

# Uncle Tom, Eliza and Little Eva Take Another Bow



Eliza Crossing the Ice

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

JUST when they were getting ready to ring down the curtain for the last time on a classic of the stage, out from the wings came those immortals, "Uncle Tom" and "Little Eva" and "Topsy" and "Simon Legree" to take another bow. Which is by way of saying that early this year The Players, with such stars as Otis Skinner, Cecelia Loftus, Kate Mayhew, Joanna Roos, Fay Bainter, Edward McNamara and Lois Shore, revived "Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly" in one of the leading New York theaters. It meant that this historic drama may be starting on a new lease of life to add to the laurels which it has already won.

Chief among those laurels are these: It is a play which has had the longest continuous run in all stage history; in it have appeared at one time or another a greater number of stage luminaries than in any other play in American theatrical history; it has been performed before more people and has made more money than any play ever written in modern times and despite the latter fact no one has ever received any royalties from it nor did Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author, ever receive a penny of profit from the dramatization of her book; it is the most representative American folk drama and it bears in the parlance of the American stage the most distinctive name—the "Tom show"; it has in it the elements of tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, yes, even vaudeville, but it defies classification under any of these heads, for it is itself alone, the "Tom show."

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" had a continuous run of 76 years, besides which record the lasting qualities of the far-famed "Abe's Irish Rose" pale into insignificance. From 1852 to 1928 there wasn't a season when at some time day or night or in some place in these United States that the whip of "Simon Legree" wasn't whistling across the back of "Uncle Tom" or "Eliza" wasn't floeing across the ice, pursued by a baying pack of "ferce bloodhounds." Then the depression came on to give the final blow to those administered by other factors in the decline of this classic.

In 1930 a Boston newspaper reported: "There is not now on the road in any section of the United States or Canada a single company playing that grand old drama 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' . . . For the same reason that the minstrel show owners of the country took their shows from the road, Tom managers found it necessary to shut up shop. The talking pictures and the radio have combined to kill both the minstrel and the Tom shows. There is not a single booking agency in New York City which could furnish a route for any one-night stand company unless it was willing to sacrifice Saturday, the best night of the week, for the showing of Wild West or talking pictures."

The same statement was probably true in 1931 but in 1932 it was discovered that in a small town in the West a home talent company was producing the play as a part of its repertory of stock plays. And now this year comes the revival in New York to prove that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is deathless even if there were not great stage names in the cast to lend it prestige, with the apparent return of some measure of prosperity to this country, it is not improbable that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" may be off on another continuous run of 76 years!

When "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was first printed in book form it sold 10,000 copies the first week and 300,000 in the first year. Half a million copies had been distributed in the United States alone in its first five years and it has been translated into more than a score of foreign languages and dialects. The entire sale of the book in the years since it was written have exceeded 12,000,000, about 7,000,000 of which never paid any royalties to the author, being sold in foreign countries before the establishment of international copyright law. The copyright, under the then existing statute, expired a few years previous to Mrs. Stowe's death in the late eighties, and the last few years of her life, when she was most in need of money, she was deprived of this source of income.



Harriet Beecher Stowe

Uncle Tom and Little Eva

The first dramatization of the book was made by George L. Aiken while the story was running serially in the National Era. On September 2, 1852, Aiken's play had its premiere in the Museum at Troy, N. Y., and from that time dates the immense popularity of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." As a matter of fact this was not the first stage production of the show, but it was the first successful one.

A certain Charles W. Taylor had also dramatized the book and in August, 1852, a month before the Troy production, he presented a play running only an hour, as one item on the evening bill at Purdy's National theater in New York City. But—fatal error!—he left both Topsy and Little Eva out of his story so his play was a failure, being withdrawn after a run of only 11 nights.

The Troy production was largely a family affair. The manager of the Troy museum, George C. Howard, played both "Uncle Tom" and "St. Clare." His wife played both "Topsy" and "Chloe." Mrs. Howard's brother, Charles Fox, played both "Phineas Fletcher" and "Gumption Cate" and Mrs. Fox played "Ophelia." George L. Aiken, the dramatist and a cousin of Howard, doubled as "Shelby" and "George Harris" and his brother, Frank Aiken, played "Marka." And finally the part of Little Eva was played by Cordella Howard, the four-year-old daughter of the Howards who thus had the distinction often claimed by others of being "the first Little Eva."

