

THE LIFE AND WORK OF CHARLES EDWARD STOWE,
THE SON OF HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

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Figure 1. Photograph of the Beecher-Stowe family

Above: A stereoscopic view of the Beecher-Stowe family outside their Mandarin Home, circa early 1880s. Below: Detail. From left, Eliza Stowe, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Stowe, Calvin Stowe, Eunice Beecher, Hatty Stowe. Possibly the only existing photograph of Charles Stowe and his mother together. (Dennis Collection, New York Public Library).

For my friend S.D.R.

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And a very particular and very special thank you to my mother, who has been there for me in all stages of this project, as far back as 2016, and without whom I would have never taken interest in Harriet Beecher Stowe at all.

Abstract

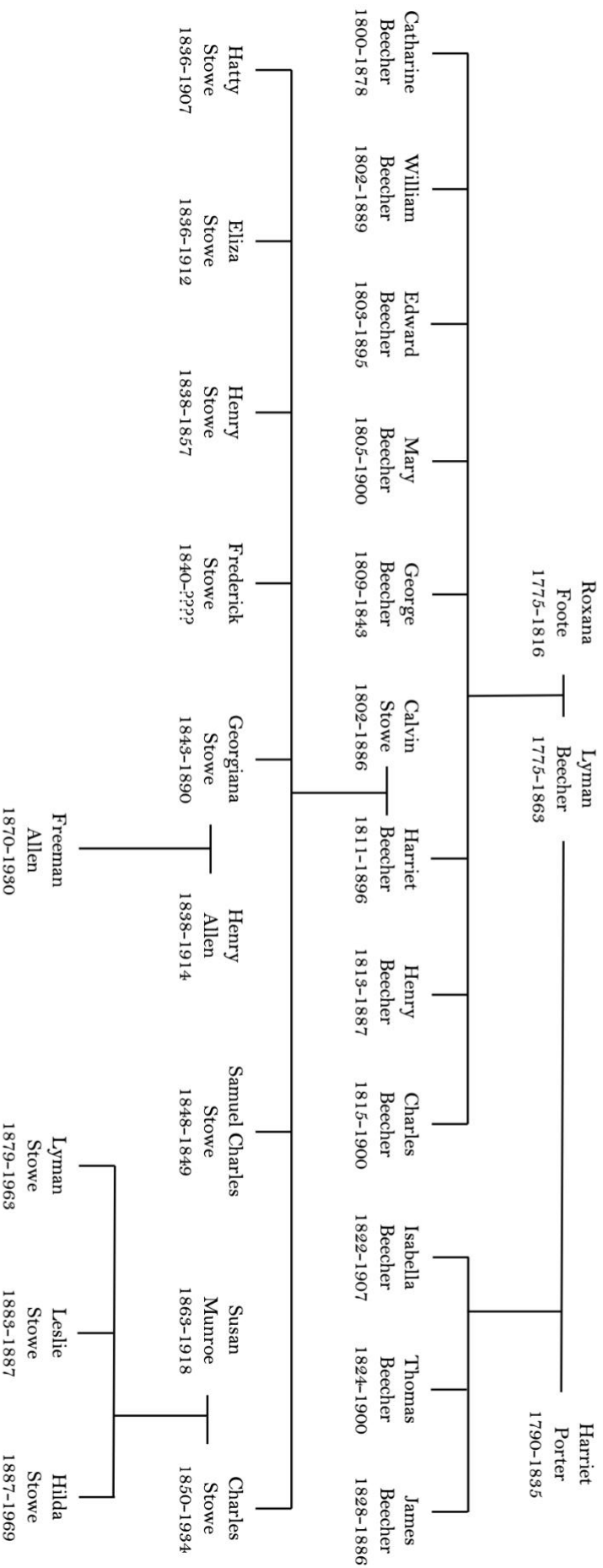
Since her lifetime, biographers have framed Harriet Beecher Stowe – the author of the 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* – as a defining figure of the American abolitionist movement, as well as the 19th century at large. Although Stowe's widely-received image as an author heavily relied on her identity as a mother, little scholarly attention has been granted to the lives of her seven children. One child in particular – her youngest, Charles – is overlooked with particular frequency, despite the significant role he played as his mother's first official biographer. This thesis lays out a biography of Charles Stowe and examines the lasting impacts that his biographies of his mother have had in shaping the way she is remembered in American history.

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Beecher-Stowe family tree

Women are shown with their names at birth; names are occasionally abbreviated or extended for clarity.

Introduction

Quite little has been written on the life of Charles Edward Stowe. And perhaps, reasonably so. Charles was not particularly famous during his lifetime; his greatest claim to celebrity was that he was the youngest son of Harriet Beecher Stowe – the best-selling author of the 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

In recent years, it seems true that Harriet Beecher Stowe's fame – and her importance in American history – are not as much as a given as they once were. Her biographies often open by attempting to qualify the two, stating the incredible number of copies her novel sold, or the dozens of languages it was translated into, or perhaps most often, the apocryphal anecdote of her meeting with Lincoln during the Civil War, where he allegedly greeted her by saying “so you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!” – or some variation thereof. Yet it stands that Harriet Beecher Stowe was indeed an incredibly well-known woman of her time – not only in the United States but abroad as well, including outside of the English-speaking world to a certain extent.¹

And yet her son Charles led a rather quiet life – he married well, held a steady career, and published several books, all of which perhaps owed at least a little to his mother's renown. Harriet Beecher Stowe's biographers do not seem to dwell on Charles for too long. Motherhood is (and was) an integral part of Harriet's image; Charles's name is often mentioned among those of his six siblings to corroborate this point, yet little more. It appears that he is named even more seldom than the rest of the Stowe children – he did not fight in the Civil War or disappear mysteriously, or die prematurely, or give Harriet her first grandchild as his siblings did.

1. See Kohn, *Transatlantic Stowe*; Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*

And yet Charles Stowe's influence on the life and memory of Harriet Beecher Stowe is much greater than the few odd sentences that historians have heretofore afforded him. Indeed, he occupies a strange place in the literature on his mother. His name is mentioned rarely in the body of text, but almost too often in its notes. He is simultaneously absent and omnipresent.

In the late 1880s, sensing she had little time left, Harriet Beecher Stowe tasked her son with creating a biography of her life. The finished work, called *the Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, was published in 1889, seven years before her death. It was the first-ever authorized biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and today it is still continuously and extensively cited. Twenty-two years later, Charles published a second edition that is also still referenced in modern writings on his mother, called *Harriet Beecher Stowe: the Story of Her Life*, co-written with his son Lyman.

While subsequent historians have indeed considered that his biographies were written by the novelist's son, these considerations have been with only a generic mother-son bias – the assumption that Charles was overly kind and praiseworthy in his descriptions of his mother – rather than with any view of Charles as an individual, his ability as a writer, or his particular relationship with his mother.

The presence and influence of Charles's biographies in later literature is not smothering; more recent biographers and historians have not been shy to break away from the precedent he put forth. Rather, Charles's biographies of his mother, and his handling of her legacy after her death, have formed the framework that subsequent authorship on Harriet Beecher Stowe have built upon. While *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* and *Harriet Beecher Stowe: the Story of Her Life* today may not be the most landmark and most referenced pieces of literature in the field, they were among the first,

and without a doubt they were the closest to the individual herself. The influence of these two biographies – Charles Stowe’s influence – is unavoidable in the field on Harriet Beecher Stowe. No major work on her life has gone without citing them. Even more minor texts that do not explicitly reference Charles Stowe nonetheless engage with the Harriet Beecher Stowe that was his creation – perhaps unknowingly. Charles’s works are something like the skeleton of the field, upon which later works are the flesh – though not always observable, his biographies lie beneath and hold up later scholarship. Without his biographies, subsequent works could not stand.

And yet – who exactly is Charles Edward Stowe?

Although most biographies on Harriet do not discuss Charles Edward Stowe at any great length, when they do mention him, he is referred to as “spoilt” and characterized as undisciplined and unruly.² Harriet herself wrote “Charley is to make trouble; that is the nature of the institution.”³ But despite the occasional mention of his misbehavior, historians have deemed Charles Stowe to be largely tangential.

It is in this work then that both the life and the work of Charles Edward Stowe shall be the focus. The task of creating a portrait of Charles Edward Stowe primarily derives its value from two reasons:

Firstly, it is from the fact that (if nothing else) he was the son of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe’s identity as an author – and as a woman – was inseparable from her role as a mother. A look at the life of Charles Stowe is a look into the results of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s mothering put into practice. Already this reason is justifiable enough – recent works like Philip McFarland’s 2007 book *The Loves of Harriet Beecher Stowe* or

2. See Olav Thulesius, *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Florida*; Hedrick, *A Life*.

3. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Our Charley: And What to Do with Him*, 26.

Nancy Koester's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life* from 2014 make this clear. Rather than attempting to create a full portrait of the author, works like these instead hone in on one facet; a focus on Harriet Beecher Stowe, the mother, therefore, would fit acceptedly in with this trend.

Secondly, the value of a spotlight on Charles Stowe comes from his role in history-writing, as it relates to Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Harriet Beecher Stowe that exists in the modern memory is the one largely created by her son. His works are still cited through today, and yet his influence has not been adequately assessed.

This text is thus divided into two sections. The first serves as a sort of assembled biography of Charles – that is, “the story of his life.” The second examines his role in writing histories of Harriet Beecher Stowe – that is, “his compiling from her letters and journals.”

SECTION I

CHARLES EDWARD STOWE: THE STORY OF HIS LIFE

The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, Connecticut occupies the house where Harriet spent the last years of her life. The hallway that had once served as an entrance into her home has been repurposed into the entrance into the museum, the walls adorned with quotations from several famous figures to demonstrate the varying receptions of Harriet Beecher Stowe over the past century and a half. Included also is one quotation from Harriet herself – serving as a visitor’s first exposure to the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe on the museum’s grounds.

I wrote what I did because as a woman, as a mother I was oppressed and broken-hearted, with the sorrows and injustice I saw, because as a Christian I felt the dishonor to Christianity — because as a lover of my country I trembled at the coming day of wrath.⁴

Her entire existence as a writer, Harriet has been framed – and has framed herself – as a mother. The Stowe Center presents her this way; in some cases it has been a motivation for reading her work altogether. “I reread with extreme attention Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom*, precisely because it’s a woman’s book, written, she says, while making soup for her children,” wrote Vincent van Gogh to his sister in 1889.⁵

Motherhood is essential to the image of Harriet Beecher Stowe. And yet no major piece of literature has focused on Harriet’s actual role as a mother, or her children. The work that perhaps comes closest is Mary Kelley’s 1978 article “At War

4. Harriet Beecher Stowe to Lord Denman, January 20, 1853; present in Hedrick, *A Life*, 237.

5. Vincent Van Gogh to Willemien van Gogh, Arles, between about Sunday, 28 April and Thursday, 2 May 1889. Translated from French by the author.

with Herself: Harriet Beecher Stowe as Woman in Conflict within the Home.” Like many other examples of literature that mention Harriet’s mothering, Kelley’s article discusses it largely in the abstract, naming a few of Harriet’s children but largely referring to them as a collective unit – “the children” or the unindividual “baby.”⁶

Indeed, historians of across the spectrum of dedication do tend to make some sort of mention of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s children in discussions of her life, almost never ignoring them completely. Her sixth child, Samuel Charles, whose death is most readily connected to Harriet’s writing of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is perhaps the most frequently named. Frederick, her fourth, who fought in (and was injured during) the Civil War, is additionally a common choice. Her eldest, twin daughters Hatty and Eliza, are often used to mark Harriet’s entrance into motherhood; the death of her third child Henry at age 19 is occasionally mentioned to corroborate the tragedy in Harriet’s life, as well. It seems safe to say that Georgiana, child five, and Charles Edward, child seven, are those most rarely mentioned; perhaps uncoincidentally, both Georgiana and Charles were moderately successful and independent from their family. Both were married, moved away from their parents, and had children of their own. Georgiana’s rather early death at age 46, and the morphine dependence she suffered from, however, has been used to string together the addiction that was rather common in the Beecher and Stowe families – and so Charles resultingly often remains the most irrelevant in the view of many existing works on Harriet, with his rather long and relatively quiet life.

Indeed, Hedrick refers to Charles as “the best adjusted of the lot,” possibly attributable to the fact that he was not primarily raised by Harriet, but rather by his

6. Kelley, “At War with Herself.”

father or domestic help.⁷ But with the early deaths and addictions of his siblings, simply making it into adulthood unscathed was comparably an accomplishment for a Stowe child.

Yet when Charles Edward was born, Harriet wrote “I do not feel him the same nor do I feel for him that same love which I felt for [Samuel] Charley”⁸ – a comparison that would be lifelong, as she reassigned the name (and nickname) of the deceased onto her youngest.

The most complete published biography of Charles Edward Stowe is one he wrote himself – he summarized his entire life in four hundred words in 1915, aged sixty-five, to mark the fortieth anniversary of his college graduation.⁹ And yet, perhaps it is his own fault that he is so rarely mentioned by Harriet’s biographers. Charles Stowe hardly includes himself in either biography of his mother – both of which serve as the framework for subsequent authorship by other writers. He rather vaguely refers to the recipient of many of the letters included in the first biography – that is, himself – as “Mrs. Stowe’s son.” He glosses over his own birth in 1850 – though the excerpts he quotes do mention an unnamed baby during this time – and he never explains who this “Charley” is to whom Harriet addresses some of her letters. To an unfamiliar reader (who skips by the title page), it is very possible to not recognize that this oft-mentioned “son” is not Henry, Frederick, or Samuel Charles, but Charles Edward Stowe himself – and to finish the entire book completely unaware of his existence.

