CHAPTER XVIII.

OLDTOWN FOLKS, 1869.

PROFESSOR STOWE THE ORIGINAL OF "HARRY" IN "OLDTOWN FOLKS."--PROFESSOR

STOWE'S LETTER TO GEORGE ELIOT.--HER REMARKS ON THE SAME.--PROFESSOR

STOWE'S NARRATIVE OF HIS YOUTHFUL ADVENTURES IN THE WORLD OF SPIRITS.

--PROFESSOR STOWE'S INFLUENCE ON MRS. STOWE'S LITERARY LIFE.--GEORGE

ELIOT ON "OLDTOWN FOLKS."

This biography would be signally incomplete without some mention of the birth, childhood, early associations, and very peculiar and abnormal psychological experiences of Professor Stowe. Aside from the fact of Dr. Stowe's being Mrs. Stowe's husband, and for this reason entitled to notice in any sketch of her life, however meagre, he is the original of the "visionary boy" in "Oldtown Folks;" and "Oldtown Fireside Stories" embody the experiences of his childhood and youth among the grotesque and original characters of his native town.

March 26, 1882, Professor Stowe wrote the following characteristic letter to Mrs. Lewes:--

MRS. LEWES,--I fully sympathize with you in your disgust with Hume and

the professing mediums generally.

Hume spent his boyhood in my father's native town, among my relatives and acquaintances, and he was a disagreeable, nasty boy. But he certainly has qualities which science has not yet explained, and some of his doings are as real as they are strange. My interest in the subject of spiritualism arises from the fact of my own experience, more than sixty years ago, in my early childhood. I then never thought of questioning the objective reality of all I saw, and supposed that everybody else had the same experience. Of what this experience was you may gain some idea from certain passages in "Oldtown Folks."

The same experiences continue yet, but with serious doubts as to the objectivity of the scenes exhibited. I have noticed that people who have remarkable and minute answers to prayer, such as Stilling, Franke, Lavater, are for the most part of this peculiar temperament. Is it absurd to suppose that some peculiarity in the nervous system, in the connecting link between soul and body, may bring some, more than others, into an almost abnormal contact with the spirit-world (for example, Jacob Boehme and Swedenborg), and that, too, without correcting their faults, or making them morally better than others? Allow me to say that I have always admired the working of your mind, there is about it such a perfect uprightness and uncalculating honesty. I think you are a better Christian without church or theology than most people are with both, though I am, and always have been in the main, a Calvinist of the Jonathan Edwards school. God bless you! I

have a warm side for Mr. Lewes on account of his Goethe labors.

Goethe has been my admiration for more than forty years. In 1830 I got hold of his "Faust," and for two gloomy, dreary November days, while riding through the woods of New Hampshire in an old-fashioned stagecoach, to enter upon a professorship in Dartmouth College, I was perfectly dissolved by it.

Sincerely yours,

C. E. STOWE.

In a letter to Mrs. Stowe, written June 24, 1872, Mrs. Lewes alludes to Professor Stowe's letter as follows: "Pray give my special thanks to the professor for his letter. His handwriting, which does really look like Arabic,--a very graceful character, surely,--happens to be remarkably legible to me, and I did not hesitate over a single word. Some of the words, as expressions of fellowship, were very precious to me, and I hold it very good of him to write to me that best sort of encouragement. I was much impressed with the fact--which you have told me--that he was the original of the "visionary boy" in "Oldtown Folks;" and it must be deeply interesting to talk with him on his experience. Perhaps I am inclined, under the influence of the facts, physiological and psychological, which have been gathered of late years, to give larger place to the interpretation of vision-seeing as subjective than the professor would approve. It seems difficult to

limit--at least to limit with any precision--the possibility of confounding sense by impressions derived from inward conditions with those which are directly dependent on external stimulus. In fact, the division between within and without in this sense seems to become every year a more subtle and bewildering problem."

In 1834, while Mr. Stowe was a professor in Lane Theological Seminary at Cincinnati, Ohio, he wrote out a history of his youthful adventures in the spirit-world, from which the following extracts are taken:--

"I have often thought I would communicate to some scientific physician a particular account of a most singular delusion under which I lived from my earliest infancy till the fifteenth or sixteenth year of my age, and the effects of which remain very distinctly now that I am past thirty.

