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THE SLAVERY BACKGROUND OF FOSTER'S MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME

BY THOMAS D. CLARK

University of Kentucky, Lexington
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Perhaps no state in the Union has taken more pride in a song than has Kentucky. As a matter of fact Kentucky can not claim a monopoly on this song for it has long since become the property of music lovers the world over. The long-standing popularity of *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night* has stimulated a vast amount of research in American social life of the middle Nineteenth Century, and likewise more or less bitter controversy.

In his *Stephen Foster, America's Troubadour*, John Tasker Howard¹ has painted a careful and complete picture of Foster's early background and life. However, he suggests, on page 177, that "what bearing this (Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) may have on the Bardstown legends is interesting to ponder." It is not the purpose of the writer of this paper to re-open the controversy of where *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night* was written, for that is of little or no consequence compared to the actual background of the song.

Howard has suggested a thesis which encourages some interesting investigation into the social background of Foster's songs. It is with that problem that this paper deals.

At the time of the birth of Stephen Collins Foster his father was devoting much of his time to the candidacy of Andrew Jackson of Tennessee for the presidency of the United States. The elder Foster seems to have fed quite freely at the public trough

¹John Tasker Howard, *Stephen Foster, America's Troubadour*, New York, 1934. 445 pages.

when his politics were in harmony with those of the elected powers.² As a result of the disputed election in 1824, the Democrats were sorely disappointed that their beloved hero, General Jackson, was "swindled out of office" by Clay and Adams' "bargain and corruption" ruse.³

Those were stirring times, when friendships were made and broken on the turning of political affiliations. Thus it was that Stephen Collins Foster became a congenial Democrat. Throughout his early and impressionable years he was a silent listener to long and earnest discussions of internal improvements, tariff issues, nullification, Calhoun, and bank charters.⁴ He had listened to his Pennsylvania father recount the valiant deeds of "Old Hickory," and doubtless he learned to hate the opposition from the selfsame source.

Throughout the whole period from 1824 to 1860 the Foster family was very much concerned over matters of national politics. Naturally, Pennsylvanians were vitally interested in the policies of the national government: First, because any internal improvements of a national nature would affect their state, for Pennsylvania was the "jug neck" which separated the North and East from the evergrowing West, and any internal improvements of an intersectional nature were forced, of course, to pass through Pennsylvania. Second, Pennsylvania was the typical border state of the period, it stood as the dividing section between anti-slavery industry to the north and pro-slavery agriculture to the south. Western Pennsylvania, Stephen Collins Foster's home, looked in both directions for its income. To a very large extent, Pittsburgh was the social and economic clearing house for the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. It was the point of origin for a vast amount of commerce, and an important depot for commerce from other sections. Goods shipped over the Ohio River from either the South or the North went by way of Pittsburgh.⁵

American eyes were turned to the South and West as the great American frontiers. The South and West were promising

²*Ibid.*, pp. 15, 367.

³Claude G. Bowers, *Party Battles of the Jackson Period*, New York, 1928, p. 31.

⁴For an account of the numerous issues of the Jackson period see William Graham Sumner, *Andrew Jackson as a Public Man, What He Was, What Chances He Had, and What He Did with Them*, Boston, 1883, pp. 164-276.

⁵Balthasar H. Meyer, Caroline Magill and Staff, *History of Transportation in the United States Before 1860*, Washington, 1917, pp. 7, 14, 51, 75, 82-89, 120, 225, 248, 288.

culture which would excel that of the Old World just as soon as lands were cleared and new systems of agriculture established. The following boast from an English magazine published in 1821 clearly illustrates the frontier American's views:⁶

"Other nations boast of what they are or have been, but the true citizen of the United States exalts his head to the skies in the contemplation of what the grandeur of his country is going to be. Others claim respect and honor because of the things done by a long line of ancestors; an American glories in the achievements of a distant posterity. Others appeal to history; an American appeals to prophecy, and with Malthus in one hand and a map of the back country in the other he boldly defies us to a comparison with America as she is to be, and chuckles in delight over the splendors the geometrical ratio is to shed over her story. This appeal to the future is his never-failing resource. If an English traveller complains of their inns and hints his dislike to sleeping four in a bed he is first denounced as a calumniator and then told to wait a hundred years and see the superiority of American inns to British. If Shakespeare, Milton, Newton are named, he is again told to wait until we have cleared our land, till we have idle time to attend to other things; wait till 1900, and then see how much nobler our poets and profounder our astronomers and longer our telescopes than any that decrepit old hemisphere of yours will produce."