And so Charles’s biographies of his mother do little to help formulate a biography of himself – and quite reasonably prevented any significant attention in his

7. Hedrick, *A Life*, 140.

8. Hedrick, *A Life*, 199.

9. Harvard College Class of 1875, *Secretary’s Report, Fortieth Anniversary*.

direction in later histories of his mother. However, in conjunction with other sources, these later biographies do assist in creating a fuller portrait of the author's son. Charles was a somewhat prolific writer, even outside of the biographies of his mother. In the later part of his life, he wrote in to local newspapers with some degree of frequency; he appears in every edition of his college's *Secretary's Report*, as well as in other assorted magazines on occasion. Not least, a large amount of his letters survive throughout various collections, as well. And rather significantly, in the summer of 1922, Charles started a project that he titled *Random Recollections of My Ancestry, Father, Mother, Personal Antics, Aspirations and Fates, Failures and Futilities of My Earthly Career*. The work is unfinished and unpublished; it sits in the archives at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Connecticut, seemingly never referenced in any existent literature on the Stowes. Yet it is an incredible resource; the work covers in great detail Charles's memories of the first two decades of his life, offering anecdotes and stories never published anywhere else.

And so assembling these sources can serve to create a fragmented, though complete life story than has ever been written about Charles Stowe. Thus what follows is the *Life of Charles Edward Stowe, Compiled from His Letters, Assorted Short Writings, Biographies of His Mother, and His Own Unpublished Autobiography*.

The Childhood of Harriet Beecher *from 1811*

Charles Stowe was born in 1850; yet his mother's conceptions of motherhood had long predated that year. To paint an image of Harriet's mothering, it seems judicious to glimpse wherefrom her notion and ideals originated – that is, the relationship with her mother, Roxana.

Harriet Beecher was born in Litchfield, Connecticut in 1811; she grew up without her mother. Aged five years at the time of Roxana Beecher's death, Harriet herself wrote that her recollections of her mother were few.¹⁰ Charles would write that the death “ever afterwards remained with [Harriet] as the tenderest, saddest, and most sacred memory of her childhood”¹¹ – yet “who can blame Harriet if she hardly understood after her mother's death that she was gone?” writes Hedrick, pointing to the rush of the large family and all its frequent guests and boarders.¹²

One of the ten children of Eli Foote and Roxana Ward, Roxana had been raised primarily by her grandfather, Revolutionary War veteran General Andrew Ward, following her father's death from yellow fever in 1792.¹³

Roxana married Lyman Beecher, a Congregationalist minister, in 1799; they were both aged twenty-four years. Their courtship had begun while Lyman was a student at Yale – Roxana and her family were living nearby in Guilford, Connecticut. Lyman had had his pick of General Ward's granddaughters; “the whole circle ... was one of uncommon intelligence, vivacity, and wit,” he wrote. Yet Roxana stood out: “I

10. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*; and via Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 2.

11. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 2.

12. Hedrick, *A Life*, 6.

13. Nathaniel Goodwin, *The Foote Family*, 83.

soon saw, in the family and out, Roxana was the mind that predominated.”¹⁴ Indeed, in many ways Roxana exemplified an appropriately learned woman of the period – though she had no formal education, Roxana was fluent in French, a vivacious reader of novels, and had a keen interest in history. And as the couple had their first child in 1800 – a girl, Catharine – Roxana’s womanly perfection continued into motherhood. Or, at least, her family remembered her this way. Roxana Beecher was everything that a woman and a mother ought to be: she was quiet (“quiet as an angel above,” Lyman wrote¹⁵), intelligent, loving, and artistic – not easily upset but quite agreeable, constantly tending to house or children.

Though her relationship with her mother was brief, through the rest of Harriet’s life, Roxana remained a beacon of the maternal ideal. “The deep interest and veneration that she inspired in all who knew her were such that during all my childhood I was constantly hearing her spoken of,” Harriet later wrote.¹⁶

Roxana had been forty-one years old at the time of her death and was already the mother of nine children. The oldest she left behind was Catharine, then aged sixteen; the youngest, a boy named Charles, was not yet one year old. She had been preceded in death by one daughter: a newborn girl called Harriet, after whom the second (and more famous) Harriet was named. Lyman Beecher reflected that upon their daughter’s death, Roxana hadn’t given in to her emotions: “she was so resigned that she seemed almost happy...she showed an entire absence of sinister motives, and an entire acquiescence in the Divine will.”¹⁷ Indeed, throughout Lyman’s autobiography are such

14. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 40.

15. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 59.

16. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 222; and via Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 2.

17. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 127.

memories as this: his almost deified view of his wife, which was doubtlessly then impressed on his children. He and Roxana were deeply in love, he reflects in his autobiography; never did the couple ever quarrel, only once coming close to it, he says.¹⁸

In a letter to her brother Charles, subsequently included in both Lyman Beecher's autobiography and Charles Stowe's biography, Harriet reflects on one of her only memories involving her mother: as a little girl, Harriet had happened upon a bag of tulip bulbs; thinking there were onions, she and her brothers ate them all. "I remember that there was not even a momentary expression of impatience," Harriet says of her mother, "but that she sat down and said, 'My dear children, what you have done makes mamma very sorry. Those were not onions but roots of beautiful flowers.'"¹⁹ It is with this anecdote that Harriet's son Charles opted to open his biography of his mother – from the very start, casting Harriet in the shadow of her mother.

Indeed, in the Beecher family, Roxana was near perfection – and even her children who were too young to remember her were made to believe it. "I think her memory and example had more influence in molding her family, in deterring from evil and exciting to good, than the living presence of many mothers," Harriet wrote in the same letter quoted above.²⁰ For Harriet, this influence continued decades after her mother's death. As a young woman, Harriet was an enthusiastic painter – a pastime that she would continue through the end of her life – "undertaken out of loyalty to the memory of her mother," who was an amateur artist herself, Hedrick asserts;²¹ Lyman

18. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 86.

19. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*; and via Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 3.

20. Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 5.

21. Hedrick, *A Life*, 52.

notes that her creations “were really quite pretty.”²² Additionally, as a young woman, in many of her letters, Harriet ends her thoughts and plans in saying “if I live” – although perhaps nothing more than a subconscious influence, Hedrick connects Harriet’s conviction of hers being a short life with her mother’s young death; Hedrick notices astutely that this repetition continued “until [Harriet] was past the age at which her mother died.”²³

Roxana Beecher’s death – and the impressions she had left on her family while she lived – took shape in Harriet’s fiction-writing, as well. Hedrick compares Roxana to Mara, the idealized young female lead martyred in Harriet’s novel *The Pearl Orr’s Island*.²⁴ Harriet herself drew a comparison with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; she writes, “The passage... where Augustine St. Clare describes his mother’s influence is a simple reproduction of my own mother’s influence as it has always been felt in her family.”²⁵ The novel’s chapter “The Reunion” is a particular encapsulation of this idea; throughout, the narrator describes St. Clare’s deceased mother guiding his actions; at times, even “his mother’s voice leading his.”²⁶ Her eternal influence, perhaps how Harriet felt it, is then culminated in his final word:

The sinking paleness of death fell on him; but with it there fell, as if shed from the wings of some pitying spirit, a beautiful expression of peace, like that of a wearied child who sleeps. So he lay for a few moments. They saw that the mighty hand was on him. Just before the spirit parted, he opened his eyes, with a sudden light, as of joy and recognition, and said “Mother!” and then he was gone!²⁷

22. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 86.

23. Hedrick, *A Life*, 49.

24. Hedrick, *A Life*, 5.

25. Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 5.

26. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 136.

27. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 398.

And so, too, was Roxana gone: thirteen months after she had died, Lyman Beecher remarried. His new wife was the twenty-seven-year-old Harriet Porter; Lyman Beecher was forty-two years old. The two had met while Lyman was in Boston, preaching against Unitarianism. “The circle ... in which Miss Porter moved, both from its distinguished family connections and her father’s personal celebrity, was one of particular elevation and refinement,” states Lyman’s autobiography. Indeed, Harriet Porter’s father was a famed physician in their home state of Maine; her uncles were Rufus, William, and Cyrus King – a Founding Father, Constitutional signer, and 1816 presidential nominee; a Representative from Massachusetts from 1813-1817; and the first governor of Maine respectively.²⁸

Lyman and Harriet Porter were married in Maine; before their arrival back to Connecticut, Harriet’s oldest sister Catharine, age seventeen, wrote a letter to her new mother. She thanks God that He has provided one who will prove to be “a tender and watchful mother to my dear brothers and sisters, and who will be to me a guide, a pattern, and friend...the sacred name of *mother*, so bound up in our hearts, would alone entitle you to the most undeviating affection and respect.”²⁹ The new Mrs. Beecher responded thus: “I am not to take the place of that mother. Oh no. She must still live in your memory and affections; but have you not room for me also?”³⁰

In the second edition of his biography, Charles adds a new anecdote that had not appeared previously: that the young Harriet defiantly approached her step-mother and proclaimed “you have come and married my pa! And when I grow up I will go and

28. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 261.

29. Catharine Beecher, via Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 265.

30. Harriet Porter Beecher, via Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, 266.

marry your pa!"³¹ – adding a sort of rebelliousness in her not present in the first biography. Regardless of Charles's depiction, it appears that Harriet's relationship with her step-mother was nonetheless rather cordial – Harriet wrote of her step-mother fondly, referring to her as "mamma" in letters to other family members ³² – though perhaps somewhat distant, as Hedrick asserts.³³ Soon Mrs. Beecher's time would be occupied by children of her own: first Frederick, who died as an infant, followed by Isabella, Thomas, and James. Likewise, education became Harriet's primary preoccupation; she was six years old when she began school and would continue over the course of the next decade of her life.

Though not with the same sort of maternal intimacy as her birth mother, Harriet Porter nonetheless was a continuation of the sort of womanly perfection that Lyman Beecher aimed to provide his children with through his choice of wife – exemplifying the same characteristics of beauty, intelligence, passivity, religiosity, and capability in childrearing that Roxana had.

Both Roxana and Harriet Porter, though differing in closeness to the young Harriet Beecher, nonetheless instilled in her a lasting sense of what a mother must be – a sense that she wrote about in her letters and stories, and later, to which she held herself.

31. Charles Stowe, *Story of Her Life*, 24.

32. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 35, 37, ex.

33. Hedrick, *A Life*, 23.



Figure 3. Photograph of Harriet Beecher Stowe

Daguerreotype of Harriet Beecher Stowe, circa 1850, by Southworth & Hawes. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Entrance to motherhood *from 1832*

Harriet and her ancestors had lived in New England since the beginning of the 17th century; the Beecher line in particular had been in Connecticut since the 1630s, not living more than fifty miles outside of Litchfield for nearly two hundred years.³⁴ But in 1832, the Beechers moved west. Lyman Beecher had been offered the role of president at the newly-founded Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio; after a preliminary

34. Hughes, *Genealogy of a Branch of the Beecher Family*.

trip to the Seminary's intended campus with Catharine, Lyman accepted the position, and the Beechers – who had been split between Massachusetts and Connecticut at the time – made the move across the country.

Shortly after, Lyman invited Calvin Stowe to Cincinnati as well, to serve as a professor of Biblical studies at the seminary. Lyman and Calvin had first met several years prior, as Calvin would attend Lyman's church in Boston on occasion.³⁵ Calvin had been living in Hanover, New Hampshire at the time; fluent in French, German, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, he was then the language chair at Dartmouth College.³⁶ He had married Eliza, the daughter of the university's previous president, Bennet Tyler, in June of 1833. Less than a year after their wedding, Calvin and Eliza moved from New England, where, just like the Beechers, they had both lived all their lives, to the border city of Cincinnati.

Born in Massachusetts in 1802, Calvin had attended Bowdoin as an undergraduate, graduating at the top of his class in 1824. He became the university's librarian for a year before continuing his studies, first at Andover Theological Seminary and subsequently Bowdoin's graduate school. He had held his position at Dartmouth for only a few years before marrying Eliza and moving to Cincinnati. Yet he was already known as an accomplished scholar when he arrived; very soon was an invitation of membership extended to him by the Semi-Colon Club – a local literary group run by James Hall, the editor of *the Western Monthly Magazine*, and Dr. Daniel Drake, a University of Pennsylvania-educated physician and medical educator.³⁷ Louis Tucker,

35. McFarland, *The Loves of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 30.

36. Hatch, *History of Bowdoin College*, 280

37. Hedrick, *A Life*, 82.

director of the Cincinnati History Society in the early 1960s, described the club's structure:

All those invited were requested to prepare a literary offering... Authors could unleash all restraint in developing their subject matter—and they frequently did. Authors were to remain anonymous. The offerings were brought to the meeting and surreptitiously given to the hostess of the evening. William Greene ... served as the official reader... With the group seated about him (women were permitted to knit) Greene thumbed through the selections and read those appearing to be intrinsically interesting and having literary distinction.³⁸

The club met on Monday evenings, most frequently in the parlor of Samuel Foote – the younger brother of Harriet Beecher's mother, Roxana. Uncle Samuel had offered to allow Harriet and Catharine to join the club as well; when the two sisters published a short geography textbook (1833's *Primary Geography for Children* – written entirely by Harriet but co-opted to some extent by Catharine) their position in the literary club became concrete.