She played that role for eight years, then at the age of twelve she left the stage never to return. In the year which marks definitely the decline of the Tom shows, she was still living at the age of nearly eight, a recluse who refused to see anyone or to talk of her career as "the first Little Eva."

The Howards' production of the play, with just seven people carrying the eleven roles, was an instantaneous success. It not only carried the country by storm but it crossed the Atlantic. In 1853 a curious English version of it, filled with "Waal, I calculate" and similar supposed Yankeeisms, was produced at the Theater Royal in Manchester, England. Arthur Ruhl, writing in the New York Herald Tribune, about the current revival reviews its early history as follows: "La Case de l'Oncle Tom, 'Onkle Tom's Huette,' 'La Cabana del Tio Tomas'—the thing swept like a prairie fire into every language in the western world. It ran down into Africa itself, was devoured by the Armenians and other Near Easterners, and little Slavs, in a Russia which still had its serfs, wept over 'Hata Djada Toma' or something that sounded more or less like that. Letters from everybody of consequence—from Macaulay, Dickens, Charles Kingsley, statesmen and political leaders, the great George Sand, German pundits, even the mocking Helme was stirred."

And Otis Skinner, who plays "Uncle Tom" in the revival, a role which he first played in 1873 in a stock company at the Philadelphia Museum, writing in the New York Times recently, contributes this bit of history: "In August, 1878, Jarrett & Palmer, an enterprising firm of New York managers, made a small fortune by taking the play overseas to England, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Holland. In the company were Marie Bates, who is still remembered as playing long and prominently with David Warfield in 'The Auctioneer,' and Harry Hawk, who was on the stage of Ford's theater in Washington at the moment that Lincoln was shot in the box above him by John Wilkes Booth. "Another in that company was Harold Fosburg, a gorgeous specimen of the old-time heavy man. Harold was of the stage stogy; he seemed to think in the terms of melodrama and blank verse. While the troupe was exhibiting in Germany his delight was to parade through the streets of Berlin and other cities dressed in the

boots, spurs, planter's hat and coat of Legree, followed by two of the negro singers from the cast, at whom he occasionally cracked his blacksnake whip to the profound amazement of the passers-by.

"Noted actors have at times appeared in the play: Joseph Jefferson, William Warren, George L. Fox of 'Humpty Dumpty' memory, John Gilbert and William Lenoxyne, who became favorites on the New York stage, Lotta and Mary McVicker, afterward the wife of Edwin Booth, each of whom played both Eva and Topsy on different occasions—in short, the leading members of every dramatic company of record in the United States from 1852 until William A. Brady's revival of 'Uncle Tom' in 1901 with Theodore Roberts and Wilton Lackaye. Among those who have played in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' one finds such other notable names as Lawrence Barrett, John McCullough, Louis James, John T. Raymond, David Belasco, Edwin Adams, Annie Russell, Mary Pickford, Maude Adams, Fay Templeton, Mrs. Fiske, Henrietta Crossman, Charles Thorne, John S. Clarke and Edie Shannon.

"The part of Topsy was sometimes acted by men; records show that John Drew's uncle, Frank Drew, and Fred Stone appeared in it. Even Little Eva was once played by William Seymour."

The "Simon Legrees" have been legion, but there was perhaps never a more unusual one than John L. Sullivan! J. W. Goodrich, who had managed a wagon circus through Connecticut and New York state for several years, one fall organized an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" company to play theaters throughout the East.

He secured as his big feature John L. Sullivan, who played Simon Legree and used up in the course of a few weeks half a dozen "Toms," who, no matter how much they padded under the red flannel shirt, could not stand the rough usage received from the famous pugilist in the whipping scene. Ern G. Estey of Lynn was playing "Tom" in the show and he probably lasted longer in the role than any other actor. He wore under his red shirt a vest that was lined an inch thick with cotton. This oftentimes was inadequate to afford sufficient protection from the lashings he received some evenings when John L. had been entertaining friends in his dressing room and desired to give them a good account of himself as an actor later on. John L. remained with the Goodrich show as long as it was on the road.