"The facts are of such a nature as to be indelibly impressed upon my mind they appear to me to be curious, and well worth the attention of the psychologist. I regard the occurrences in question as the more remarkable because I cannot discover that I possess either taste or talent for fiction or poetry. I have barely imagination enough to enjoy, with a high degree of relish, the works of others in this department of literature, but have never felt able or disposed to engage in that sort of writing myself. On the contrary, my style has always been remarkable for its dry, matter-of-fact plainness: my mind has been distinguished for its quickness and adaptedness to historical

and literary investigations, for ardor and perseverance in pursuit of the knowledge of facts,--eine verständige Richtung, as the Germans would say,--rather than for any other quality; and the only talent of a higher kind which I am conscious of possessing is a turn for accurate observation of men and things, and a certain broad humor and drollery.

"From the hour of my birth I have been constitutionally feeble, as were my parents before me, and my nervous system easily excitable. With care, however, I have kept myself in tolerable health, and my life has been an industrious one, for my parents were poor and I have always been obliged to labor for my livelihood.

"With these preliminary remarks, I proceed to the curious details of my psychological history. As early as I can remember anything, I can remember observing a multitude of animated and active objects, which I could see with perfect distinctness, moving about me, and could sometimes, though seldom, hear them make a rustling noise, or other articulate sounds; but I could never touch them. They were in all respects independent of the sense of touch, and incapable of being obstructed in any way by the intervention of material objects; I could see them at any distance, and through any intervening object, with as much ease and distinctness as if they were in the room with me, and directly before my eyes. I could see them passing through the floors, and the ceilings, and the walls of the house, from one apartment to another, in all directions, without a door, or a keyhole, or crevice

being open to admit them. I could follow them with my eyes to any distance, or directly through or just beneath the surface, or up and down, in the midst of boards and timbers and bricks, or whatever else would stop the motion or intercept the visibleness of all other objects. These appearances occasioned neither surprise nor alarm, except when they assumed some hideous and frightful form, or exhibited some menacing gesture, for I became acquainted with them, as soon as with any of the objects of sense. As to the reality of their existence and the harmlessness of their character, I knew no difference between them and any other of the objects which met my eye. They were as familiar to me as the forms of my parents and my brother; they made up a part of my daily existence, and were as really the subjects of my consciousness as the little bench on which I sat in the corner by my mother's knee, or the wheels and sticks and strings with which I amused myself upon the floor. I indeed recognized a striking difference between them and the things which I could feel and handle, but to me this difference was no more a matter of surprise than that which I observed between my mother and the black woman who so often came to work for her; or between my infant brother and the little spotted dog Brutus of which I was so fond. There was no time, or place, or circumstance, in which they did not occasionally make their appearance. Solitude and silence, however, were more favorable to their appearance than company and conversation. They were more pleased with candle-light than the daylight. They were most numerous, distinct, and active when I was alone and in the dark, especially when my mother had laid me in bed and returned to her own room with the

candle. At such times, I always expected the company of my serial visitors, and counted upon it to amuse me till I dropped asleep. Whenever they failed to make their appearance, as was sometimes the case, I felt lonely and discontented. I kept up a lively conversation with them,--not by language or by signs, for the attempt on my part to speak or move would at once break the charm and drive them away in a fret, but by a peculiar sort of spiritual intercommunion.

"When their attention was directed towards me, I could feel and respond to all their thoughts and feelings, and was conscious that they could in the same manner feel and respond to mine. Sometimes they would take no notice of me, but carry on a brisk conversation among themselves, principally by looks and gestures, with now and then an audible word. In fact, there were but few with whom I was very familiar. These few were much more constant and uniform in their visits than the great multitude, who were frequently changing, and too much absorbed in their own concerns to think much of me. I scarcely know how I can give an idea of their form and general appearance, for there are no objects in the material world with which I can compare them, and no language adapted to an accurate description of their peculiarities. They exhibited all possible combinations of size, shape, proportion, and color, but their most usual appearance was with the human form and proportion, but under a shadowy outline that seemed just ready to melt into the invisible air, and sometimes liable to the most sudden and grotesque changes, and with a uniform darkly bluish color spotted with brown, or brownish white. This was the general

appearance of the multitude; but there were many exceptions to this description, particularly among my more welcome and familiar visitors, as will be seen in the sequel."