Yet despite their literary background, the sisters were not exactly representative of the club's demographic at large: "men and women came as couples, either as husbands and wives or as a courting pair," Hedrick states, and indeed, Calvin Stowe, along with Foote, Hall, Drake, and many other members, all brought their wives along; yet "for the unattached there were opportunities for flirtation and more serious explorations of common interests," she notes.³⁹ Both Beecher girls were unmarried. Catharine, perhaps justifiably so: back in New England, about a decade before, she had been engaged to a young mathematics professor at Yale named Alexander Fisher – following his sudden death in a shipwreck in 1822, Catharine vowed to never love again. But in 1834, Harriet Beecher was twenty-three years old, and completely without any prospects. "Harriet's

38. Tucker, *The Semi-Colon Club of Cincinnati*.

39. Hedrick, *A Life*, 84.

eight years in a female seminary...had not particularly fitted her for the marriage market,” Hedrick remarks.⁴⁰ Harriet had briefly expressed interest in James Perkins, a twenty-four-year-old Cincinnati lawyer and fellow member of the Semi-Colon Club – yet he was soon engaged and subsequently married to another woman, Sarah Elliot.⁴¹ Forrest Wilson’s (at time dubious) 1941 biography *Crusader in Crinoline* hints at a romantic attraction between Harriet and Theodore Weld, an established abolitionist and a student at Lane, though this is little evidenced in any letters or other literature on either individual.⁴² Nonetheless, female company seemed to suit Harriet quite well for the time, and she soon became particularly close friends with Eliza Stowe.

Yet in the summer of 1834, the city of Cincinnati saw what was only one of many outbreaks of cholera. Harriet had returned to New England for the graduation of her younger brother, Henry Ward Beecher, from Amherst College. But before she returned, she received a letter from her step-mother telling her that Eliza Stowe had died.

“Next came the illness of our dear Mrs. Stowe,” Harriet Porter Beecher wrote. “Dr Drake was anxious for her case from the beginning...[Eliza said] she wished to talk no more about these things, she wished the 23d Psalm to be read & to be quiet.”⁴³

Eliza died in August of 1834, at the age of twenty-five. Her marriage to Calvin Stowe had lasted a little more than two years; she died childless. Harriet took on a

40. Hedrick, *A Life*, 89.

41. Hedrick, *A Life*, 92.

42. Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline*, 128. This theme is also expressed in the 2019 film *Sons & Daughters of Thunder*, based upon a play of the same name.

43. Harriet Porter Beecher, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 95.

primary role in comforting the widower; and “it was easy for sympathy to ripen into love,” Charles Stowe writes of his parents.⁴⁴

Less than a year after Eliza’s death, Calvin professed his love to Harriet; after an engagement, they were married in January of 1836.⁴⁵ Harriet was twenty-four at the time of her marriage to Calvin Stowe, who was then thirty-three years old. The morning of the wedding, Harriet started a letter to her school friend, Georgiana May:

About half an hour more and your old friend, companion, schoolmate, sister, etc., will cease to be Hatty Beecher and change to nobody knows who... I have been dreading and dreading the time, lying awake all last week wondering how I should live through this overwhelming crisis, and lo! it has come and I feel nothing at all.⁴⁶

Harriet’s experience in womanhood had been somewhat unconventional thus far into her life. Her education was extraordinary, at times nudging into the masculine sphere. As a young woman, Harriet did not live with her parents, but with her sister, Catharine. After her graduation from the Hartford Female Seminary, Harriet had begun teaching there alongside Catharine – remaining in Hartford for the school even after her father left for Boston. In fact, Harriet had come to Cincinnati with the sole intention of assisting Catharine in her founding of a new school for girls – the Western Female Institute.

For Catharine, an accepted spinster, perhaps the permanent choice of schoolmarm was not out of the ordinary. But the young Harriet was still an eligible bachelorette. “Harriet was in a position that anticipated that of a later generation of college-educated young women who chose to follow a career rather than marry,” Hedrick writes, noting Lyman Beecher’s comment that teaching “opened the greatest

44. Charles Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 76.

45. Hedrick, *A Life*, 97.

46. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 99.

sphere of usefulness” for Harriet.⁴⁷ Harriet was also a semi-regular writer for Semi-Colon James Hall’s publication, *the Western Monthly Magazine*; during the two years before her wedding, she had submitted about a dozen sketches and short stories.⁴⁸

Throughout the 19th century, it was somewhat commonplace for young women to fear their wedding day – a moment that marked not only their separation from their families, but a formal end to the life they had lived before.⁴⁹ For Harriet, this change was perhaps even more drastic. Her whole life had not been in preparation for marriage – it is little surprise that Harriet Beecher expressed such hesitancy and uncertainty about what was to come. Harriet and Calvin were married somewhere on the campus of Lane Theological Seminary – perhaps in the school’s primary church, or in the parlor of the seminary’s President’s House, the home of Harriet’s father.⁵⁰

A few months after their wedding, Calvin Stowe left for Europe, on a trip that would last the greater part of the year – “thus establishing what became the pattern in their relationship:” separation.⁵¹ In addition to being a professor at Lane, Calvin was also the seminary’s librarian; the Ohio legislature sent him abroad to study the Prussian public schooling system, and while he was there, he purchased books for the seminary’s library. Calvin was absent from June of 1836 until February 1837, missing not only the couple’s first wedding anniversary, but monumentally, in September 1836, the births of his first children – twin girls.

Harriet and Calvin had lived in a little cottage down the street from her father’s house following their marriage; upon Calvin’s leave, Harriet moved back in with her

47. Hedrick, *A Life*, 89.

48. *Harriet Beecher Stowe Bibliography*, from the Stowe Society.

49. Rothman, *Hand and Heart*, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 98.

50. McFarland, *The Loves of Harriet Beecher Stowe*; Hedrick, *A Life*. 23.

51. Hedrick, *A Life*, 99.

family. It was there, in an upstairs bedroom, that Harriet gave birth; in the neighboring room, Lyman Beecher's sister, called by the family Aunt Esther, lay dying from cholera. Dr. Daniel Drake – a Semi-Colon and the family's physician – attended them both.⁵²

“[Harriet's] production of twins was taken as confirmation of her eccentricity,” Hedrick writes.⁵³ Before he left for Europe, Calvin had instructed Harriet to name their child Eliza Tyler, after his first wife, if it was a girl; Harriet complied, naming the other Isabella, after her younger sister. When Calvin returned to the United States, first landing in New York, he received the news of Harriet's having twins; he compelled her to change Isabella's name to Harriet, and once again, Harriet complied. Her two daughters thus had the same names as Calvin's two wives: Eliza Tyler Stowe and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Harriet's family – those who knew her best – perhaps had not always seen her motherhood as a given. Joan Hedrick quotes a Beecher family circular letter that seems to evidence this. She notes that Catharine was worried that Harriet would not be able to raise both girls; yet nonetheless, Catharine states that “Harriet manages better than folk would expect who are wont to think a genius & a blue stocking cannot be good for anything else”⁵⁴ – perhaps giving a glimpse into Catharine's own expectations for her younger sister.

This period of child-rearing marked a joyful, though wearing time in Harriet's life. She wrote to a friend back in New England, “tho I scarcely slept a wink last night & tho I have had one of two babies in my arms all day—tho money is scarce & times hard

52. Hedrick, *A Life*, 111.

53. Hedrick, *A Life*, 111.

54. Hedrick, *A Life*, 112.

yet I never was happier on the whole than I am now.”⁵⁵ This continued for more than the next decade, as baby after baby came. Every time Harriet had a child, it seems she fell in love all over again. After the twins came a boy, Henry, in January of 1838; Isabella Beecher, Harriet’s sister, described him as the “best beloved.”⁵⁶ After that was Frederick in May of 1840, and then Georgiana in July of 1843 – “I seem to love her more than any child I ever had,” Harriet wrote.⁵⁷ Though this trend continued (and culminated) with Samuel Charles, Harriet’s constitution took a toll with each birth: Calvin wrote of Samuel Charles to Harriet, “You are so proud of your baby, one would think you never saw a baby before. Well, you had trouble enough with the infancy of the others—I am right glad you can take comfort with this one.”⁵⁸

Harriet had been rather reliant on nurses and domestic help while her children were young; during the periods in which she was rather ill, this was only emphasized. “Harriet Beecher had grown up with household servants and simply assumed that one could not get along without them,” writes Hedrick, noting that in the family’s poorest time, up to 20% of Calvin’s salary went to paying domestic servants.⁵⁹ She was particularly close with a servant named Anna, a nineteen year old English émigrée. Harriet often spent time away from home, leaving her children behind; in one letter, Anna comforts her, saying that she was mothering them well in Harriet’s absence – “so well that one wonders who, indeed, was the vicarious mother, servant Anna or mother Harriet?” Hedrick writes.⁶⁰

55. Hedrick, *A Life*, 112.

56. Isabella Beecher Hooker, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 254.

57. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 155.

58. Calvin Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 188.

59. Hedrick, *A Life*, 115.

60. Hedrick, *A Life*, 130.

Harriet had spent a considerable amount of time away from many or all her children in the 1840s, often traveling with Calvin or visiting family back in New England. In one particularly long instance, Harriet left Cincinnati for Brattleboro, Vermont, trying to regain her health through the water cure. Anna was placed in charge of Georgiana and Hatty, and Henry went with Calvin; Fred and Eliza were left with family friends. The children did not see their mother from May 1846 until March 1847; Calvin had visited her once.

Samuel Charles was born a healthy baby, ten months after Harriet's return from Vermont. After the birth of their son, Harriet encouraged Calvin to try the water cure as well; while he was gone, Cincinnati experienced one of many cholera epidemics to which the city was prone during the summer months. First it claimed the family dog, Daisy; next was Samuel Charles Stowe, on July 24th, 1849.

"The anger that she could not direct to a Calvinist God she heaped upon the patriarchal institution of slavery," Hedrick writes.⁶¹ Though Harriet had been exposed to slavery and the cause towards its abolition since she had moved to Cincinnati in 1832, the death of her son added another dimension to her anti-slavery position and fueled her writing of the novel just two years later. "It was at *his* dying bed, and at *his* grave that I learnt what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn away from her," she wrote.⁶² Throughout her novels, Harriet appeals to the mothers reading her story – at times addressing them directly.⁶³ This idea of motherhood, particularly maternal loss, is present in many of Harriet's works, as in Mrs. Marvyn in *The Minister's Wooing* or Prue in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

61. Hedrick, *A Life*, 201.

62. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 193.

63. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 316.

The memory of Samuel Charles Stowe lived long after his death; perhaps, the longest of any of Stowe's children. Harriet would later write, "I had two little, curly-headed twin daughters to begin with, and my stock in this line has gradually increased till I have been the mother of seven children, the most beautiful and the most loved of whom lies buried near my Cincinnati residence."⁶⁴

The birth of Charles Edward Stowe *from 1850*

In 1850, Calvin Stowe was offered a position at Bowdoin College – yet found himself tied between Lane and Andover Theological Seminary as well. Harriet left Ohio for Maine in April of that year, both traveling and settling there without her husband. Calvin taught variously between the three institutions for the next several semesters, though Harriet urged him to stay with her in Brunswick.⁶⁵

It was there in Brunswick that Harriet gave birth to her last baby, Charles, on July eighth, 1850 – her only child born outside of Cincinnati. Charles and Harriet had both been their mother's seventh child, called the same name as a deceased sibling. Though the heavy involvement of nurses in her children's infancy did continue with this child, the lovingly maternal sentiments, expressed in letters to her friends, did not. In one, she wrote: "I often think of what you said to me, that another child would not fill the place of the old one...for tho he is so like I do not feel him the same nor do I feel for him that same love which I felt for [Samuel] Charley—It is a different kind—I shall never love another as I did him."⁶⁶

64. Charles Edward Stowe, *Story of Her Life*, 100.

65. Hedrick, *A Life*, 207.

66. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 199.

Harriet was a fundamentally different mother to Charles than she was to her previous children. From birth, Charles Edward Stowe had a burden: he never received the same affection and he was in constant comparison. His infantile shortcomings detracted as much as his strengths – “Every line of his face in its likeness warns me not to love him too well,” Harriet wrote.⁶⁷

At first he was too thin, then too fat; his first winter, he fell ill – “When I did sleep, it was to dream that he was dying of the croup,” wrote Harriet to her sisters.⁶⁸ Harriet far from “took comfort” with this Charley as she had the previous one.

Her grief and homesickness tangled into one – she missed her home half a country away and the baby she left there. It “marked an epoch in her consciousness,” Hedrick writes, and set the scene for Harriet’s writing of her first novel – *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁶⁹

Indeed, all of the energy that Harriet could devote to writing, she did – “I could not leave it any more than I could have left a dying child” Harriet later wrote.⁷⁰ The first installment of the story was published in *The National Era* in spring 1851; the last came in spring 1852. In *Random Recollections*, Charles repeats a story taking place during this time that he admits he was too young to remember himself:

An insane woman caused great excitement in my immediate family and in all Brunswick by scooping me up in her arms and running off into the pine woods with me and keeping me a day and a night before I was returned to my all-but-distracted parents by a party of searchers who found that she had done no harm.⁷¹

67. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 200.

68. Hedrick, *A Life*, 200.

69. Hedrick, *A Life*, 201.

70. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, 161.

71. Charles Edward Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 16

This story, perhaps understandably, does not appear in either published biography of his mother; regardless, it emphasizes – perhaps caricatures – the notion that his mother was at that time completely absorbed in her work.