This London magazine of 1821 little realized that this impetuous American boast would begin to be true as early as the decades extending from 1830 to 1860. While the Jacksonians and the anti-Jacksonians were in earnest combat over the "peoples' destiny," James Fenimore Cooper was directing the literate American's attention to native sources for their literature. This he did in the *Spy*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *The Prairie*. In his novels, Cooper sensed a changing social attitude and he predicted, though unconsciously, the very thing which created a theme for Stephen Collins Foster's songs.⁷ In 1837 Ralph Waldo Emerson sounded the nation's cultural declaration of independence when he delivered "The American Scholar" as a

⁶Ralph Volney Harlow, *Growth of the United States*, New York, 1932, quotes a London magazine for 1821, p. 311.

⁷It is interesting to note the reputation which James Fenimore Cooper acquired as an author in his early years. When seeking a consulate position Governor Clinton recommended him to Henry Clay in the following note: "Believing you disposed to encourage American talent I have taken the liberty of commending him (Cooper) to your favorable notice as a gentleman every way worthy of it." Quoted by Henry Wolcott Boynton, *James Fenimore Cooper*, New York, 1931, p. 142. See also pp. 67, 75, 82, 118, 142, 160, 162.

Phi Beta Kappa address. Following these early leads, American literature became purely American in theme.*

The twenties and thirties of the Nineteenth Century were years of social ferment. Philosophers dreamed of social Utopias, such as Robert Owen's experiment at New Harmony, Indiana, and the Transcendentalist experiment of Brook Farm in Massachusetts.⁹ Horace Mann and a host of other democratic social leaders conceived the idea of public education and struggled faithfully to develop a democratic American school system. Through this agency these leaders hoped to create an effective and informed American democracy. Thus was set in motion an educational fervor which was to run to many extremes. In a new country where educational training was as yet untried and socialism was rampant it was only natural that many erratic institutions should develop. Some of the new type schools soon became hot beds of social, political and moral reform. Such institutions were Lane's Seminary, established in Cincinnati in 1833, and its offspring, Oberlin College, founded in 1835. These schools laid an effective basis for a powerful abolition movement in the South.

It was with malice aforethought which prompted the location of Lane Seminary and Oberlin College near the border line of slavery. It was from these bases of operation that a successful attack on slavery was conducted. From these points anti-slavery agents and literature were sent into the South with the hope of abolishing the institution of chattel slavery.¹⁰

When Stephen Collins Foster was only four years of age William Loyd Garrison brought out the first copy of his *Liberator* at Boston, on January 1, 1831. The next year the Anti-Slavery Society was formed.¹¹ It is interesting to note in this connection that the attitude toward slavery underwent a change also. Using Kentucky as a specific example it is easy to see that the local attitude changed from one of peaceful emancipation to one of stubborn resistance of abolition. *The Frankfort Commonwealth* for December 13, 1831, said that public sentiment was stirred to the breaking point when anti-slavery propaganda was

⁹Phillip Russell, *Emerson the Wisest American*, New York, 1929, p. 150.

¹⁰Donald G. Mitchell, *American Land and Letters*, New York, 1897, p. 159.

¹⁰Asa Earl Martin, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky*, The Filson Club Publications No. 29, Louisville, 1918, pp. 98, 110.

¹¹*The Liberator*, Boston, January-July, 1831.

distributed in the State. Two years later James G. Birney, a native of Boyle County, removed to his native state of Kentucky from Huntsville, Alabama,¹² where he had run amuck with slavery forces. In December of that year he called a meeting of the "Kentucky Society for the Relief of the State from Slavery." Thus Birney created much sentiment in Kentucky in opposition to the anti-slavery crusade.¹³ Where there had been a considerable tendency among the Kentucky slave holders to emancipate their slaves they now held on to them to spite their protagonists. Had the arguments condemning slavery continued to come from within the State, and had they been based purely upon economic issues there is little doubt that slavery would have ceased peacefully to exist. Instead, the issue was made on the grounds of morality, and the anti-slavery forces went far in condemning indiscriminately the Kentuckians for their mistreatment of slaves.¹⁴

Unfortunately, Kentucky was a Border State, which placed it in front so far as the views of the anti-slavery group were concerned. Too, the institution of slavery in Kentucky was entirely different from that of the lower Southern States. Kentucky's lands were fertile, but through climate and soil conditions Mother Nature was able to dictate types of agriculture. Despite this unquestioned fertility of the Kentucky soils it was impractical to carry on extensive agricultural operations. Hence few Kentucky planters had overseers, for slavery was purely domestic. Thus whatever evils existed in the local system of slavery were chargeable directly to the owner, and it is very easy to account for the fact that the charges of the Anti-Slavery Society were taken as personal attacks by the domestic owners. This condition naturally created much bitter sentiment.¹⁵

While Kentucky's slave system was being attacked, first by the church and then by the abolitionists, the lower South was growing in population and economic importance. The 1850 *Census*, edited by James B. DeBow of New Orleans, gave the South 2,137,000 white people and 1,841,000 blacks. That part of the South which was most influenced by slavery produced the

¹²William Burney, *James G. Birney and His Times*, New York, 1890, p. 40.