"Besides these rational and generally harmless beings, there was another set of objects which never varied in their form or qualities, and were always mischievous and terrible. The fact of their appearance depended very much on the state of my health and feelings. If I was well and cheerful they seldom troubled me; but when sick or depressed they were sure to obtrude their hateful presence upon me. These were a sort of heavy clouds floating about overhead, of a black color, spotted with brown, in the shape of a very flaring inverted tunnel without a nozzle, and from ten to thirty or forty feet in diameter. They floated from place to place in great numbers, and in all directions, with a strong and steady progress, but with a tremulous, quivering, internal motion that agitated them in every part.

"Whenever they appproached, the rational phantoms were thrown into great consternation; and well it might be, for if a cloud touched any part of one of the rational phantoms it immediately communicated its own color and tremulous motion to the part it touched.

"In spite of all the efforts and convulsive struggles of the unhappy victim, this color and motion slowly, but steadily and uninteruptedly, proceeded to diffuse itself over every part of the body, and as fast as it did so the body was drawn into the cloud and became a part of

its substance. It was indeed a fearful sight to see the contortions, the agonizing efforts, of the poor creatures who had been touched by one of these awful clouds, and were dissolving and melting into it by inches without the possibility of escape or resistance.

"This was the only visible object that had the least power over the phantoms, and this was evidently composed of the same material as themselves. The forms and actions of all these phantoms varied very much with the state of my health and animal spirits, but I never could discover that the surrounding material objects had any influence upon them, except in this one particular, namely, if I saw them in a neat, well furnished room, there was a neatness and polish in their form and motions; and, on the contrary, if I was in an unfinished, rough apartment, there was a corresponding rudeness and roughness in my aerial visitors. A corresponding difference was visible when I saw them in the woods or in the meadows, upon the water or upon the ground, in the air or among the stars."

"Every different apartment which I occupied had a different set of phantoms, and they always had a degree of correspondence to the circumstances in which they were seen. (It should be noted, however, that it was not so much the place where the phantoms themselves appeared to me to be, that affected their forms and movements, as the place in which I myself actually was while observing them. The apparent locality of the phantoms, it is true, had some influence, but my own actual locality had much more.)"

"Thus far I have attempted only a general outline of these curious experiences. I will now proceed to a detailed account of several particular incidents, for the sake of illustrating the general statements already made. I select a few from manifestations without number. I am able to ascertain dates from the following circumstances:--

"I was born in April, 1802, and my father died in July, 1808, after suffering for more than a year from a lingering organic disease. Between two and three years before his death he removed from the house in which I was born to another at a little distance from it. What occurred, therefore, before my father's last sickness, must have taken place during the first five years of my life, and whatever took place before the removal of the family must have taken place during the first three years of my life. Before the removal of the family I slept in a small upper chamber in the front part of the house, where I was generally alone for several hours in the evening and morning. Adjoining this room, and opening into it by a very small door, was a low, dark, narrow, unfinished closet, which was open on the other side into a ruinous, old chaise-house. This closet was a famous place for the gambols of the phantoms, but of their forms and actions I do not now retain any very distinct recollection. I only remember that I was very careful not to do anything that I thought would be likely to offend them; yet otherwise their presence caused me no uneasiness, and was not at all disagreeable to me.