In February of 1852 Harriet moved from Maine to Massachusetts to complete the final few chapters of her novel – joining Calvin but leaving her six children behind, under the care of her sister Catharine.⁷²

Throughout his writings, both published and unpublished, Charles Stowe constantly points to the fame and significance of his mother's novel. But had he really any true frame of reference? Charles was the only one of Harriet's children who knew only a post-Uncle Tom world. He was a little more than a year and a half old when the novel was published; the next youngest Stowe child, Georgiana, was almost nine. His age meant that he spent more time away from his mother during this period as well. Harriet made three trips to Europe in the 1850s, at some point taking all the children along except Charles. The first she undertook in 1853; Charles writes that he was left under the care of a hired housekeeper Miss Brackett during this time, who he describes as “a strange combination of gloom, Calvinism, and vinegar”⁷³ – though perhaps he confuses this first European journey with a later one, made in 1856 and lasting about a year, or that in 1859, both of which he would have been old enough to properly remember. Though Calvin went along on these transatlantic voyages, he often came home early to attend to other matters – and to take care of Charles.

Charles was ill in the summer of 1857, just as his mother had returned from Europe. She had planned to take him up to New Hampshire to visit his brother Henry,

72. Hedrick, *A Life*, 221

73. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 20.

then a student at Dartmouth, but his sickness prevented it, Harriet wrote.⁷⁴ Harriet was visiting friends with her brother when the hostess presented her with a telegram.

Harriet guessed... that something was wrong. 'Is it my husband'?... 'is it Charley' ... Finding the suspense "worse than anything," Harriet reeled off the names of each of her children, reaching Henry last. "Drowned."⁷⁵

While Charles writes extensively about this brother's death in *Compiled From Her Letters and Journals*, he barely mentions it – or much else about his brother Henry – in *Random Recollections*. Harriet's "flock" of seven was now reduced to five; Charles states that it was his first encounter with death, at age seven, and it seems that his memories of his brother were few. He had lost a brother seemingly he barely knew.

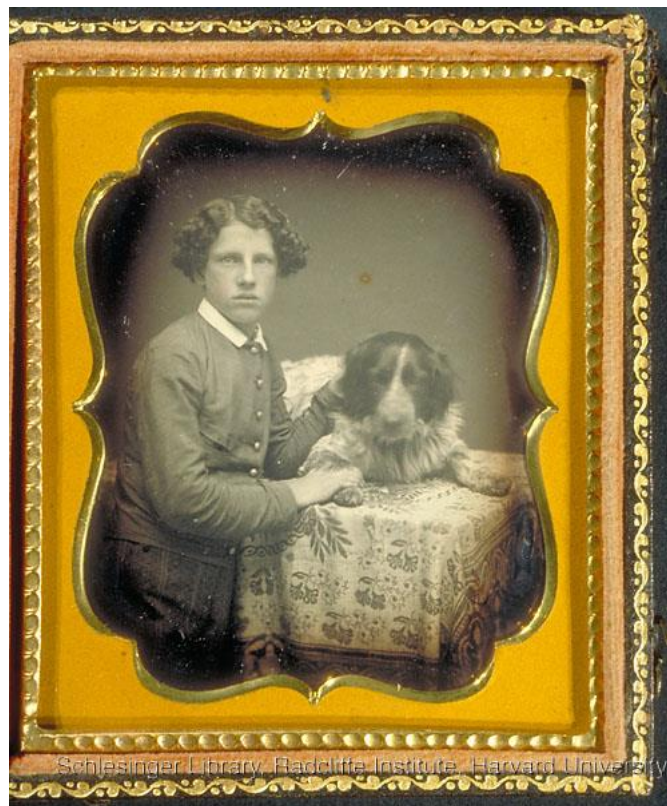


Figure 4. Photograph of Henry Stowe.

Daguerreotype of Henry Ellis Stowe with a pet setter dog, 1855. (Beecher-Stowe family papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute)

74. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, 316.

75. Hedrick, *A Life*, 274.

The Youth of “Our Charley” from 1858

One work of Harriet’s that has received almost no attention is a collection of short stories published in 1858 titled *Our Charley: And What to Do with Him* – “presenting me in the light of a perplexing problem,” Charles writes, though getting the name of the book wrong.⁷⁶ “The stories following are some of those with which one mother has beguiled the twilight hours of one Charley; they are given in hopes of other mothers may find pleasure in reading them to their Charleys,” writes Harriet in the collection’s introduction.⁷⁷ She takes her Charley as archetypical of a young reckless boy, and encourages her readers to instill virtues in their sons, yet not to break their spirits – stating it is better to be disturbed by a young child playing than by an undisciplined adult son.

The introduction does not make her Charley to be a creature completely beyond saving; rather, he is an unruly but playful child. Yet one wonders why this child out of Harriet’s seven prompted such a reflection on child-rearing; perhaps Hedrick lends some insight: “Even more than the other children, Charley had been petted and indulged to the point that Calvin admitted he could do nothing with him,” she writes. “When he was eleven years old his parents sent him to a boarding school in Washington, Connecticut.”⁷⁸

Charles had previously attended a boarding school nearby to Brunswick, in Topsham, Maine, run by a Mr. Johnston, starting around 1861. Charles appears to have left the school that same year; both Hedrick and Charles himself write that then he had very briefly spent time at Phillips Andover Academy, which Harriet felt was a bad

76. Charles Edward Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 48.

77. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Our Charley*, 26.

78. Hedrick, *A Life*, 308.



Figure 5. Frontispiece of *Our Charley: And What to Do with Him*, 1858.

influence on her son. Her brother Henry had recommended Mr. Gunn to her; Charles writes of the school's reputation as "a tamer of wild asses' colts."⁷⁹ It appears that Charles began there in the fall of 1862.

The boarding school period was a rather prolific one in the life of Charles Stowe, the letter writer – or, at least the surviving letters make it seem that way. Charles wrote to his parents, usually his father, slightly more frequently than every week. He often requests that his parents send him something – usually money, sometimes a magazine subscription or a gun – and frequently updates his parents on his shooting skills.

Many of his letters are rather unhappy. Often he writes that he is very sad, or that he is in trouble, or that the scores on his hands make it too painful to write a long letter – perhaps an implication that he had been the recipient of corporal discipline across the palms. Indeed, both Hedrick and Charles describe the strange punishments that boys at Mr. Gunn's school. At times, it seemed to work. Wrote Charles to Calvin: "You know how I have a habbit of deceiving you or any person who had the care of me, Mr Gunn is trying every meanes to make me frank and truthful and am also trying my dear father."⁸⁰

Hedrick notes the young Charles's particular tendency to lie; she then states, "After 18 months under Mr. Gunn's strict regimen, Charley ran away. He made his way to Bridgeport and signed up to be a sailor. The letter of farewell he sent his parents reached them, with the name of the ship, before the date of sailing, and his parents retrieved him before he embarked."⁸¹ Although they curtailed this particular voyage,

79. Charles Edward Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 98

80. Charles Stowe to Calvin Stowe, November 1862, , Beecher-Stowe family papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute.

81. Hedrick, *A Life*, 309.

Charles was able to win over his parents somehow; only several months later did they send him off on another ship – this time, one they approved of. Charles writes that it was a vessel owned by an old married couple, who tutored him and another boy while they went on their travels.

“Our Charley came home all right for Thanksgiving, stocky and manly, with the same boy’s face, but with hands so spread with hard work that they look twice too big for him... On the whole, he was glad to see home again, and I can not see that the radical passion for the sea has much abated; only he wants to study and rise in his “profession,” as he calls it. Unfortunate is the hen who hatches a duck, but she must make the best of it,” wrote Harriet.⁸²

Hedrick describes the relationship between Harriet and Calvin as one marked by separation; her relationship with her son, particularly during his childhood years, is seemingly marked the same way. Harriet made three, significant transatlantic voyages in the 1850s, each lasting up to a year; Charles asserts that he was about nine years old when he was first sent away to boarding school, which was then followed by years away from his family at sea.

Indeed, Harriet had been away from all of her children at various points, as she undertook trips across the country, sent them off to boarding school, or spent time away from them so she could write. Yet for no child did she spend more time apart than with Charles.

82. Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline*, 505.



Figure 6. Photograph of Charles Stowe, circa 1860

Portrait of Charles Stowe, circa 1860, Silsbee, Case & Co, Boston, Mass. (Beecher-Stowe family papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute)

Return from sea, from 1868

“It was on a big Bath clipper ship, on the voyage from Liverpool to Philadelphia, that I met with an experience that changed my whole life-aim, and led me to try the doubtful experiment of spoiling a good sailor to make a poor parson,” Charles Stowe wrote in 1915.⁸³ It was the fortieth anniversary of his graduation from Harvard, and like many other members of his class, Charles gave a brief summary of his life in that year’s *Secretary’s Report*.

It was 1868 and Charles was eighteen years old during this converting voyage of his. It would be his final trip at sea as a sailor: he had written to his parents that he had become “profoundly religious” and that he wished to return to the United States to study in order to enter the ministry. Charles had been away a long time; between 1864 and 1868, he had missed the end of the Civil War, his sister Georgiana’s wedding, and a half dozen publications of his mother’s work.

Charles had long been apathetic, or even resistant, to religion; when they received his letter, his mother, who had devotedly committed herself to Christ at age eleven, and his father, a professor of Biblical studies, felt that their prayers had finally been answered.

Charles refers to this life-changing experience rather vaguely in documents with a public intended viewership; it is in his *Random Recollections* that he reveals what exactly happened on that voyage: Two criminals-turned-evangelists had joined the ship’s crew for a four-month journey, opting to spread the gospel as an alternative to facing the death penalty, he states. Charles wrote that they “made a most profound

83. Harvard College Class of 1875, *Secretary’s Report, Fortieth Anniversary*

impression” on him and the rest of the crew; soon everyone on board was engaging in daily Bible study. A self-proclaimed “good speaker,” Charles began to lead many of these prayer meetings – and he “secretly glorified in the observed effects of my eloquence,” he wrote.⁸⁴ Indeed, it was not some miraculous occurrence nor particularly persuasive oration that formed this experience that changed his whole life-aim, as he describes in the *Secretary’s Report* – rather, it was the attention he received while preaching that convinced him to join the ministry. In *Random Recollections*, Charles mentions this outright, stating he had then been “a silly, frivolous and vain-glorious affair” and that his actual conversion came only several years after he had already joined the ministry.⁸⁵ He states that the evangelists “began to tire us a little” long before the voyage was over, and that he soon reverted back to his dislike of religion.⁸⁶ “I learned to look on religion as a dread disease or insanity that had afflicted mankind in all ages and countries,” he wrote. “It was a mystery to me what men wanted gods for anyway for I hated them and had no use for them. Hideous nasty things they were to me.”⁸⁷

And yet the letters expressing his already-passed religiosity had already been sent. He describes that Harriet and Calvin wrote back to him expressing their elation – soon he would become a preacher just like his father, his grandfather, and all of his uncles. They had set their plans: he was to join his parents at their new home in Florida, studying under his father for a year or so before enrolling in college. Charles received this letter with “shock,” he wrote.⁸⁸

84. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 135

85. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 136.

86. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 138.

87. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 153.

88. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 153.

Soon Charles's days as a sailor came to a close; he returned to the United States, and telegraphed his family that he had landed in Philadelphia and was set to board a ship to Jacksonville – hoping all the while that he would somehow be able avoid the ministry by working on a plantation in Florida instead.

The ship Charles boarded, the *Lenora*, was not only a passenger vessel; she was carrying refined oil and bales of hay as well. Perhaps not surprisingly, given her cargo, the ship caught fire in the waters outside the Florida coast. The fire was extinguished, but the ship was left without a mast or rudder; soon the *Lenora* crashed outside Fernandina Beach, Charles writes.⁸⁹ He swam to shore – sans jacket, hat, and shoes – and promptly boarded another ship for Mandarin.

When he arrived at his parents' house, his sister Hatty was the first to see him – and fainted from shock, he writes. Harriet and Calvin, who were next, burst into tears. They had read in a newspaper that his ship had crashed and thought him dead. And could their happiness have been any greater? The Stowes were still under the impression that their Charley had become a man of God as well. Here he was, returned to them, saved in more than one way, they thought.

It is here that Charles ends his *Random Recollections* rather abruptly, covering nearly the first two decades of his life in a little more than 160 pages. There is no conclusion, finishing remark, nor closing reflection: the resolution of his final anecdote serves as the resolution of the total work. Perhaps the work in this form is incomplete, or perhaps it was never finished.

89. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 160.

Yet Charles's return from sea serves as appropriate an ending place as any – it was a turning point in his life, the end of his adolescence as much as the end of his autobiography. Already he had spent more time away from his parents than any of his siblings had, and over the next years, he would reach a level of independence that no Stowe child ever had. At first gradually, and then quite abruptly, it was this period in Charles's life that his role in the family began to change as well. With his shipwreck, Calvin and Harriet had mistakenly thought that they had lost a third son – and less than two years later, they did. Yet it was not their youngest son, but their oldest who left them in 1870. And so Charles Stowe became the only son of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Frederick William Stowe had not been the same since the Civil War, Charles wrote; the lifelong alcohol dependence that Fred suffered from only worsened after his injury at Gettysburg. Harriet euphemistically wrote of his addiction as Fred's "tobacco" problem in letters to friends and family and tried everything she could to cure him of it. During one of the family's trips to Europe (again, undertaken without Charles) Harriet had brought Fred's friend Samuel Scoville along, sending the two on a hiking tour while the rest of the family stayed in metropolitan centers. Sam, who was then Fred's friend and later became his cousin-in-law as well, was to be Harriet's mole – observing Fred's abstinence from alcohol and any improvements in mood secretly, sending reports back to Harriet without her son's knowledge.

Fred was able to sober up for short bouts of time, variously deciding to commit himself to Christ or make his family proud. Yet his relapses were frequent and only worsened after the Civil War. Hedrick laments "poor Fred, upon whom his mother's fame sat heavily;"⁹⁰ in his second biography, Charles characterizes his brother as

90. Hedrick, *A Life*, 140.

extremely concerned with honor and the family name – perhaps a burden that only worsened his drinking.