¹³Asa Earl Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁴Theodore Weld, *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, New York, 1839, pp. 87, 93.

¹⁵Even Henry Clay changed his mind when the Abolitionists began to meddle with Slavery.

major portion of the \$102,000,000 worth of cotton, \$14,000,000 worth of sugar, and \$2,600,000 worth of rice exported from the United States. The lower South furnished more than one-half of the \$203,000,000 of goods exported by the whole country. Thus the South had become money-minded. Cotton, sugar and rice were bringing good prices, and there was plenty of land for future exploitation.¹⁶

Immigration from Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri was greatly stimulated by the opening of new territory, and this immigration encouraged the domestic slave trade.¹⁷ As early as 1842 the Webster-Ashburton Treaty between the United States and Great Britain closed the African trade, and made the Southern cotton states definitely dependent upon the border states for their supply of slaves. Travelers throughout the South were impressed with the increasing slave trade.¹⁸ As early as 1818 Henry Bradshaw Fearon, an English traveler, noted barges loaded with slaves from Kentucky landing at Natchez.¹⁹ J. H. Ingraham, in 1834, found the slave market at the Natchez "Cross Roads" both fascinating and shocking.²⁰ Court records in Kentucky court houses bear mute testimony as to the extent of the "down river trade" in slaves.²¹ River boats were common and efficient carriers of slaves to market, for once on board a steamboat there was little chance that a slave would be lost either from exhaustion or from running away. Although this trade was notorious and the dealers were clouded with social opprobrium,²² the steamboat companies seemed to have had no scruples against hauling such cargo.²³

Throughout the slave holding counties in Kentucky slave dealers were conspicuous.²⁴ Robert Wickcliffe, the largest slave-

¹⁶James D. B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States* (Compendium of the Census of 1850), Washington, 1854, see tables CLXXXIII-CLXXXVI, pp. 169-174.

¹⁷Winfield Collins, *Domestic Slave Trade of the South and Other States*, New York, 1904, p. 26.

¹⁸Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America*, London, p. 268.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰J. H. Ingraham, *The Southwest, By a Yankee*, New York, 1835, pp. II, 192, *et seq.*, especially p. 244.

²¹See Index to Fayette County Court Records, Lexington, 1849-1860.

²²No self-respecting man dared have it known that he was engaged in the business of buying and selling slaves. If a respectable man socially did engage in the business it was in secrecy.

²³Sundry Way Bills in possession of author.

²⁴*The Observer and Reporter*, Lexington, *The Kentucky Statesman*, Lexington, *The Frankfort Commonwealth*, and *The Louisville Journal* all carried advertisements asking for slaves.

holder in Fayette County, estimated in 1840 that over 60,000 slaves were being taken to the lower South annually. Humane slaveholders were bitterly opposed to this sale of Negroes down the river, but always there were enough unscrupulous, or bankrupt owners, to commit this act. Petitions from over Kentucky were submitted to Congress periodically requesting that interstate traffic be prohibited. Congress, however, refused on the ground that it had no right to go further than the regulation of interstate commerce.²⁵ Thus the argument over the internal slave trade continued until it was brought to a close in 1865. However, the question of internal slavery was brought to a head in the Compromise of 1850.

At the Whig convention in 1848, Zachary Taylor of Kentucky, and hero of the battle of Buena Vista, won the nomination as his party's candidate for the presidency of the United States. Already an issue was fermenting which was to distinguish the brief administration of the heroic Kentuckian.

On January 24, 1848, a listless California mill foreman discovered a lump of gold in a mill race, and following the announcement that gold had been discovered at Sutter's Mill there followed the maddest struggle in American annals for everyone wished to reach California and gold.²⁶ This sudden immigration Westward created sufficient population in the California area for the territory to petition for statehood. President Taylor and his advisers were quick to perceive that the sectional struggle would break out anew when California petitioned for statehood unless some efforts were made to prevent such an occurrence.²⁷

President Taylor turned to his fellow Kentuckian, the venerable Whig leader, Henry Clay, to bring the Union safely through this morass of sectional bickering. Clay's task was that of producing a definite statement regarding sectional difficulties already apparent and the admission of California. Fortunately the aging Clay had at his command some able young assistants who were anxious to try their wings of leadership. Outstanding among these young men was Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. Thus, with competent assistants who did most of the work, Clay

²⁵Asa Earl Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 44, 45.