"The first incident of which I have a distinct recollection was the following:--

"One night, as I was lying alone in my chamber with my little dog Brutus snoring beside my bed, there came out of the closet a very large Indian woman and a very small Indian man, with a huge bass-viol between them. The woman was dressed in a large, loose, black gown, secured around her waist by a belt of the same material, and on her head she wore a high, dark gray fur cap, shaped somewhat like a lady's muff, ornamented with a row of covered buttons in front, and open towards the bottom, showing a red lining. The man was dressed in a shabby, black-colored overcoat and a little round, black hat that fitted closely to his head. They took no notice of me, but were rather ill-natured towards each other, and seemed to be disputing for the possession of the bass-viol. The man snatched it away and struck upon it a few harsh, hollow notes, which I distinctly heard, and which seemed to vibrate through my whole body, with a strange, stinging sensation The woman then took it and appeared to play very intently and much to her own satisfaction, but without producing any sound that was perceptible by me. They soon left the chamber, and I saw them go down into the back kitchen, where they sat and played and talked with my mother. It was only when the man took the bow that I could hear the harsh, abrupt, disagreeable sounds of the instrument. At length they arose, went out of the back door, and sprang upon a large heap of straw and unthreshed beans, and disappeared with a strange, rumbling

sound. This vision was repeated night after night with scarcely any variation while we lived in that house, and once, and once only, after the family had removed to the other house. The only thing that seemed to me unaccountable and that excited my curiosity was that there should be such a large heap of straw and beans before the door every night, when I could see nothing of it in the daytime. I frequently crept out of bed and stole softly down into the kitchen, and peeped out of the door to see if it was there very early in the morning.

"I attempted to make some inquiries of my mother, but as I was not as yet very skillful in the use of language, I could get no satisfaction out of her answers, and could see that my questions seemed to distress her. At first she took little notice of what I said, regarding it no doubt as the meaningless prattle of a thoughtless child. My persistence, however, seemed to alarm her, and I suppose that she feared for my sanity. I soon desisted from asking anything further, and shut myself more and more within myself. One night, very soon after the removal, when the house was still, and all the family were in bed, these unearthly musicians once made their appearance in the kitchen of the new house, and after looking around peevishly, and sitting with a discontented frown and in silence, they arose and went out of the back door, and sprang on a pile of cornstalks, and I saw them no more.

"Our new dwelling was a low-studded house of only one story, and, instead of an upper chamber, I now occupied a bedroom that opened into

the kitchen. Within this bedroom, directly on the left hand of the door as you entered from the kitchen, was the staircase which led to the garret; and, as the room was unfinished, some of the boards which inclosed the staircase were too short, and left a considerable space between them and the ceiling. One of these open spaces was directly in front of my bed, so that when I lay upon my pillow my face was opposite to it. Every night, after I had gone to bed and the candle was removed, a very pleasant-looking human face would peer at me over the top of that board, and gradually press forward his head, neck, shoulders, and finally his whole body as far as the waist, through the opening, and then, smiling upon me with great good-nature, would withdraw in the same manner in which he had entered. He was a great favorite of mine; for though we neither of us spoke, we perfectly understood, and were entirely devoted to, each other. It is a singular fact that the features of this favorite phantom bore a very close resemblance to those of a boy older than myself whom I feared and hated: still the resemblance was so strong that I called him by the same name, Harvey.

"Harvey's visits were always expected and always pleasant; but sometimes there were visitations of another sort, odious and frightful. One of these I will relate as a specimen of the rest."

"One night, after I had retired to bed and was looking for Harvey, I observed an unusual number of the tunnel-shaped tremulous clouds already described, and they seemed intensely black and strongly

agitated. This alarmed me exceedingly, and I had a terrible feeling that something awful was going to happen. It was not long before I saw Harvey at his accustomed place, cautiously peeping at me through the aperture, with an expression of pain and terror on his countenance. He seemed to warn me to be on my guard, but was afraid to put his head into the room lest he should be touched by one of the clouds, which were every moment growing thicker and more numerous. Harvey soon withdrew and left me alone. On turning my eyes towards the left-hand wall of the room, I thought I saw at an immense distance below me the regions of the damned, as I had heard them pictured in sermons. From this awful world of horror the tunnel-shaped clouds were ascending, and I perceived that they were the principal instruments of torture in these gloomy abodes. These regions were at such an immense distance below me that I could obtain but a very indistinct view of the inhabitants, who were very numerous and exceedingly active. Near the surface of the earth, and as it seemed to me but a little distance from my bed, I saw four or five sturdy, resolute devils endeavoring to carry off an unprincipled and dissipated man in the neighborhood, by the name of Brown, of whom I had stood in terror for years. These devils I saw were very different from the common representations. They had neither red faces, nor horns, nor hoofs, nor tails. They were in all respects stoutly built and well-dressed gentlemen. The only peculiarity that I noted in their appearance was as to their heads. Their faces and necks were perfectly bare, without hair or flesh, and of a uniform sky-blue color, like the ashes of burnt paper before it falls to pieces, and of a certain glossy smoothness."