Figure 7. Photograph of Frederick Stowe

The Sto *Portrait of Frederick Stowe in Union Uniform, 1863. (Beecher-Stowe family papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute)* rehabilitation

for Fred – Harriet saw work on a cotton plantation as a way to keep her son’s mind off of alcohol. And for a time, it worked. First, Fred had been sent down South alone, with

only occasional visits from his family members. Harriet wrote during one that he seemed as happy and as lively as she had ever seen him. But the plantation became an utter failure – and the \$10,000 that Harriet had invested in it was lost. She had fallen in love with the lush landscape of the state, and the family built a winter home there in 1867; but for Fred, Florida had been a disaster.

Around this time, Fred had been engaged to a young woman named May Osborne. The two never married – what exactly became of the engagement, or its relation to his emotional state during this period, is unclear.

Charles, meanwhile, was away from his family once again – not only from Fred down in Florida, but from his parents and sisters in New England, as well. Charles notes in his *Random Recollections* his parents' plan for him as he returned from sea: a year studying with his father before enrolling in college. Perhaps he did; yet Charles is rather unreliable when it comes to dating. By his own account, he variously gives the years for his return from sea as 1865-1869, though 1868 is the most certain. Upon his return to the United States, Charles spent some time at Edward's Place School; the years during which are a bit difficult to ascertain, but it appears that he would have studied at the school around the year 1869 or 1870.

Many sources, including among them Forrest Wilson's *Crusader in Crinoline* and even Charles himself at times, state that Charles immediately enrolled at Harvard University upon his return.⁹¹ However, after his time at Edward's Place, Charles actually began his higher education at Bowdoin College – the alma mater and previous

91. Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline*, 505.

employer of his father, and the campus on which Charles had been born twenty years before.

Charles appears only in the fall 1870 student catalog; while he is mentioned as a member of the boating club in the spring 1871 student newspaper *the Orient* (rather fittingly for the former sailor), he is not in that term's catalog, nor in any after that – indicating that he did not complete the spring '71 semester. His exact reason for withdrawing from Bowdoin is rather unclear. However, this period was a tumultuous one for the Beecher-Stowe family – perhaps there is some connection.

It was late in the year of 1870 that the Beecher-Tilton scandal began to break; Harriet's brother, the famous preacher Henry Ward Beecher was accused of having an affair with the wife Elizabeth of one of his close friends, Theodore Tilton. Charles was very fond of his uncle Henry, and the accusation affected him deeply, he wrote to his mother.

It was in 1871 that the Stowes heard from Fred for the last time, as well. In another attempt to encourage sobriety, Fred had boarded a ship bound for California. After a long journey around the bottom of South America, he landed in San Francisco, and was never heard from again. Charles surmised that his brother had likely taken his own life; Joan Hedrick suspects that perhaps he had been taken advantage of while intoxicated.⁹² Fred had written to his mother shortly before his disappearance, "Did I only think of my own comfort I would kill myself and end it all, but I know that you and all the family would feel the disgrace such an end would bring upon you."⁹³ Harriet was never convinced that he had truly died. Frederick William Stowe has no memorial or

92. Hedrick, *A Life*, 383.

93. Frederick Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 382.

gravestone – even decades after his disappearance, Harriet would approach strangers in public, thinking that they were her son. She had sent investigators across the country to search for him, even attempting to contact him through spiritual means via a medium. Nonetheless, Harriet wrote to Charley, “I give you to Christ as all I have left—my only son.”⁹⁴ Charles’s reaction to his brother’s disappearance is rather uncertain, as is his reason for leaving Bowdoin. Perhaps the two are related, perhaps not.

After Charles’s brief break from schooling, he reenrolled in the fall of 1871, starting at Harvard University – the school that Fred had dropped out of nearly ten years before. Charles graduated in 1875 with a degree in theology; he spent the next three years abroad, studying divinity in the newly-unified Germany at both Heidelberg University and later Bonn University. His father was fluent in German, and Charles appears to have learned it as a young boy as well, recounting anecdotes in which he employed the language as a teenager at sea in *Random Recollections*. This period of Charles’s life – the end of his schooling into the beginning of his practice as a minister – is one that receives some attention from Harriet’s biographers, likely due to the large amount of letters that she sent to him during this time.

94. Harriet Beecher Stowe, via Hedrick, *A Life*, 391.



Figure 8. Photograph of Charles Stowe, circa 1877

Carte de visite of Charles Stowe, right, and an unidentified young man, circa 1877. Photographer Emil Koch, Bonn, Germany. "To Hattie & Eliza, from C." written on reverse. (Harriet Beecher Stowe Center)

One author reports that it was in Germany that Charles began to have issues with his religion; Charles writes in *Random Recollections*, as previously mentioned, that he did not truly become a convert until he had already been in the ministry for several years – meaning around the year 1880. Charles had returned to the United States in late 1878 or the beginning of 1879, and for several months, he worked as a missionary in Presque Isle, Maine. In May 1879, he married Susan Munroe. The couple had likely met while Charles was a student at Harvard: Susan’s family lived nearby the school in Cambridge.

At some point, the Munroe family had risen to some level of prominence – a fact evidenced by the family tree in figure 9. Susan’s older brother Kirk was a well-known conservationist and novelist, and had married the daughter Mary of British writer Amelia Edith Huddleston Barr; Susy’s younger brother Frederick married the daughter Elizabeth of famous *Republican* editor and publisher, Samuel Bowles; and her younger sister Charlotte married Herbert Putnam, later the longest-serving Librarian of Congress and the brother of Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi. Susan fit into the pattern quite well herself, marrying the only son of the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Indeed, many of the Munroe children came to the societal limelight in some capacity – interestingly, doing so seemingly independently from one another and from their parents.

Susy’s parents, Charles and Susan Munroe, were two Massachusetts missionaries; they had moved out west, initially to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, shortly before their first son Kirk was born in 1850 – “in a log cabin,” Kirk would later write.⁹⁵

95. “Kirk Munroe’s Death Removes Miami Pioneer,” *The Miami News*, June 17, 1930.

The family then relocated to Appleton, Wisconsin, where Susy was born in 1853. They moved back to Massachusetts when she was only a few years old.

Almost immediately after Susy and Charles Stowe were married – with both sets of parents in attendance – they relocated to Saco, Maine, where Charles accepted a position as minister, to the great joy of his mother. However, things were not so joyful for Charles: “The parish had a rear guard of old-style Calvinists,” Hedrick writes, and they appeared to give Charles a bit of trouble.⁹⁶ Harriet sent him a flurry of letters – and money – advising him on theological matters and almost bribing him to stay at his post.

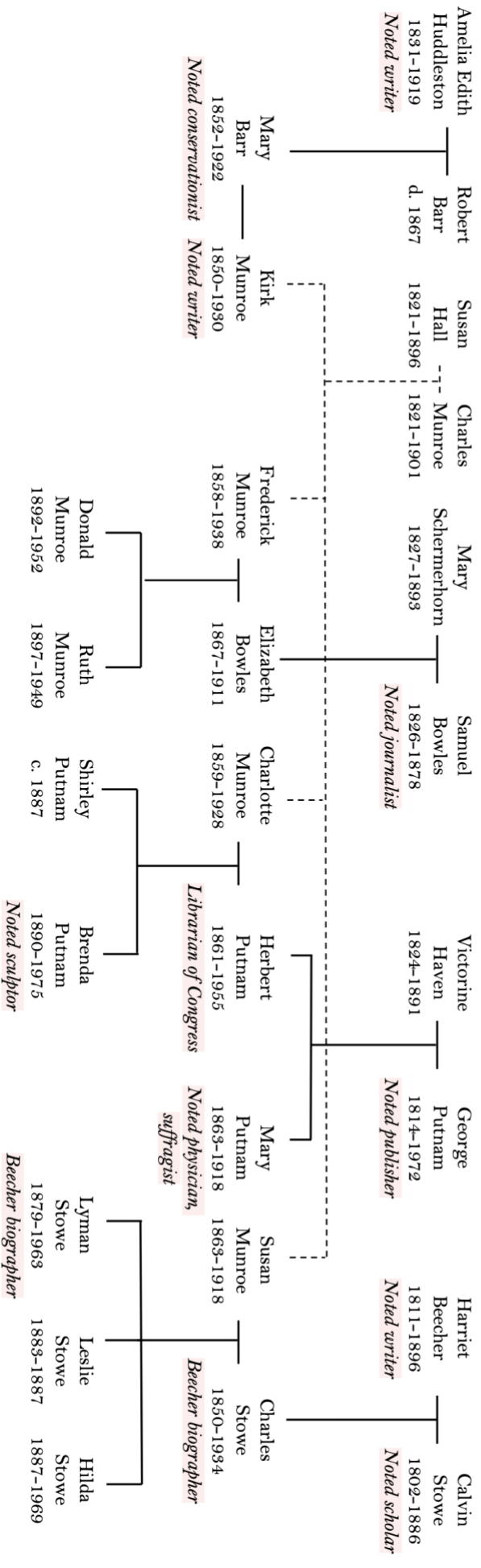
Charles and Susan had their first child in December of 1880, and Harriet came to visit the new baby – a son, named Lyman Beecher Stowe. And yet the stay in Saco did not last long; Hedrick describes it as “a very contentious ministry,”⁹⁷ and in 1883, Charles, Susy, and Lyman moved from Maine to Hartford, Connecticut – not far away from Harriet Beecher Stowe. A few months later, Charles and Susy had daughter named Leslie Munroe Stowe.

Thus far into his life, Charles had long been at some great distance from his mother; his move to Connecticut marked the period during which his proximity to Harriet was the closest, and the greatest in length, perhaps it had ever been. “He looked in on his parents every day, oversaw the winterizing of their home, and brought his children to visit with their grandparents and aunts Eliza and Hatty,” Hedrick describes.⁹⁸ Charles had accepted a position at Windsor Avenue Congregational Church at Hartford, just two miles away from Harriet’s Nook Farm home.

96. Hedrick, *A Life*, 390.

97. Hedrick, *A Life*, 391.

98. Hedrick, *A Life*, 392.



Munroe family tree (*abbreviated*)

Women are shown with their names at birth; names are occasionally abbreviated or extended for clarity. The immediate Munroe family is shown in dashed lines.



Figure 10. Photograph of the Storve family, circa 1884

Photograph of Susan, Charles, and their two children, Lyman (left) and Leslie, circa 1884. Kellogg's Photography, Hartford, Connecticut. (Harriet Beecher Storve Center).

The Biographer *from 1886*

Charles's move to Hartford had meant that he was nearby during the last years of his father's life; after a prolonged illness, Calvin Stowe died in 1886 at age 84. In the next few years, Harriet lost her brothers William and Henry; soon her son Charles would become the only immediate male family member she had left.

Harriet and Calvin had not visited their Florida home in quite some time, given Calvin's sickness. Yet soon Charles began to winter there, just as his parents in sisters had in the years before – though staying close to Miami instead of up by Jacksonville like his family. Olav Thulesius writes that it was in the winter of 1886-1887 that Charles and his family passed their first winter in Coconut Grove,⁹⁹ though Susan would have been heavily pregnant at that time, giving birth to their second daughter Hilda in Hartford that January. Only two months after Hilda was born, however, oldest daughter Leslie passed away. Her obituary states that she died in Cambridge, perhaps while staying with Susy's parents, who lived there still. A notice was posted in the newspaper that the granddaughter of Harriet Beecher Stowe had died; letters of sympathy poured in, many of which still survive.¹⁰⁰

It was in the wake of Leslie's death that Charles wrote the life-story of his mother – one that was tinged with the premature deaths of her mother, brother, and by that time, three of her children. Charles spends page upon page documenting the loss of Samuel Charles in his toddlerhood; his own daughter Leslie had just turned four.

Around 1887, Harriet had become aware that the writer Florine McCray was in the process of creating a full-length biography of her life; while Harriet had previously

99. Thulesius, *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Florida*.

100. See Beecher-Stowe family papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute.

given Florine permission to write a short sketch, she denounced the fuller work. Harriet published an announcement: “Permit me to say, that all reports with regard to any authorised edition of my life, are without foundation. I have placed all the letters & documents for this purpose in the hands of my *son* & neither he nor I have authorised any one to circulate such reports as have appeared of late in various papers.”¹⁰¹

McCray’s work has been almost completely ignored – mentioned only by Harriet’s later biographers to set the scene for the 1889 publication of Charles’s *the Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Compiled from Her Letters and Journals by Her Son, Charles Edward Stowe*.

It seems that Charles wrote a substantial part of the work while in Florida; “I desire to express my indebtedness to Mr. Kirk Munroe, who has been my co-laborer in the work of compilation,” he writes in the biography’s introduction.¹⁰² Kirk had moved to Coconut Grove, Florida, after first visiting Harriet’s winter home in Mandarin during a trip with Charles and Susy; he was a noted conservationist and wrote many stories for boys set in Florida. Certainly the process of creating this biography was a long one; it demanded not only searching through decades upon decades of family letters, but eliciting new ones from friends and relatives where there were gaps in the narrative.

Harriet’s later biographers do not tend to mention the impact that Charles’s biography of his mother had; its legacy in these later biographies, however, is significant, and forms the focus of the second portion of this work. Seemingly, it was

101. Hedrick, *A Life*, 11.

102. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, introductory statement.

Charles's first publication, yet in the Secretary's Report from 1891, he writes that he "has done other literary work" as well.¹⁰³

The end of the 1880s and the start of the 1890s were a time of change for Charles and his family; shortly after his biography was published, his sister Georgiana passed away at age 46, leaving behind a son, Freeman, and her husband Henry Allen. Harriet, now a widow, had only three of her seven children left: Charles, Hatty, and Eliza.