²⁶Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado or Adventure in the Path of Empire*, New York, 1855; and Stuart Edward White, *The Forty-Niners*, New Haven, 1921, see chapters IV-V.

²⁷George Fort Milton, *Eve of Conflict*, Boston, 1934, p. 50.

was able to lay before the United States Senate, on January 29, 1850, eight resolutions for the settlement of California, the other western territories and the slavery question. The sections of this compromise which dealt directly with slavery were the fugitive slave clause (which guaranteed the Southern slave holder a right to recover his property with federal protection) and the prohibition of the slave trade from the District of Columbia. This discussion attracted more attention, perhaps, than any measure which came before Congress prior to 1860, for the moderates hoped it would bring peace, the slave holders hoped it would insure recovery of their fugitive slave property, and the radical anti-slavery forces hoped they could eventually exclude slavery from the country.²¹

The moderates of both sections believed that the compromise would save the Union, but little did they realize that the agreement was only a lull in what proved to be a disastrous storm. Just when the Union was saved from a civil war, public opinion was stirred to a high pitch by the election of 1852, which was followed by the appearance of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This story was effective in creating a storm of public rage; it first appeared as a serial in the *National Era*, and then, in 1852, as a two volume work.²²

Thus *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is immediately important to the understanding of Foster's *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*. Some commentators on Foster's works acknowledge a possibility of the influence of Mrs. Stowe's book, but, so far as is known, no one has thoroughly analyzed this influence. The story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did not originate with Mrs. Stowe; it antedates her publication by more than two decades. Perhaps the first publications attracting attention in the Middle West were the various denominational pamphlets issued by the itinerant preachers of Kentucky. Especially was this true of the pamphlet published by Father David Rice, at Danville, in 1792, under the title of *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy*. Even Henry Clay had attacked the institution of slavery in the *Kentucky Gazette* for April 25, 1798, under the pseudonym of *Scaevola*.

Perhaps the first of these anti-slavery works which actually attracted Mrs. Stowe's attention was William Lloyd Garrison's

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Kentucky Statesman*, December 17, 1852.

Liberator. Doubtless this publication was very influential in planting the germ of righteous protest in her mind.

The next publication of importance was the *Anti-Slavery Record* issued by the Anti-Slavery Society from its 143 Nassau Street, New York, address. This little magazine appeared for the first time in 1834 and carried more anti-slavery propaganda than any other publication of its time. It played very definitely upon the imagination of its readers by the sure-fire method of using quotations. These excerpts range all the way from the Declaration of Independence to speeches of Asa A. Stone, a theological student from Natchez, Mississippi at Lane Seminary.¹⁰

The *Anti-Slavery Record* devoted a goodly amount of attention to slavery in Kentucky. The next year after the initial appearance of this publication, J. H. Ingraham, a New England school teacher-novelist, published his work entitled *The Southwest by a Yankee*. Ingraham's story of slavery as he found it around Natchez was indeed fascinating. He witnessed the slave trading operation of the dealers at the "Natchez at the Cross Roads" market.¹¹ Although not writing from the standpoint of a propagandist, his work, which is in two volumes, was soon circulated in anti-slavery circles. It made a very definite impression upon anti-slavery writers who were to express themselves in the future.

Four years after the appearance of *The Southwest by a Yankee* William Jay published his interesting little volume entitled *Jay's View*.¹² Jay perhaps did more solid investigating than any of the protagonists before him. He analyzed slavery from a political and economic standpoint, and many of his findings will still stand fire under the best of historical research. To anti-slavery propagandists *Jay's View* formed the ridge pole of well informed criticism.¹³

At the same time that William Jay expressed himself in his publication Theodore Weld, with the assistance of his South Carolina wife, Angelina Grimke Weld, issued his work *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*.¹⁴ This book, containing 224 pages, is undoubtedly the most exhaustive

¹⁰For some of these quotations see Theodore Weld, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36, 77-82.

¹¹J. H. Ingraham, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

¹²*Jay's View* is cited by many anti-slavery authors.

¹³William Jay, *Jay's View*, New York, 1839.

¹⁴Theodore Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, New York, 1839.

study of its kind. The author collected letters, speeches, pamphlets, testimonials and newspaper advertisements to condemn slavery. Kentucky is duly represented; in fact the reader gets the impression that much of the attack was centered upon Kentucky, thus the chief background study for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It was from this information collected by Weld that Mrs. Stowe secured a well-digested source for her famous book. If one should take *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and check it against *American Slavery as It Is* he would find that the two would coincide, with only one significant exception: Mrs. Stowe had the advantage of changing national circumstances and additional written materials. Following the battle of Buena Vista, in February, 1847,¹⁴ there was a general expansion of the cotton industry, and consequently an expansion of the slave trade.

