute way, a commendable plea for the Negro's cause. However, their presentations do not have the depth which one finds in the novels of Twain. None has approached Twain in character portrayal.

Mark Twain's motto, suggested to him by his wife, was "Treat every man as if he were colored until he is proved white."[355] His sympathy for the Negro, his intense suffering at an injustice done the Negro, and his largeness of heart gave him the capacity to endow his characters with a sense of life. Twain's pictures of life in the ante-bellum South are regarded as, on the whole, nearer the

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[354] Carter, op. cit., p. 82.

[355] Twain, Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 170.

truth than those supplied by any other artist.[356] Twain gave all points of view--the beautiful side of slavery, the patriarchal side, and the horror of it. The intense dread of the Negro, that he would be sold down the river, has never been more vividly presented than when Roxy saw the swirling water against the snag and realized that she was going the wrong way. Scott says that even ". . . the peculiar harmlessness of Jim was beautiful to contemplate."[357] The writer agrees with De Voto who said, "Nigger Jim, Roxy and Uncle Dan'l are the only Negroes who truly live, as persons apart from the folk tales of Harris, in the literature of the nineteenth century."[358] Twain's characters live because he painted them from life.

Twain was more concerned about his world and the people who inhabited it than were most men, and his resentment of what he and others had to suffer was very profound.[359] It is believed that Twain was ". . . ahead of his time in condemning race discrimination.[360] In fact, critics have found many instances of Twain's forward-looking mind. This

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[356]Arthur L. Scott (ed.), Mark Twain Selected Criticism, p. 86.

[357]Loc. cit.

[358]De Voto, Mark Twain's America, p. 292.

[359]Minnie M. Brashear, The Art, Humor, and Humanity of Mark Twain, p. 391.

[360]Ibid., p. 388.

fact, plus his rare sensitivity, related him to the writers of the twentieth century beyond the date of his death in 1910.[361] Twain may be regarded as the muralist who painted the true Negro characters of American literature. He may be regarded as the artist without peer who petitioned for the Negro's freedom--that new birth of freedom promised by the Emancipation Proclamation--the freedom of dignity and humanity.

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361 *Loc. cit.*

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