In 1891, Charles and his family relocated to Simsbury, Connecticut, ten miles or so away from Hartford. Charles had left his position at Windsor Avenue Congregational Church for one at First Congregational Church. What exactly occupied Charles's time for the next few years is not quite certain. He and his wife Susy had two children to raise, and he had a parish to take care of. Both his mother and his mother-in-law Susan were in decline in the early 1890s, family letters indicate – neither woman had much time left.

Harriet Beecher Stowe died on July 1st, 1896, at age 85, with her three remaining children by her side. She was buried alongside Henry Ellis and Calvin in Andover.

After Harriet *from 1896*

Charles Edward Stowe was the executor of his mother's will, and so frequently onto him falls the blame for the loss of Harriet's homes in Connecticut and Florida. Olav Thulesius in *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Florida* writes that Charles Stowe "was not fond of

103. Harvard College Class of 1875, *Secretary's Report, Fortieth Anniversary*.

the Florida enterprise of his parents and not attached to their Mandarin home” – offering this as his reason for not keeping the house for himself.¹⁰⁴ In fact, Charles writes in his *Random Recollections* that his time in Florida after his return from sea was the happiest period of his life. The Stowes had not been to their Southern home for more than twelve years before Harriet’s death; the trip had become too difficult for Calvin in his final years, and Harriet never traveled there alone. Charles visited the house after his mother passed and found it completely decayed – he approved its demolition and offered the neighbors the pieces for free.

Before and after her rise to international fame, Harriet Beecher Stowe had had money troubles: throughout her life she had budgeted poorly, been swindled, made bad investments and spent frivolously. Harriet had left a trust to her daughters Hatty and Eliza, but it allotted for no more than \$75 per month.¹⁰⁵ Isabella Beecher Hooker, Harriet’s sister, had published a plea seeking donations to help the twins maintain the home; the women were humiliated.

In 1898, Charles officially authorized the sale of the Connecticut home. His sisters Hatty and Eliza – fourteen years older than he, and both unmarried – had moved in with his family in Simsbury.

Approximately a year after his mother died, Charles Stowe was approached by two men from his church; they were representatives of a small committee that had formed within the parish. On behalf of the committee, the two men requested his resignation as pastor. “They individually and collectively bewailed and lamented the short-comings and indiscretions of their pastor, as God knows he knows himself!”

104. Thulesius, *Harriet Beecher Stowe in Florida*.

105. Hedrick, *A Life*, 398.

Charles wrote.¹⁰⁶ He was forty-six years old at the time of this meeting. He had been a preacher for the last twenty years of his life – it was all he had ever known professionally. He accepted the men’s request and agreed to resign. His plan was to leave the church within a year, hoping to prevent the dramatic scene that his immediate departure would cause. “I wish with God’s help to try to undo the mischief which I feel that I have done by my carelessness, and a certain unbecoming levity of speech and manner unbecoming a minister... I have carried a theory too far and that theory is that a minister is a man and can allow himself just what any other man can,” Charles wrote in the same letter quoted above. He writes in the Secretary’s Report that in 1899, “on account of serious illness of a member of the family, resigned his pastorate in Simsbury for a protracted stay abroad.”¹⁰⁷

He gives this trip as “an extensive tour of the western states and the West India Islands,” as well as “England, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland, besides touring extensively in other countries.”¹⁰⁸ The illness of which family member, if any, is not quite certain; nonetheless, upon the family’s return to the United States, they relocated from Connecticut to Massachusetts. It was there that Charles began his final pastoral position at Central Square Church in Bridgewater. He lasted just under six years there, retiring from the ministry at age 58 and moving to New York City.

It was around this time that Charles began work on another version of his mother’s biography. What prompted this second edition is not certain. One magazine article notes that the year of its publication – 1911 – would have been Harriet’s 100th birthday. Perhaps Charles, now no longer split between the ministry and his writing,

106 Charles Stowe to L.S. Ellsworth, August 25 1897.

107. Harvard College Class of 1875, *Secretary’s Report, Fortieth Anniversary*.

108. Harvard College Class of 1875, *Secretary’s Report, Fortieth Anniversary*.

felt he could give a biography his full attention. He undertook the project with his son Lyman, who was then in his late twenties, working as a publisher at Doubleday.

Also during this time did Charles's public life began to revolve almost completely around his mother. Over the last few decades of his life, he gave lectures about his mother, the Civil War, and Abraham Lincoln; he wrote in to newspapers interjecting or clarifying his mother's beliefs. Susy died in 1918, and allegedly on her deathbed wished for Charles to marry Elizabeth Holmes, who had been her close friend in the years before her death. Elizabeth hardly exists outside of their 1920 marriage announcement, which states that she had met the Stowes through church forty years before – and makes quite clear that Charles was the son of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Charles and Elizabeth relocated to California, marrying in Los Angeles before settling in Santa Barbara. Charles took up a job at the Santa Barbara Morning Press, working as an editor and contributing weekly columns. Here he identifies himself as a writer, and nothing else – eschewing the title of *Rev.* that had appeared his name on nearly every other published work.

Only four significant pieces of literature written by Charles Stowe remain. In addition to the two biographies, Charles wrote a brief work titled *Simsbury's Part in War of the American Revolution* the same year his mother died; in 1922, he published a collection of poems entitled *Rhymes from the Santa Barbara Hills*.

Charles lived out the rest of his life in Santa Barbara, with his daughter Hilda nearby – married, but childless – and his son Lyman across the country in New York, married and with two sons. He was Harriet's last surviving child – he lost his two sisters in 1907 and 1912.

Charles Stowe died in 1934, on the same day that his brother and namesake Samuel Charles had died eighty-five years before. The location of his gravestone – if he has one – is not known; somewhat fitting, and perhaps symbolic, for a man whose life story has long been unknown, and likewise unresearched.

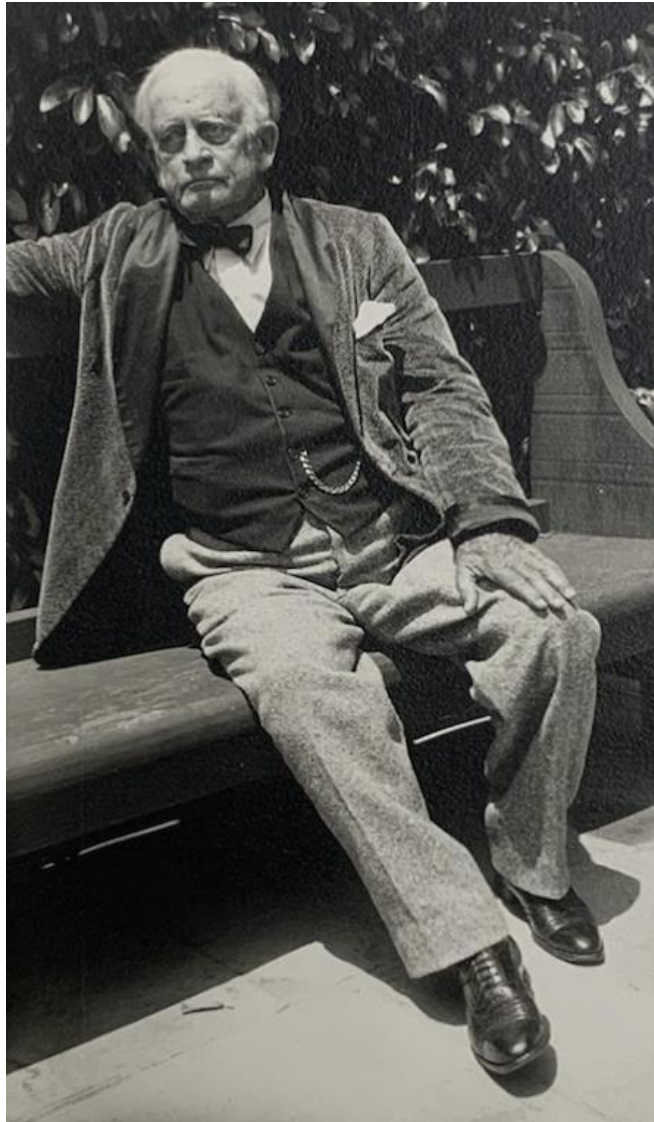


Figure 11. Photograph of Charles Stowe, circa 1925.

Photograph of Charles Stowe, taken by Lyman Stowe, Santa Barbara, Calif., circa 1925. (Harriet Beecher Stowe Center)

SECTION II
THE COMPILING FROM HER LETTERS AND JOURNALS,
BY HER SON CHARLES EDWARD STOWE

In writing a biography it is impossible for us to tell what did and what did not powerfully influence the character. It is safer simply to tell the unvarnished truth.¹⁰⁹

The Omnipresence of Charles Stowe

Charles's biography of his mother was the first of its kind, but not for long was it the only of its kind. The second authorized biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe ever published was released in 1897 – just one year after Harriet's death. Its writer Annie Fields was the wife of Harriet's publisher, James Fields, and was herself a close friend and correspondent of Harriet during the latter part of her life. Fields opens her biography thus:

The editor of this book wishes to express her thanks to the Rev. C. E. Stowe for the use of the *Life of Mrs. Stowe* written by him while his mother was still at his side. His sequence of material concerning her early days left little to be desired; but many letters and much new material have since appeared...¹¹⁰

It is a bit difficult to trace every biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe that has ever been written; many have long since been out of print and before then had received little circulation. It seems safe to say that at least one dozen works dedicated to creating a life portrait of Stowe – rather than those that include a biographical sketch alongside a literary analysis – have been published since Charles's first biography. One of the more

109. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, 101.

110. Fields, *Life and Letters*, Preface.

recent is Philip McFarland's book *Loves of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, published in 2007.

McFarland writes in his notes section:

The narrative derives details of Stowe's life from three sources principally: Charles Edward Stowe's *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, prepared by the novelist's son late in her lifetime and published 1889; Forrest Wilson's *Crusader in Crinoline* (1941); and Joan D. Hedrick's exemplary *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (1994).¹¹¹

In a manner quite similar to those included above, both Wilson and Hedrick also acknowledge their use of Charles Stowe's two biographies; Hedrick refers to her own work and Wilson's as the only attempts at a definitive biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe since Charles's *Story of Her Life*.¹¹² Indeed, no major biographical work of Harriet Beecher Stowe has been written that does not heavily cite (or rely on) one or both of Charles Stowe's biographies of his mother.

However, that is not to say that his works are at all sanctified; later historians are not afraid to differ from Charles's biographies or criticize his writing. Subsequent biographers silently gloss over his screeds on the Founding Fathers ("The signers of the Declaration of Independence and the statesmen and soldiers of the Revolution were no friends of negro slavery," Charles writes in *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*¹¹³) or refer to his tone as one "with an air of condescension;"¹¹⁴ Hedrick refers to him as "hagiographical."¹¹⁵

And yet, looking at the bibliographies and notes of these works, Charles's name is often everywhere. For the Harriet Beecher Stowe biographer, it certainly seems that Charles Stowe is unavoidable. Is it possible to write a biography of Harriet Beecher

111. McFarland, *Loves of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 293

112. Hedrick, *A Life*, 11.

113. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, 141.

114. Noel Gerson, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 163.

115. Hedrick, *A Life*, 11.

Stowe without relying on Charles's biographies? In a world after 1959, the answer seems (optimistically) to be yes. It was in that year that Lyman Stowe – Charles Stowe's son – donated nearly one thousand Beecher-Stowe family letters and papers to Radcliffe College, making them available to the public for the first time since they were written. Indeed, through a combined effort of Harriet's descendants and relatives, there exists a substantial amount of family papers in various archives and collections throughout the country – including those that Charles used to write his *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*.

In this way, Charles's work is largely replicable. And yet, no biographer has yet attempted to replicate his work; his writing is taken as a given, with perhaps a little acknowledgement of partiality or weakness of memory. Biographers are not shy to point out that he may be biased or dated – but they cite his works as though he were not, only shedding doubt on the most unsubstantiated of his claims.

Many biographies of Harriet were written with these hundreds of letters available to them – included among them are Johanna Johnston's *Runaway to Heaven* (1963), John R. Adams's *Harriet Beecher Stowe* (1963, updated 1989), Edward Wagenknecht's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Known and the Unknown* (1965), Noel Gerson's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Biography* (1976), and Joan Hedrick's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (1994). Through the middle of the 20th century, the Beecher-Stowe family and its close correspondents were the only ones with access to the unpublished writing of Harriet Beecher Stowe – it follows reasonably, then, that biographies written during this time had little choice but to cite earlier works like Charles's, which was one of the few sources for such material. But biographers continued to do the exact same even after Lyman Stowe made hundreds of Beecher-Stowe papers publicly accessible. Even

though the particular letters that Charles Stowe had used were no longer held privately within the family, biographers nonetheless deferred (and still – *continue* to defer) to his biographies, at times very closely emulating the exact quotations that he had selected. Hedrick (1994) and Wagenknecht (1965) both make good use of the letters newly available to them, and add significantly to the field – yet they still both use Charles Stowe’s biographies as a starting point.

Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Compiled from Her Letters and Journals and *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Story of Her Life* are not the only biographies about Harriet Beecher Stowe, nor have they been for over a century. Yet in many instances, biographers continue to treat the texts that way. Johnston opens her 1963 biography with the exact anecdote that Charles Stowe uses to open *Story of Her Life* – the story of Harriet and her brothers eating their mother’s tulips, thinking they were onions. A charming story, perhaps (enough so that it appears in this text as well), but by no means the only story from Harriet’s childhood, and certainly not one so compelling that it is absolutely necessary for two separate biographies of Stowe, written fifty years apart, to begin with it. Examples like this are found throughout biographies written about Harriet Beecher Stowe: the overlap with one or both Charles’s works is often considerable. Perhaps citing the same letter is understandable; but these works cite the same individual details that oftentimes are not truly that important or relevant.