Advertisements appeared in the newspapers throughout the country asking for slaves to be sold in the Southern market. The following which appeared in 1852 is typical of these requests:

I wish to purchase immediately, for the South, any number of negroes, from 10 to 30 years of age, for which I will pay the very highest cash price. All communications promptly attended to.

Joseph Bruin,
West End, Alexandria, Va.¹⁵

During the same time, in Kentucky, John Mattingly's agency was advertising in 1849 for 100 negroes to be sold in the Southern market.¹⁶ There were also other agents, such as P. N. Brent, and J. M. Heady, who were advertising in the Kentucky papers each week for negroes to be sold in the Southern markets.¹⁷

Thus the expanding slave market gave Mrs. Stowe her central theme. Contrary to popular belief, Mrs. Stowe did not, however, collect all of her material in Kentucky. It is true, as she says in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*,¹⁸ that she saw slavery in Kentucky and was duly impressed by it. Tradition says she saw the conditions of slavery at the old Kennedy home in Garrard County and at Washington in Mason County. On casual observation it would seem true that Kentucky formed the background for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and had this book not attracted

¹⁴Theodore Clark Smith, *Parties and Slavery, 1850-1860*, New York, 1906, pp. 3-13.

¹⁵*Lynchburg Virginian*, November 18, 1852.

¹⁶*Kentucky Statesman*, August 17, 1850.

¹⁷See *Kentucky Statesman and Lexington Observer and Reporter*, 1850-1860.

¹⁸Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1853, p. 9.

world-wide attention and had it not incurred such bitter criticism the author's many readers might never have been wiser.⁴⁰ As it was, Mrs. Stowe felt that she was impelled to make some statement in behalf of her book, and in 1853 she published her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon Which the Story is Founded—Together with Corroborative Statements Verifying the Truth of the Work*. This book throws some interesting light upon just how much influence the writings and utterances of the anti-slavery disciples had upon the making of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It is now well known that Mrs. Stowe's book is a composite picture of the whole anti-slavery struggle. The work embodies all of the anti-slavery arguments combined into an appealing drama of the life of Uncle Tom.

The *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a fine skeleton of the original publication, and completely denounces the belief of local origin. In fact the careful student of slavery is surprised to see how much material was called into service in the creation of the Uncle Tom story. It is quite obvious that Mrs. Stowe set out to present a prejudiced view of the slavery situation, and naturally her works have to be taken judiciously; but at the same time she is to be credited with having utilized the mass of anti-slavery material available. It is especially significant in the treatment of the subject in hand to know that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not the figment of a fertile imagination. The story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is generally borderland,⁴¹ falling with equal responsibility upon Maryland, the Carolinas, Kentucky and Missouri. Upon careful analysis of the story it will be found that it has three natural divisions: that of a happily situated and trusted domestic servant, a slave unhappily involved in the financial reverses of a beloved master; the sale, and the inevitable movement down the river, and, lastly, despair in this life, but hope that better times are coming in a better land.

Here it is opportune to analyze the theme of *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*. In the first stanza, and the one sung most often, is the cheerful picture of what was a slave's Utopia:

"The young folks roll on the little cabin floor,
All merry, all happy and bright";

⁴⁰Mrs. Stowe was enthusiastically praised and bitterly condemned. She felt it worthwhile to publish some comment on the sources for her work. It is possible, however, that many of these sources were unknown to her in 1852.

⁴¹By border-land is meant Missouri, Kentucky, Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina.

The second stanza indicates that a veil has passed over this happy situation, and the negroes are seized with the dread of an impending crisis:

"They hunt no more for the possum and the coon,
On the meadow, the hill, and the shore: . . .
The time has come when the darkeys have to part";

In the third stanza, one slave moans:

"A few more days, and the trouble all will end,
In the field where the sugar canes grow. . . .
A few more days till we totter on the road;—
Then my old Kentucky home, good night."

There are several angles to my *Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*, which are worthy of serious consideration. First, Foster, truly enough, was a Democrat; but was he a staunch Democrat? Did his Democratic view in politics affect his attitude toward slavery? Many Democrats were opposed to slavery. For instance, Stephen A. Douglas, a staunch Democrat who was ambitious for the highest gift of the party, was not favorably disposed toward slavery.⁴² Also, did the fact that the Foster family had a bound girl, Olivia Pise,⁴³ make of Stephen a pro-slavery advocate? He was not, contrary to some claims, a Southerner, and it is unlikely that Foster was affected vitally by any of these influences. Apparently he took his politics lightly, and doubtless his contact with slavery in his own family was a far cry from that of the lower South. It would not be unreasonable to suspect that the Foster family looked upon the absentee master system of slavery as atrocious, whether they were anti-abolitionists or not.