"As I looked on, full of eagerness, the devils struggled to force Brown down with them, and Brown struggled with the energy of desperation to save himself from their grip, and it seemed that the human was likely to prove too strong for the infernal. In this emergency one of the devils, panting for breath and covered with perspiration, beckoned to a strong, thick cloud that seemed to understand him perfectly, and, whirling up to Brown, touched his hand. Brown resisted stoutly, and struck out right and left at the cloud most furiously, but the usual effect was produced,--the hand grew black, quivered, and seemed to be melting into the cloud; then the arm, by slow degrees, and then the head and shoulders. At this instant Brown, collecting all his energies for one desperate effort, sprang at once into the centre of the cloud, tore it asunder, and descended to the ground, exclaiming, with a hoarse, furious voice that grated on my ear, 'There, I've got out; dam'me if I haven't!' This was the first word that had been spoken through the whole horrible scene. It was the first time I had ever seen a cloud fail to produce its appropriate result, and it terrified me so that I trembled from head to foot. The devils, however, did not seem to be in the least discouraged. One of them, who seemed to be the leader, went away and quickly returned bringing with him an enormous pair of rollers fixed in an iron frame, such as are used in iron-mills for the purpose of rolling out and slitting bars of iron, except instead of being turned by machinery, each roller was turned by an immense crank. Three of the devils now seized Brown and put his feet to the rollers, while two others stood,

one at each crank, and began to roll him in with a steady strain that was entirely irresistible. Not a word was spoken, not a sound was heard; but the fearful struggles and terrified, agonizing looks of Brown were more than I could endure. I sprang from my bed and ran through the kitchen into the room where my parents slept, and entreated that they would permit me to spend the remainder of the night with them. After considerable parleying they assured me that nothing could hurt me, and advised me to go back to bed. I replied that I was not afraid of their hurting me, but I couldn't bear to see them acting so with C. Brown. 'Poh! poh! you foolish boy,' replied my father, sternly. 'You've only been dreaming; go right back to bed, or I shall have to whip you.' Knowing that there was no other alternative, I trudged back through the kitchen with all the courage I could muster, cautiously entered my room, where I found everything quiet, there being neither cloud, nor devil, nor anything of the kind to be seen, and getting into bed I slept quietly till morning. The next day I was rather sad and melancholy, but kept all my troubles to myself, through fear of Brown. This happened before my father's sickness, and consequently between the four and six years of my age."

"During my father's sickness and after his death I lived with my grandmother; and when I had removed to her house I forever lost sight of Harvey. I still continued to sleep alone for the most part, but in a neatly furnished upper chamber. Across the corner of the chamber, opposite to and at a little distance from the head of my bed, there

was a closet in the form of an old-fashioned buffet. After going to bed, on looking at the door of this closet, I could see at a great distance from it a pleasant meadow, terminated by a beautiful little grove. Out of this grove, and across this meadow, a charming little female figure would advance, about eight inches high and exquisitely proportioned, dressed in a loose black silk robe, with long, smooth black hair parted up her head and hanging loose over her shoulders. She would come forward with a slow and regular step, becoming more distinctly visible as she approached nearer, till she came even with the surface of the closet door, when she would smile upon me, raise her hands to her head and draw them down on each side of her face, suddenly turn round, and go off at a rapid trot. The moment she turned I could see a good-looking mulatto man, rather smaller than herself, following directly in her wake and trotting off after her. This was generally repeated two or three times before I went to sleep. The features of the mulatto bore some resemblance to those of the Indian man with the bass-viol, but were much more mild and agreeable."

"I awoke one bright, moonlight night, and found a large, full-length human skeleton of an ashy-blue color in bed with me! I screamed out with fright, and soon summoned the family around me. I refused to tell the cause of my alarm, but begged permission to occupy another bed, which was granted.