Mention has been made of the fact that Harriet Beecher Stowe never made a penny of profit from the dramatization of her book. For there was no copyright law in the 1850's and there was no way for the novelist to collect from the playwright who made use of the material in the book. More than that, Mrs. Stowe knew very little about the theater—it wasn't "proper," you see, for the daughter of a New England clergyman to have anything to do with such a wicked institution as the stage. She was greatly surprised when the play proved to be such a success but she does not seem to have resented either the dramatization nor the success. Once she made a dramatization of the book herself but it wasn't "good theater" so it was never staged.

The only profit she ever received from the dramatization of her book was in the form of a free box in a theater in Hartford, Conn., where she was living in her old age. A road show playing "Uncle Tom" came to town and she went to see the play for the first time with her friend, Charles Dudley Warner, the essayist and novelist. Harriet, sitting beside her in her free box, had to explain the plot of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" to Harriet Beecher Stowe, for she could not understand it as the actors and actresses were presenting her immortal story!

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## Scraps of Humor



### ALL FOR NOTHING

She watched the door of her new establishment open to admit her first client. Business had started! A good impression must be created upon him!

Hurriedly she grasped the telephone receiver and became engaged in an animated conversation. Then, an appointment having been arranged, she replaced the receiver, and, beaming on her customer asked: "What can I do for you, sir?"

A moment's pause, and then: "If you please, ma'am, I've come to connect the telephone!"—London Tit-Bits.

### Theological Mainspring

Two ministers were driving in a cab to the station, and were in some anxiety lest they should miss their train. One of them pulled out his watch and discovered it had stopped. "How annoying!" he exclaimed. "And I always put such faith in that watch!"

"In a case like this," answered the other, "good works would evidently have answered the purpose better."—Christian Advocate.

### DID SHE MEAN HIM?



Betty—The fortune-teller says I'm going to marry money.  
Bill—Good! How did she say I was going to make it?

### The Old Coot

Mazie—I'm afraid I'm not going to like my new job.

Mabel—Why, not, dearie?

Mazie—The boss told me he didn't mind my being pretty, but he wouldn't stand for me looking into my mirror to see if my nose needed powdering, when I should be looking into the dictionary to see how words should be spelled.

### Unnecessary

Prof.—Why don't you take notes in my course?

Dumb 36—Please sir, my father took this course and I have his notes.

### FRANKLY SPEAKING

The shop-assistant wrapped up the customer's parcel and deftly handed it to him.

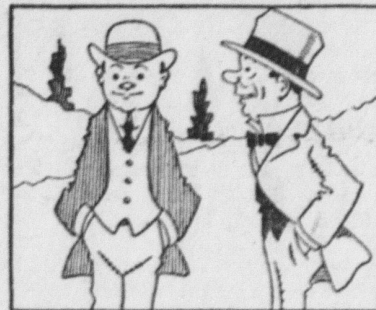
"There you are, sir," he said, "and if the goods are not just to your liking we will cheerfully refund the cash."

Farmer Giles sniffed. "Don't tell me such a yarn, young man," he replied.

"Eh? What?" exclaimed the assistant, momentarily taken off his guard.

"Ye might g'e me my money back," said the farmer, "but 'tain't human nature to be cheerful about it.—London Answers.

### LIKE MANY OTHERS



"My wife is a clinging vine."  
"Mine is more of a rambler. She goes all over the shopping district."

### Signs of Busyess

The busy housewife was making a hurried trip downtown and at the last minute decided to sew a rip in her dress.

On the car she noticed several youngsters looking at her and laughing, and on looking down she found that she had her hands folded nicely in her lap and on one finger was her thumb.

### Adaptation

New Resident—I stopped over in San Juan and—

Old Resident—Pardon me, but you should say San Juan. In California we pronounce our J's like H's.

New Resident—Well, you'll have to give me time. You see, I've been in the state only through Hunc.—El Padre, San Jose, Calif.

### He Couldn't

Peewit—I got a \$4 bill this morning.

Nitwit—Get out! There's no such bill.

Peewit—I wish you could make my tailor believe that.—Pathfinder Magazine.

### Mistaken Encouragement

"I told a friend of mine to sing instead of brooding over his troubles."

"Good advice!"  
"I don't think so. Every time he gets a little bit worried now, everybody in the building has to suffer!"

### How It Happened

Windows are something we can see through, was the way he wrote it. Windows are something we can see through, is the way the linotype operator finally made it.—Florida Times-Union.

### Just the Eyes

Gir—I have broken my glasses. Will I have to be examined all over again?

Optician—No, only your eyes.—Everybody's Weekly.

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