It is well to go further behind the scenes and analyze the situation socially and politically in American history at the time *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*, was written. Stephen Collins Foster went to Cincinnati to become a bookkeeper for his brother Dunning, some time after 1846. During the years 1848, 1849 and early 1850 he was engaged as a clerk in his brother's steamboat business. While there he drew upon southern slavery as the source for several of his early songs. Especially was this true of *Away Down Souf, Camptown Races, Lou'siana Belle*,⁴⁴ and

⁴²It is most doubtful that Stephen Collins Foster's politics in any way influenced his views on human relationships.

⁴³There were two servants in the Foster household, but these were indentured, or bound servants, rather than "slaves for life." Howard, *op. cit.*, pp. 82, 83, 86.

⁴⁴*Lou'siana Belle* was written in Pittsburgh and published in Cincinnati.

Oh! Susanna.“ These songs show conclusively that at times Foster’s inclination in his writings was toward the South. Furthermore, as a clerk in a steamboat office, it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that he saw numerous bills-of-lading for negro traders who were shipping their human wares southward.”

At the time young Foster was a resident of Cincinnati the community was upset over slavery, largely due to the activities of the underground railroad, Lane Seminary and Oberlin College. Foster undoubtedly saw much of this in the Cincinnati newspapers, and heard much discussion of the subject in the street.”

It is impossible to throw much light upon the next point, but if Foster read any of the works of the contemporary American poets he would have come face to face with some startling selections condemning slavery.” Longfellow wrote in his *Slave’s Dream*:

“In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp
The hunted negro lay;
He saw the fire of the midnight camp,
And heard at times the horse’s tramp
And a blood hound’s distant bay,” etc.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote in *The Farewell*:

“Gone, gone—sold and gone,
To the rice swamp dank and lone.
Where the slave whip ceaseless swings,
Where the noisome insect stings,
Where the fever demon strews
Poison with the falling dews,
Where the sickly sunbeams glare,
Through the hot and musty air,—

“There is a controversy as to whether *Oh! Susanna* was written in Pittsburgh or Cincinnati. It was copyrighted, New York, February 25, 1848.

“Undoubtedly Foster saw way-bills passing through the steamboat office of his brother Morris. He also saw slaves being shipped South by boats in 1852. Morrison Foster’s *My Brother Stephen*, originally published in 1896, in Pittsburgh, was republished in 1932, in Indianapolis, by Josiah Kirby Lilly, Foster Hall, Indianapolis. 55 pages; p. 51.

“Not only was slavery a subject of discussion in Cincinnati and the surrounding area, but Mrs. Stowe’s reputation spread abroad in an incredibly short time. The play *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was popular in several foreign languages.

“Foster’s work book, now in possession of Mr. Josiah Kirby Lilly, Foster Hall, Indianapolis, has a list of classic American titles scribbled on the back of one of the pages.

Gone, gone—sold and gone,
 To the rice swamp dank and lone,
 From Virginia's hills and waters,—
 Woe is me, my stolen daughters!"

It cannot be proved that Foster read the works of the American poets.⁴⁴ On this subject both Morrison Foster and John Tasker Howard are mute. That Stephen Collins Foster read Longfellow and Whittier is rather doubtful. They were read and used, however, by Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe.⁴⁵ John Greenleaf Whittier's *The Farewell* was a strong influence in laying the basis for the latter part of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

It is significant that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was dramatized in many languages, and that Stephen Collins Foster was busily engaged in writing for the minstrels of his day. Chief among these traveling companies was that of E. P. Christy which advertised its appearance in 1847 at Mechanic's Hall, New York:⁴⁶

CHRISTY'S

Far famed and original band of
 ETHIOPIAN MINSTRELS

Whose unique and chaste performances have
 Been patronized by the elite and fashionable in
 All the principal cities of the Union—respectfully
 Announce that they will give a series of their
 Popular and inimitable concerts, introducing
 A variety of entirely new songs, choruses
 And burlesques.

The minstrel was a popular form of entertainment during the forties and fifties.⁴⁷ As early as 1842 Dan Emmett organized a minstrel company, and that same year the Virginia Minstrels were organized in Buffalo by E. P. Christy. It was not, however, until 1846 that this group became known as Christy's Minstrels.⁴⁸

On September 11, 1850, Phineas Taylor Barnum, the king of American amusement, crowded Castle Garden to more than its

⁴⁴Mrs. Stowe quotes John Greenleaf Whittier in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, New York, 1858, p. 151.

⁴⁵Meade Minnigerode, *The Fabulous Forties, 1840-1850*, New York, 1924, pp. 230-232.