"For the remainder of the night I slept but little; but I saw upon the window-stools companies of little fairies, about six inches high, in

white robes, gamboling and dancing with incessant merriment. Two of them, a male and female, rather taller than the rest, were dignified with a crown and sceptre. They took the kindest notice of me, smiled upon me with great benignity, and seemed to assure me of their protection. I was soothed and cheered by their presence, though after all there was a sort of sinister and selfish expression in their countenances which prevented my placing implicit confidence in them.

"Up to this time I had never doubted the real existence of these phantoms, nor had I ever suspected that other people had not seen them as distinctly as myself. I now, however, began to discover with no little anxiety that my friends had little or no knowledge of the aerial beings among whom I have spent my whole life; that my allusions to them were not understood, and all complaints respecting them were laughed at. I had never been disposed to say much about them, and this discovery confirmed me in my silence. It did not, however, affect my own belief, or lead me to suspect that my imaginations were not realities.

"During the whole of this period I took great pleasure in walking out alone, particularly in the evening. The most lonely fields, the woods, and the banks of the river, and other places most completely secluded, were my favorite resorts, for there I could enjoy the sight of innumerable aerial beings of all sorts, without interruption. Every object, even every shaking leaf, seemed to me to be animated by some living soul, whose nature in some degree corresponded to its

habitation. I spent much of my life in these solitary rambles; there were particular places to which I gave names, and visited them at regular intervals. Moonlight was particularly agreeable to me, but most of all I enjoyed a thick, foggy night. At times, during these walks, I would be excessively oppressed by an indefinite and deep feeling of melancholy. Without knowing why, I would be so unhappy as to wish myself annihilated, and suddenly it would occur to me that my friends at home were suffering some dreadful calamity, and so vivid would be the impression, that I would hasten home with all speed to see what had taken place. At such seasons I felt a morbid love for my friends that would almost burn up my soul, and yet, at the least provocation from them, I would fly into an uncontrollable passion and foam like a little fury. I was called a dreadful-tempered boy; but the Lord knows that I never occasioned pain to any animal, whether human or brutal, without suffering untold agonies in consequence of it. I cannot, even now, without feelings of deep sorrow, call to mind the alternate fits of corroding melancholy, irritation, and bitter remorse which I then endured. These fits of melancholy were most constant and oppressive during the autumnal months.

"I very early learned to read, and soon became immoderately attached to books. In the Bible I read the first chapters of Job, and parts of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, with most intense delight, and with such frequency that I could repeat large portions from memory long before the age at which boys in the country are usually able to read plain sentences. The first large book besides the Bible that I

remember reading was Morse's 'History of New England,' which I devoured with insatiable greediness, particularly those parts which relate to Indian wars and witchcraft. I was in the habit of applying to my grandmother for explanations, and she would relate to me, while I listened with breathless attention, long stories from Mather's 'Magnalia' or (Mag-nilly, as she used to call it), a work which I earnestly longed to read, but of which, I never got sight till after my twentieth year. Very early there fell into my hands an old school-book, called 'The Art of Speaking,' containing numerous extracts from Milton and Shakespeare. There was little else in the book that interested me, but these extracts from the two great English poets, though there were many things in them that I did not well understand, I read again and again, with increasing pleasure at every perusal, till I had nearly committed them to memory, and almost thumbed the old book into nonenity. But of all the books that I read at this period, there was none that went to my heart like Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress.' I read it and re-read it night and day; I took it to bed with me and hugged it to my bosom while I slept; every different edition that I could find I seized upon and read with as eager a curiosity as if it had been a new story throughout; and I read with the unspeakable satisfaction of most devoutly believing that everything which 'Honest John' related was a real verity, an actual occurrence. Oh that I could read that most inimitable book once more with the same solemn conviction of its literal truth, that I might once more enjoy the same untold ecstacy!