On several significant occasions, such is the case with Joan Hedrick’s 1994 biography. Take, for example, the corresponding sections from Charles’s 1889 *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Compiled from Her Letters and Journals* and Hedrick’s *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*, written a little more than a century after. Both biographies discuss

the 1832 move from New England to Cincinnati undertaken by the Beecher family.

Charles writes:

“On the same journey George Beecher writes:— ‘We had poor horses in crossing the mountains. Our average rate for the last four days to Wheeling was forty-four miles. **The journey, which takes the mail-stage forty-eight hours, took us eight days.** At Wheeling we deliberated long whether to go on board a boat for Cincinnati, but the prevalence of the cholera there at last decided us to remain.”

“... This afternoon, as we were traveling, **we struck up and sang ‘Jubilee.’** It put me in mind of the time **when we used to ride along the rough North Guilford roads** and make the air vocal as we went along. Pleasant times those.”¹¹⁶

It is true that the original words are not Charles’s, but rather belong to his uncle George Beecher and his mother, Harriet. But nonetheless – it was Charles who selected these particular words out of the countless options before him. Hedrick echoes his work:

A journey that normally took the mail-stage forty-eight hours took the Beecher family eight days. They passed the time by singing hymns, which recalled to Harriet the land they had left, the hills and the skies that she would see no more, the friends whom she had left behind. **When they struck up “Jubilee”** she remembered the times she had sung it with Georgiana May as **they bumped over the rough Guilford roads.**¹¹⁷

Although Hedrick quotes Charles’s biographies throughout her own and cites them appropriately, in this instance, she does not – there is no reference or acknowledgement that the facts she there presents appear in an earlier work.

In many ways, Hedrick’s work is quite preferable to Charles Stowe’s. Her biography is much more cohesive, fact-checked, and contextualized than Charles’s, padded quite eloquently with many additional Beecher-Stowe letters. And yet – at times she is completely reliant on Charles for the base of her text. Hedrick, while at times criticizing his saintly portrayal of his mother, appears to have viewed Charles’s

116. Charles Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, 59.

117. Hedrick, *A Life*, 69.

biographies as a sort of shortcut to the original material. The particular song that that the Beechers “struck up” is truly not of such significance, for instance, and perhaps, had Hedrick started with a complete disregard for any of her biographical forerunners, she would have omitted it.

Continuing through Hedrick’s work, the similarities are often quite significant. In one instance, Charles Stowe reproduces an entire letter that his mother wrote to her childhood friend Georgiana May – perhaps appropriate for a work titled *Compiled from Her Letters* (etc.). Yet Hedrick does the exact same. She also includes the letter in its entirety, spanning several pages. Again, this happens again and again throughout Hedrick’s work – in one section, Charles provides snippets of about nine letters written from his mother to his father, providing a day-by-day view of the illness and eventual death of his brother Samuel Charles:

July 3. We are all in good health and try to maintain a calm and cheerful frame of mind....

July 4. All well...

July 10. Yesterday little Charley was taken ill, not seriously...

July 12. Yesterday I carried Charley to Dr. Pulte, who spoke in such a manner as discouraged and frightened me...¹¹⁸

And so on, until the 26th of July. Hedrick frames her section in almost the exact same way: quoting or paraphrasing the exact same parts of the exact same letters. “On July 10 Harriet wrote to Calvin, “Yesterday little Charley was taken ill...” and so on, until the 26th of July.¹¹⁹ Hedrick’s version is perhaps easier to read and more artfully crafted – but in its content it owes much to her predecessor.

In many ways, Hedrick’s biography is simply Charles’s biography, with a few of his outdated analyses stripped away and her own modern ones added on. But during the

118. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from her Letters and Journals*, 121-122.

119. Hedrick, *A Life*, 189-190.

period in which Hedrick was writing, that was in no longer the only option – she had at her disposal all the material he had used initially.

Yet the evidence of dependence on Charles Stowe’s biographies is much greater than simply the amount of times his name appears in a *Notes* section. It is true that on many occasions historians first reference Charles’s plating of the source material, rather than the source material itself. And more recently, there is another stop on the train towards the original letters – and this is Joan Hedrick’s biography. The significance of this phenomenon occurring in Hedrick’s work in particular is that her biography landmark in the field; journal articles, books, and Internet pages defer to her before anyone else, or only to her. McFarland, for example, cited above, writes of his indebtedness to Charles Stowe and to Joan Hedrick, who in many cases is simply citing Charles Stowe. In this way, a note referencing McFarland’s *Loves of Harriet Beecher Stowe* – which is heavily cited in free online encyclopedias – is actually a reference to Joan Hedrick, who actually references Charles Stowe, who referenced the original source material.

This occurrence – a piece of scholarly literature citing Hedrick and not naming Charles Stowe – appears to be increasingly common. The 2019 book “*There is a North*” is one such example; the work explores the cultural leadup to the Civil War, including not least *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Author John Brooke cites Hedrick approximately three dozen times throughout the work; not once does he acknowledge the existence of Charles Stowe, in the work’s notes nor in the biographical sketch of Harriet that the work puts forth. Yet once again these references to Hedrick are underlined by Charles. In his notes, Brooke in once instance guides the reader to a section that appears in

Hedrick – the aforementioned day-by-day descriptions of Samuel Charles’s passing, lifted from Charles Stowe’s original presentation of the letters.

It is uncertain whether this lack of reference to Charles’s biographies, in Brooke’s work and in others, is due to an ignorance of their existence or simply a preference for the more readable and complete Hedrick; optimistically, the latter. But the point stands nonetheless that Charles Stowe is everywhere in the literature on Harriet Beecher Stowe – not simply in works that cite him. And it is true that Charles is no longer as popular a citation as Hedrick may currently be. Yet Charles Stowe lives on in her work, and the work of countless other biographers – a credit that perhaps he does not frequently or adequately receive.

In the field of literature on Harriet Beecher Stowe, there is a noteworthy exception. Seemingly unique in the field, Mary Kelley’s 1978 article “At War With Herself” does not cite either of Charles Stowe’s biographies – and predated Hedrick’s work by more than fifteen years. She makes an admirable use of the Beecher family letters made available to her just two decades before, her bibliography comprising nearly completely of the letters, as well as Harriet’s novels; the only pieces of Beecher-Stowe scholarship she references are a biography of Catharine Beecher and Wagenknecht’s *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Known and the Unknown*. Yet her work, like that of so many others, nonetheless exists in the environment that Charles created; she references Charles Stowe perhaps without even knowing it. She repeats the “little woman” quote (without citing it), taking it as fact, while simultaneously ignoring the place it originates from.

Kelley’s article, like many more recent works that cite only Hedrick and not Charles Stowe, nonetheless serves as an excellent example of how deeply permeating

Charles Stowe's influence is. It is true that in many works of history focusing on Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author's son is mentioned extremely frequently in the works' notes and bibliographies. Yet Charles Stowe has created a precedent that is so fundamental in the field, that even in times where he is not mentioned by name – unknowingly or not – he is referenced nonetheless.

...And the Dubiousness of Charles Stowe

And yet, at some level, the omnipresence of Charles Stowe may be a cause for concern. Charles was doubtlessly the biographer closest to the subject herself – he provides a level of detail and familiarity that perhaps no later biographer could have. But Charles's writings are at times dubious. Sometimes, the issues are small ones. His *Random Recollections*, never intended for publication, perhaps sheds light on his particular fallibilities in writing – the little mistakes that an editor in this case could not fix. The mistakes he there makes appear in his published writing, as well, though on a smaller scale.

Charley Stowe, who had consistently signed his name *Charley* since at least age twelve, in the last decade or so of his life began to rarely, though significantly, alternate between *Charley* and *Charlie*. This echoes *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, in which there is a continuous misspelling of *Catharine* as *Catherine*, and *Elisabeth* as *Elizabeth* – small, yes, inconsequential, also yes – but indicative of a certain lack of punctiliousness.

Charles is rather inconsistent with ages and dates as well – something that is notable in the attempted reconstruction of his life that compromises the first section of

this work. Charles estimates his own age to be up to five years off at certain points in his youth. And likewise, he begins the first biography by stating his mother was three or four years old at the time of her mother's death, when Harriet had actually been five – he corrects this for his second edition. In his updates for the Harvard Secretary's Report, he occasionally writes the incorrect birthday or date of death for his children. He reports first that Leslie, his first daughter, died in April 1887; he later amends it to March. Similarly, he changes Hilda's birthday from January 18th to January 19th.

In most of these cases, the errors are small, inconsequential, and quite easily verifiable from another source. The larger issues, however, are ones that go unchecked. Daniel Vollaro perhaps comes the closest to an explicit assessment of Charles's work, through his analysis in a 2009 article focusing on the "Little Woman / Great War" story.

This apocryphal anecdote serves as an excellent example of not only the far-reaching and often uncredited work of Charles Stowe, but also how at times the veracity of his writing can be rather questionable. The story is one that has very frequently been used to introduce Harriet Beecher Stowe, repeated countless times, often in varying forms. The general elements that most variations include are these: while in Washington, D.C. in late 1862, Harriet Beecher Stowe was invited to the White House, accompanied by some family members. Presented to the president by another politician, Lincoln greeted Harriet by saying (something to the effect of) "so this is the little lady who made this big war."

Though Harriet most certainly met Lincoln, what he said to her is anything but definitive. Some versions of the quotation opt for *little woman* instead of *little lady*, or *you are* instead of *this is*. Some substitute *great* for *big*, and more tend to say *started* rather

made. Others include a longer, middle section of the quote – “so you’re the little woman *who wrote the book* that started this great war.” The combinations are countless, and Vollaro details them well – while also noting that it is very possible that the quotation was fabricated completely.

Indeed, although the Washington, D.C. visit first appears in Charles’s *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals* in 1889, no variation of the president’s alleged quotation appears alongside it. An *Atlantic* article written by Annie Fields shortly after Harriet’s death serves as the first printed iteration of the quote – “[Stowe’s] daughter was told that when the President heard her name he seized her hand, saying, ‘Is this the little woman who made this great war?’” Fields writes.¹²⁰

And yet, as Vollaro notes, Charles’s *Story of Her Life*, written fifteen years after Harriet’s death, “is clearly the source for the most commonplace version of the quotation currently in circulation.”¹²¹ Charles’s version is this:

It was Mr. Seward who introduced her, and Mr. Lincoln rose awkwardly from his chair, saying, ‘Why, Mrs. Stowe, right glad to see you!’ Then with a humorous twinkle in his eye, he said, ‘So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!’¹²²

A particular authority has been afforded to Charles’s version of the story, not only because of his position as Stowe’s son, but also due to his claim that he was there as it unfolded. In actuality, it is very unlikely that Charles was present, as Vollaro appropriately notes; and yet it was even more unlikely than perhaps Vollaro realizes.

Then twelve years old and away at boarding school, Charles wrote letters to his parents quite frequently during this period of his life, as noted in the first portion of this

120. Fields, via Vollaro, “Lincoln, Stowe, and the “Little Woman/Great War” Story.”

121. Vollaro, “Lincoln, Stowe, and the “Little Woman/Great War” Story.”

122. Charles Stowe, *Story of her Life*, 202-203

work. Joan Hedrick puts the date of the Lincoln encounter at December 2nd, 1862; Charles wrote letters to his father on November 24th, November 30th, and December 5th of that year, with a few additional undated letters in between – all marked with the location of his boarding school, in Washington, Connecticut. One letter with *Dec 1862* written across the top appears quite plausibly to be his reply to his mother’s letter recounting her trip to the nation’s capital (figure 12.)

Washington Dec 1862
My Dear mother

I received your kind letter
and also your presents. I was very much pleased
when the stage driver told me that he had brought
for me.

I now go hunt-ing quite often.
Our Drill-master goes for
hunt-ing and I go with him some times.

I am getting to be quite a
sportsman. I read books about sporting
and learn from them the mystery of fowling.

I was very much surprised
to hear that Fred was absent from his corps.

Father writes to me once a
week. I wish you would write oftener, the
reason I have not written often is because I did not
know your direction half the time, when you are at
home I wil write you every day I mean every
week

I now must close I am your affec
Charles

Figure 12. Letter from Charles Stowe to Harriet Beecher Stowe, December 1862

In her account to her husband, Harriet actually says little of the president, and instead dwells on news about the meeting with her son Fred, who was given forty-eight hours off from his military duties on the occasion of her visit. It seems that Harriet wrote a similar letter to Charley. In his letter, Charles thanks his mother for the gift she sent him and updates her on his improving shooting skills. He then writes,

I was very much supprised to hear that fred was absent from his corps. Father writes to me ounce a week, I wish you would write oftenner, the reason I have not written often is because I did not know your direction half the time, when you are at home I wil write you evry day I mean evry week.¹²³

“Most twentieth-century accounts of the Lincoln visit mention the presence of Charles Stowe”¹²⁴ – but it seems quite reasonable to assert that Charles was in fact not present in Washington, D.C. on the visit undertaken by his mother. Certainly if he were there alongside her, he would not need to update her on his endeavors at school, nor she on her visit with Fred. Charles does not outwardly assert in *Story of Her Life* that he was there alongside his mother; yet ten years later, he would make just that claim.