Poor uncle Tom, good nights

Chorus

Oh good nights, good nights, good nights

Poor uncle Tom

So never not for your old Kentucky home

Your band for a better land

Old Uncle Tom

A few more days for to tote de weary load

No matter it soon will be light

A few more days for to tattel on de road

Den Poor Uncle Tom and Good Nights

Old ^{Kentucky} Home

Reduced facsimile of the first of the two pages of Foster's holograph of the song which when finished was titled *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*. The two pages are here reproduced in *The Filson Club History Quarterly* by permission of Mr. Josiah K. Lilly, of Foster Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana, in whose Foster Collection the original document is preserved. *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night* was copyrighted by the publishers, Firth, Pond & Company of New York City, on January 31, 1853.

Poor uncle Tom, good night

Chorus

Oh good night, good night, good night
Poor uncle Tom

Soiree not for your old Kentucky home
Your bond for a better land
Old Uncle Tom

A few more days for to tote de weary load
No matter it soon will be light
A few more days for to tottel on de road
Den Poor Uncle Tom Good night

Old Kentucky
Home

Reduced facsimile of the first of the two pages of Foster's holograph of the song which when finished was titled *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*. The two pages are here reproduced in *The Filson Club History Quarterly* by permission of Mr. Josiah K. Lilly, of Foster Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana, in whose Foster Collection the original document is preserved. *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night* was copyrighted by the publishers, Firth, Pond & Company of New York City, on January 31, 1853.

Dear Uncle Tom Good night
 De river shines bright in de old Kentucky
 Lane
 De corn tops ripe and de meadows in de bloom
 de birds make music all de day
 De young folks will in de little cabin floor
 All merry all happy with freest
 Beyond de Hard Times comes a Kingdom
 De poor Uncle Tom Good night
 De good night to
 De hunt no more fur de possum and de coon
 In de meadow, de hill and de shore
 De sing no more by de glimmer of de moon
 On de bench by de old Cabin door
 De day goes by like a shadow on de heart
 With sorrow where all was delight
 De time has come when de darlings must
 De poor Uncle Tom Good night
 De head must bow and de back will not to bend
 Whether de darlings may go
 A few more days and de troubles all
 In de field wha de cotton had grow
 A few more days for to tote de
 It's matter it ^{many hand} soon will be light
 A few more days for to settle on de
 De poor Uncle Tom Good night

Reduced facsimile of second page of Foster's holograph of the song which when finished was titled *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*.

Poor Uncle Tom Good night
 De sun shines bright in de old Kentucky
 Home
 'Tis summer, de darkeys air gay
 De corn tops ripe and de meadows in de bloom
 de birds make music all de day
 De young folks roll in de little cabins
 All merry all happy and bright
 Beyond de Hard Times comes a Knosking
 at de door
 De poor Uncle Tom good night
 De good night
 Dey hunt no more for de passums and de corn
 On de meadow, de hill and de shore
 Dey sing no more by de glimmer of de moon
 On de bench by de old Cabin door
 De day goes by like a shadow on de heart
 With sorrow where all was delight
 De time has come when de darkeys make
 to part
 De poor Uncle Tom good night
 De head must bow and de back will not to bend
 Whether de darkey may go
 A few more days and de troubles all
 In de field wha de cotton pod grow
 A few more days for to tote de
 weary load
 No matter it soon will be light
 A few more days for to fatten on de road
 De poor Uncle Tom good night

Reduced facsimile of second page of Foster's holograph of the song which when finished was titled *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*.

6,000 comfortable seating capacity when he introduced Jenny Lind, "The Swedish Nightingale."⁶¹ For once P. T. Barnum had produced the real thing, and the American amusement-loving public was spared the ordeal of paying its money to be swindled by the "Master of Colonel Tom Thumb." While "The Swedish Nightingale" was taking her New York audience by storm at Castle Garden, and was being written-up in every tag-end newspaper on the continent, the "divine" English actress, Fanny Kemble, was collecting \$1,600.00 in Cincinnati for six interpretations of Shakespeare's plays.⁶²

Americans of the forties and fifties craved excitement. The gold rush of the late forties had keyed the public to a high pitch. This was an America which demanded manufactured amusement, and there were showmen to do the amusing. Barnum, Christy, Emmett and scores of others catered to their fellow countrymen's desires. Everything from a fake mermaid, a stupid waterfall called "Niagra," dioramas, and wax figures to the plunk-a-plunk of the minstrels' banjos were called into service. In order to meet the increasing demands there were hundreds of creative artists who, like Stephen Collins Foster, kept their producers supplied with new tunes to tickle the fancies of their fickle audiences.⁶³ Time has proved that none of these artists were as efficient as Foster, for his tunes are still capable of creating in the American, whether North or South, a nostalgic longing for some sentimental place.