"One other remark it seems proper to make before I proceed further to details. The appearance, and especially the motions, of my aerial visitors were intimately connected, either as cause or effect, I cannot determine which, with certain sensations of my own. Their countenances generally expressed pleasure or pain, complaisance or anger, according to the mood of my own mind: if they moved from place to place without moving their limbs, with that gliding motion appropriate to spirits, I felt in my stomach that peculiar tickling sensation which accompanies a rapid, progressive movement through the air; and if they went off with an uneasy trot, I felt an unpleasant jarring through my frame. Their appearance was always attended with considerable effort and fatigue on my part: the more distinct and vivid they were, the more would my fatigue be increased; and at such times my face was always pale, and my eyes unusually sparkling and wild. This continued to be the case after I became satisfied that it was all a delusion of the imagination, and it so continues to the present day."

It is not surprising that Mrs. Stowe should have felt herself impelled to give literary form to an experience so exceptional. Still more must this be the case when the early associations of this exceptional character were as amusing and interesting as they are shown forth in "Oldtown Fireside Stories."

None of the incidents or characters embodied in those sketches are ideal. The stories are told as they came from Mr. Stowe's lips, with

little or no alteration. Sam Lawson was a real character. In 1874 Mr. Whittier wrote to Mrs. Stowe: "I am not able to write or study much, or read books that require thought, without suffering, but I have Sam Lawson lying at hand, and, as Corporal Trim said of Yorick's sermon, 'I like it hugely.'"

The power and literary value of these stories lie in the fact that they are true to nature. Professor Stowe was himself an inimitable mimic and story-teller. No small proportion of Mrs. Stowe's success as a literary woman is to be attributed to him. Not only was he possessed of a bright, quick mind, but wonderful retentiveness of memory. Mrs. Stowe was never at a loss for reliable information on any subject as long as the professor lived. He belonged, to that extinct species, the "general scholar." His scholarship was not critical in the modern sense of the word, but in the main accurate, in spite of his love for the marvelous.

It is not out of place to give a little idea of his power in character-painting, as it shows how suggestive his conversation and letters must have been to a mind like that of Mrs. Stowe:--

NATICK, July 14, 1839.

I have had a real good time this week writing my oration. I have strolled over my old walking places, and found the same old stone walls, the same old footpaths through the rye-fields, the same bends

in the river, the same old bullfrogs with their green spectacles on, the same old terrapins sticking up their heads and bowing as I go by; and nothing was wanting but my wife to talk with to make all complete. . . . I have had some rare talks with old uncle "Jaw" Bacon, and other old characters, which you ought to have heard. The Curtises have been flooding Uncle "Jaw's" meadows, and he is in a great stew about it. He says: "I took and tell'd your Uncle Izic to tell them 'ere Curtises that if the Devil did n't git 'em far flowing my medder arter that sort, I didn't see no use o' havin' any Devil." "Have you talked with the Curtises yourself?" "Yes, hang the sarcy dogs! and they took and tell'd me that they'd take and flow clean up to my front door, and make me go out and in in a boat." "Why don't you go to law?" "Oh, they keep alterin' and er tinkerin'-up the laws so here in Massachusetts that a body can't git no damage fur flowing; they think cold water can't hurt nobody."

Mother and Aunt Nabby each keep separate establishments. First Aunt Nabby gets up in the morning and examines the sink, to see whether it leaks and rots the beam. She then makes a little fire, gets her little teapot of bright shining tin, and puts into it a teaspoonful of black tea, and so prepares her breakfast.

By this time mother comes creeping down-stairs, like an old tabby-cat out of the ash-hole; and she kind o' doubts and reckons whether or no she had better try to git any breakfast, bein' as she 's not much appetite this mornin'; but she goes to the leg of bacon and cuts off a

little slice, reckons sh'll broil it; then goes and looks at the coffee-pot and reckons sh'll have a little coffee; don't exactly know whether it's good for her, but she don't drink much. So while Aunt Nabby is sitting sipping her tea and munching her bread and butter with a matter-of-fact certainty and marvelous satisfaction, mother goes doubting and reckoning round, like Mrs. Diffidence in Doubting Castle, till you see rising up another little table in another corner of the room, with a good substantial structure of broiled ham and coffee, and a boiled egg or two, with various et ceteras, which Mrs. Diffidence, after many desponding ejaculations, finally sits down to, and in spite of all presentiments makes them fly as nimbly as Mr. Ready-to-Halt did Miss Much-afraid when he footed it so well with her on his crutches in the dance on the occasion of Giant Despair's overthrow.