It is significant that *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night*, was published early in 1853, and certainly written in 1852.⁶⁴ Not even the most casual school child can read *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night* from beginning to end without becoming immediately conscious that the description of a state or region is only incidental to the story. The existence of a personality is as distinct as was the ghost at the death bed of Simon Legree. The first draft of it gives it a personality. That personality is a poor luckless old negro who lives during the first stanza in a

⁶¹Joel Benton, *Life of Honorable Phineas Taylor Barnum*, n. p., 1891, p. 224.

⁶²Leota S. Driver, *Fanny Kemble*, Chapel Hill, 1933, p. 166.

⁶³See list of songs turned out during these years by Foster, Howard, *op. cit.*, appendix 1, pp. 370-385.

⁶⁴Manuscript copy of Foster's work book, Foster Hall, Indianapolis.

happy home—who in the second verse senses trouble—and in the third verse, like Whittier's:

“Gone, gone—sold and gone,
To the rice swamps dank and lone,”

Foster makes the soulful plaint:

“A few more days and the trouble all will end
In the fields where the sugar canes grow;
A few more days for to tote the weary load,
No matter, 'twill never be light,
A few more days 'till we totter on the road,
Then my old Kentucky home, good night.”

This verse, however, (like the other two verses and the chorus) has been changed from the original draft which admitted a personality in the text and the title. Instead of “My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night” the title was “Poor Uncle Tom, Good Night.” The line

“Den poor Uncle Tom, good night”

appears at the end of each verse in the original draft, also at the end of the chorus.

The last line of the three verses of the finished song, it will be recalled, is

“Then my old Kentucky Home, good night.”

and at the end of the finished chorus the line is

“For my old Kentucky Home, far away.”

The original draft of the song is in Mr. Josiah K. Lilly's Foster Collection and is reproduced in facsimile in *Foster Hall Bulletin*, No. 8, February, 1933. A reduced facsimile is presented in this, the January, 1936, issue of *The Filson Club History Quarterly*.

Perhaps Foster changed the title of his song to dodge prejudices against it in the South. The minstrels were playing throughout the country, and it was from the South that they collected a goodly amount of revenue.“ Hence it was poor policy to antagonize so important an amusement loving center.

⁶⁶See advertisements in southern newspapers. A specific notice appears in *The Kentucky Statesman*, April 19, 1853.

After 1852 the minstrels had competition in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which was dramatized and appeared on the stage throughout the free states. There were also other slave plays which enticed the showgoing public to patronize their theatres. Although not enjoying anything like the phenomenal popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, J. T. Trowbridge's *Neighbor Jackwood* had a successful run.⁶⁶ Throughout the country the newspapers were crowded with both estimable and critical comments on Mrs. Stowe's work.⁶⁷ One commentator said of the book that "When Latin I studied, my Ainsworth in hand, I answered my teacher *Sto* meant 'to stand', but if you asked I should now give the reply 'For Stowe means, beyond cavil, to lie.'"⁶⁸

All of the many and thunderous comments undoubtedly attracted the attention of Stephen Collins Foster. It is well known that he was extraordinarily sensitive to contemporary occurrences. In 1848 he published: *Santa Anna's Retreat from Buena Vista*; in 1856 *The Great Baby Show, The Abolition Show*; in 1861 *I'll Be a Soldier*, and, in 1863, *A Soldier in de Colored Brigade*.⁶⁹

Other writers of the period were sensitive to the happenings of the times. For instance, C. S. Bodley's music store in Lexington, Kentucky advertised the *Gold Diggers' Waltz*, in 1853, a song commemorating the Gold Rush to California.⁷⁰

Foster, like Cooper, found in his American surroundings a super-abundant source of themes for his songs. This fact is well illustrated in his negro songs such as *Away Down Souf* (1848), *Dolcy Jones* (1849), *Dolly Day* (1850), and *Gwine to Run All Night* (1850).

Thus it matters little where *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night* was written, but it is significant that it mirrors a most interesting background of the nation's history. It is significant, also, that the author's use of a title obscured his context sufficiently to cause Kentuckians, to whom *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was anathema, to take the song to their hearts and claim it as their very own.

⁶⁶Meade Minnigerode, *op. cit.*, 160-161, gives a list of other plays which were popular.

⁶⁷See any Southern newspaper for 1853.

⁶⁸*The Kentucky Statesman*, February 1, 1853.

⁶⁹George Cooper wrote the words for *A Soldier in de Colored Brigade*.

⁷⁰*The Kentucky Statesman*, January 18, 1853.