I have thus far dined alternately with mother and Aunt Susan, not having yet been admitted to Aunt Nabby's establishment. There are now great talkings, and congresses and consultations of the allied powers, and already rumors are afloat that perhaps all will unite their forces and dine at one table, especially as Harriet and little Hattie are coming, and there is no knowing what might come out in the papers if there should be anything a little odd.

Mother is very well, thin as a hatchet and smart as a steel trap; Aunt Nabby, fat and easy as usual; for since the sink is mended, and no longer leaks and rots the beam, and she has nothing to do but watch

it, and Uncle Bill has joined the Washingtonians and no longer drinks rum, she is quite at a loss for topics of worriment.

Uncle Ike has had a little touch of palsy and is rather feeble. He says that his legs and arms have rather gi'n out, but his head and pluck are as good as they ever were. I told him that our sister Kate was very much in the same fix, whereat he was considerably affected, and opened the crack in his great pumpkin of a face, displaying the same two rows of great white ivories which have been my admiration from my youth up. He is sixty-five years of age, and has never lost a tooth, and was never in his life more than fifteen miles from the spot where he was born, except once, in the ever-memorable year 1819, when I was at Bradford Academy.

In a sudden glow of adventurous rashness he undertook to go after me and bring me home for vacation; and he actually performed the whole journey of thirty miles with his horse and wagon, and slept at a tavern a whole night, a feat of bravery on which he has never since ceased to plume himself. I well remember that awful night in the tavern in the remote region of North Andover. We occupied a chamber in which were two beds. In the unsuspecting innocence of youth I undressed myself and got into bed as usual; but my brave and thoughtful uncle, merely divesting himself of his coat, put it under his pillow, and then threw himself on to the bed with his boots on his feet, and his two hands resting on the rim of his hat, which he had prudently placed on the apex of his stomach as he lay on his back. He

wouldn't allow me to blow out the candle, but he lay there with his great white eyes fixed on the ceiling, in the cool, determined manner of a bold man who had made up his mind to face danger and meet whatever might befall him. We escaped, however, without injury, the doughty landlord and his relentless sons merely demanding pay for supper, lodging, horse-feed, and breakfast, which my valiant uncle, betraying no signs of fear, resolutely paid.

Mrs. Stowe has woven this incident into chapter thirty-two of "Oldtown Folks," where Uncle Ike figures as Uncle Jacob.

Mrs. Stowe had misgivings as to the reception which "Oldtown Folks" would meet in England, owing to its distinctively New England character. Shortly after the publication of the book she received the following words of encouragement from Mrs. Lewes (George Eliot), July 11, 1869 :--

"I have received and read 'Oldtown Folks.' I think that few of your readers can have felt more interest than I have felt in that picture of an elder generation; for my interest in it has a double root,--one in my own love for our old-fashioned provincial life, which had its affinities with a contemporary life, even all across the Atlantic, and of which I have gathered glimpses in different phases from my father and mother, with their relations; the other is my experimental acquaintance with some shades of Calvinistic orthodoxy. I think your way of presenting the religious convictions which are not your own,

except by the way of indirect fellowship, is a triumph of insight and true tolerance. . . . Both Mr. Lewes and I are deeply interested in the indications which the professor gives of his peculiar psychological experience, and we should feel it a great privilege to learn much more of it from his lips. It is a rare thing to have such an opportunity of studying exceptional experience in the testimony of a truthful and in every way distinguished mind."

"Oldtown Folks" is of interest as being undoubtedly the last of Mrs. Stowe's works which will outlive the generation for which it was written. Besides its intrinsic merit as a work of fiction, it has a certain historic value as being a faithful study of "New England life and character in that particular time of its history which may be called the seminal period."

Whether Mrs. Stowe was far enough away from the time and people she attempts to describe to "make (her) mind as still and passive as a looking-glass or a mountain lake, and to give merely the images reflected there," is something that will in great part determine the permanent value of this work. Its interest as a story merely is of course ephemeral.