Just as accounts of the Lincoln visit differ from source to source, throughout Charles’s lifetime his own account differed drastically. First Charles was not there, and then he was – and then what Harriet recalled from the visit soon became what Charles recalled. In his *Random Recollections*, written in the summer of 1922, Charles, then aged 72, asserts very effortlessly that he had been there with his mother. He writes that it was not Henry Wilson who introduced his mother to the President (although in all likelihood, this is who it was, confirmed in the accounts of Hatty, Isabella, and Harriet herself – all three of whom were most certainly there), nor was it even William Seward, as he had claimed in *Story of Her Life* ten years before. Here, Charles says it was Salmon

123. Charles Stowe, letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, December 1862.

124. Vollaro, “Lincoln, Stowe, and the “Little Woman/Great War” Story.”

P. Chase who had presented her – Harriet’s friend from the Semi-Colon Club in Cincinnati, and at that time the Secretary of the Treasury. No other source, even those written by Charles, makes this claim.

And as for the quotation itself – it does well to preface it with a different retelling, made by Charles’s son, Lyman Beecher Stowe. At times, Lyman Stowe’s career served well as a continuation in the direction that Charles had been moving in his own published career. Over time, Charles’s claims became grander and less substantiated; it seems that Lyman too had difficulties resisting the grandeur of lofty depictions of his grandmother. It seems that the source that truly cemented the idea of Charles’s presence at the meeting was written by his son, Lyman – the 1934 work *Saints, Sinners, and Beechers*, both written and published while Charles was alive.

It was Lyman who had assisted his father Charles in writing *Story of Her Life*, yet he did not cling so tightly to that particular retelling. In a typed transcription of an interview, Lyman notes (accurately) that it was Henry Wilson who introduced the Beecher-Stowes to the president, rather than Seward, as he and his father at previously written. “Can you quote the words exactly?” the interviewer asks. Lyman Stowe responds: “Yes. My father never forgot them. Mr. Lincoln said to Harriet Beecher Stowe, ‘So this is the little woman who wrote the book that made this big war!’”

Indeed, here Lyman quotes exactly the version that appears in *Story of Her Life*; in that respect, he is consistent. However, in addition to the switch from Seward to Wilson, Lyman emphatically asserts that his father had been there, unquestionably – something that had not been made clear in the 1911 publication with his father, but that he clarified in his own later work. The interview is not dated, but it appears to have

taken place some time after Charles's death, possibly in the mid-to-late 1930s, in the wake of his publication of *Saints, Sinners, and Beechers*.

Although Lyman states that his father “never forgot” the words, evidently, he had. In *Random Recollections*, Charles gives the quote as “So then this is the little woman who wrote the book that has made us so much trouble.”¹²⁵ Incredibly, Charles, the source of the most-repeated version of the quotation, offers a second version that seemingly exists nowhere else. Vollaro ponders the different iterations the quotation could have gone through, from a possible original form to the carefully crafted version that appears in *Story of Her Life*. Could it be that the version that appears in *Story of Her Life* was not just carefully crafted, but one of many? Charles had evidently not set his heart on one definitive form of the quotation – had the biography been written a year or two before, or a year after, would the quote be different?

Though not of much importance, another brief anecdote from the Lincoln encounter documents the gradual alteration of fact– that is, the sort of dialect that Lincoln is depicted with. Again, nothing is mentioned to this effect in Charles's first biography; it appears for the first time in the second edition. It reads, first quoting Lincoln: “‘I do love an open fire. I always had one to home.’ Mrs. Stowe particularly remarked on the expression ‘to home.’”¹²⁶ Lyman, in a similar fashion as above, again repeats the quote as it appears in *Story of Her Life*. “I do love an open fire. I ‘spect it’s because we always had one to home,” he states in the same interview. However, he once again emphasizes that his father was there – “When outside the White House, my father

125. Charles Stowe, *Random Recollections*.

126. Charles Stowe, *Story of Her Life*, 203.

said to his mother, ‘Say, ma, why does President Lincoln say ‘to home’ instead of ‘at home?’”¹²⁷

In *Random Recollections*, Charles misses the point of the anecdote completely, remarking that Lincoln said only “I do love an open fire. We always had one at home” – altering the quote in such a way that the reason for its initial remarkability has all but disappeared.

Vollaro, perhaps a little harsh of Harriet, describes a sort of necessity Charles and Lyman felt in *Story of Her Life* to justify Harriet’s historical importance, doubting that she was really as significant as she has been portrayed. This could very well be true. Most of the differences that exist between the two biographies are descriptions anchoring a given scene in its political context. In addition to the Lincoln quote, Charles and Lyman add in a meeting with Josiah Henson; in the first biography, the births of the twins and of their younger brother Henry Stowe two years later appear on the same page. In the second, they are pages apart; what separates them this time is a discussion of the political ongoings in Cincinnati that Harriet is described to have been very involved in.

Charles and Lyman do not seem to have had any malicious intentions in creating their family biographies; they were simply two individuals, interested in family history but not immune to the failings of memory or the draw of unsubstantiated grandeur. Indeed, the shortcomings of memories have deeply permeated the field of literature on Harriet Beecher Stowe – but certainly this is not unique to this subject matter. What makes this example unique, however, is that so many of these questionable memories

¹²⁷ Lyman Stowe interview transcript, Beecher-Stowe family papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute.

stem from one source – Charles’s biographies. Charles cites materials that any other historian can read for themselves – yet these other historians simply take his word for it. At times, Charles misquotes; other times, he does not cite anything at all. While some of the material he uses is contemporary with the event he describes, in other instances, they too are retrospective – written at his request for their specific inclusion in his biography.

Some of the more well-known Harriet Beecher Stowe quotations and anecdotes fit into this latter category. That is – they were written in retrospect; an estimation of what someone had once said decades before. Much of Charles’s *Compiled from her Letters and Journals* consisted of letters, as the title implies; but these letters were frequently written decades after the fact, and with the intention of being published in Charles’s work. This includes letters by his mother, as well as other family members. Charles’s aunt, Isabella Jones Beecher, wrote a letter to him in the late 1880s intended specifically to be reproduced in his biography, describing an event in that took place in 1850. “I remember distinctly saying in one [letter], ‘Now, Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is.’”¹²⁸ This section of the letter – “If I could use a pen as you can” – has often been stripped from its original context as a recollection, and treated as though it were an actual quotation, and not just the memory of one.

Truly it is difficult to gauge what exactly in Charles’s biographies should be regarded with particular suspicion. But way in which Charles presents Sojourner Truth in his *Random Recollections* is again another source of concern – one that perhaps

128. Charles Edward Stowe, *Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, 145.

indicates how carefully his biographies should be examined, the latter of which was written only ten years before.

Other scholarship has noted that despite how Truth's dialect has been portrayed, her manner of speech was actually quite different than the stereotypical "Southern slave speak." In fact, Truth was born and raised in upstate New York; her first language was Dutch.¹²⁹ Her words had been altered – caricatured, even – in her speech *Ain't I a Woman?* to align more closely with the reader's expectation of how a formerly enslaved woman would talk.

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sojourner Truth met after Harriet wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Charles recounts the event from his childhood as he remembers it. Charles writes, framing it as a quotation from Truth:

When I was a little girl in Africa da dem slavers cum an dey killed my folks and dey burned our huts and I ran out an hid in the thicket... Well, dey cotched me an dey took me down to the die coast an dey sold me to a slaver with the rest of die [n—].¹³⁰

For an intended audience that included no one outside his immediate family, Charles portrays Sojourner Truth's dialect to be something it most certainly was not. Harriet had done something similar, but in a published work, that indeed received criticism from Truth herself.¹³¹ Yet Charles goes a step further: Truth was not born in Africa, and this information was widely accessible for anyone who made a remote effort to find it. Truth's biography, *the Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, had been published in 1850; its second sentence notes that she was born in New York.¹³²

129. Corona Brezina, *Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" Speech: A Primary Source Investigation*

130. Charles Edward Stowe, *Random Recollections*, 33

131. Hedrick, *A Life*, 270.

132. Truth & Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 1.

This quotation that Charles fabricates for Truth is not without its context in his work; it is situated in the middle of several pages on the meeting with Truth, amongst dozens of other lines he credits to her.

Additionally, Charles spells her name incorrectly – he writes it consistently as *Sojourna*. This is not unlike the spelling mistakes he makes in his published biographies – yet it is one that seems to heavily implicate that he had not confirmed any of what he wrote; he relied on memory alone.

Charles's motivation is quite unclear. Was he adapting to his mother's portrayal of Truth? Did he misremember? Had he even been there at their meeting? Was his entire characterization of Truth based on a racist and emphatically inaccurate caricature? Indeed – was any of this intentional?

Charles's concerning treatment of Sojourner Truth serves very well as a window into just how problematic his history-writing could be. What Charles wrote about Truth was grand, showy – and verifiably untrue. He presents the encounter as fact when other sources prove it simply could not have been. His characterization of Truth, however, is largely inconsequential; it appears only in an unpublished manuscript intended for his grandchildren to read. And yet, another scene he treats largely the same way – the meeting with Lincoln – has had more consequence than any other anecdote concerning Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Was it intentional deception, or simply an implanted memory? Charles Stowe simply could not have been present during Harriet's 1862 meeting with the President; and yet he provides a great level of detail about the trip to Washington in *Random Recollections*, creating a portrait of the capital so charming and nostalgic that one may feel guilty in charging him with inventing the whole thing. But the Charles Stowe who

“never forgot” the words that Lincoln said to his mother was the same Charles Stowe who writes that “Sojourna” Truth told how she was born in Africa and “cotched” by slavers, with the same impressed degree of veracity. This is likewise the Charles Stowe whose work is cited nearly everywhere in literature on Harriet Beecher Stowe; his scene of the meeting with Lincoln is so often repeated it is no longer associated with him, its originator.

No existing piece of scholarship on Harriet Beecher Stowe raises enough concern over the way in which her son Charles wrote about her. A few biographers have indeed questioned a few of his claims, and criticized his saintly portrayal of his mother. Gerson, writing in 1976, captures well the prevailing view on Charles Stowe for much of the 20th century – he writes that “posterity’s only record comes from the recollected experience of a twelve-year-old-boy,” and mentions that the exact wording of the Lincoln quotation may be uncertain. Gerson does not mention the presence of Isabella Hooker and Hatty Stowe on the Washington trip – though, by contemporary letters written by both them and Harriet, they most certainly were – and does not even consider the possibility that Charles Stowe was not actually there. Only recently have historians taken this a step further, and considered that Charles – the event’s primary recorder – was not actually present during the Lincoln meeting.

But the doubt that historians cast on Charles Stowe is not nearly enough. It does not seem as though his intentions were particularly objectionable in every case – yet it is difficult to ascertain the difference between false memories, intentional deception, or innocent grandiosity in his writing.

Charles Stowe is omnipresent and unavoidable in biographies of his mother. Yet he misquotes, misremembers, and at times, seemingly fabricates altogether. What is

true, and what is not, is difficult to assess; yet already Charles Stowe's biographies have permeated so deeply into the field that his work has at times been separated from his name – anecdotes repeated so frequently that they are taken as legend and fact and no longer attributed to the author's son.

CONCLUSION

It seems simultaneously understandable and incredible that no historian has ever mentioned Charles Stowe in any significant capacity. Certainly, it makes sense – he did not attract very much attention during his lifetime, after all; he was little more than the son of a moderately famous individual, and one of four sons at that; he barely mentions himself in his own writings.

Yet over the course of the twentieth century, there was no shortage of interest in the life of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Even in the last fifteen years, many major pieces of scholarship focusing on Stowe have been published; there is near-constant research into her life and the context and impact of her works. Nearly every facet of Harriet Beecher Stowe has lent itself to some sort of literature, scholarly or otherwise – from a 2020 dive into her relationship with author George Elliot or a three-hundred page piece of amateur fiction speculating on her son Fred’s demise published in 1953.¹³³ And yet – as previously mentioned – the most complete published biography of Charles Stowe is four hundred words long, and it is one that he wrote himself.

In a field where nearly every other subject has been explored, Charles Stowe continues to receive no attention. He is by no means alone – all existing scholarship would probably form a paragraph or two each on his siblings Georgiana and Henry. And yet, for Charles this lack seems so much more consequential; the brief aside that scholars do provide about him – he was the undisciplined youngest son who wrote Harriet’s biographies – seems sufficient to beckon the interest of a scholar, raising immediate questions about the trustworthiness of what he wrote. In this way, it is

133. Soares, “Literary Transmigration: George Eliot, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Spirit of Transatlantic Exchange;” Brown, *The Cup of Trembling*.

seemingly incredible – the same scholars who point out how much Harriet’s son Charley liked to lie as a boy do not think twice about how truthful his biographies must be.

And yet this thesis is a first in many ways. It is the first to lay out a biography of Charles Stowe longer than a page; it is the first to question at length the integrity of his history-writing – and how deeply it has penetrated the field of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

This thesis is the first work to make use of – or even mention – Charles’s *Random Recollections*, which has been sitting in the archives at the Stowe Center, an essential stop made by every Stowe historian, since the mid-twentieth century. In a body of scholarly literature that seems at times anecdote starved – with nearly every major work mentioning the same onion-tulip story – *Random Recollections* seems to be a treasure trove.

Likewise it seems that this work is the first to put together a family tree of the Munroe-Stowe families; known connections between the various leaves on this tree have been acknowledged before, yet the familial relationships easily linking them have not. No source has mentioned why in the opening of his biography Charles Stowe thanks the novelist Kirk Munroe (who turns out to be his brother-in-law) or why it was the sculptor Brenda Putman who made a bust of Harriet Beecher Stowe for the Hall of Fame of Great Americans (she was her great-aunt by marriage).

This thesis is also seemingly the first to mention Charles’s letter from December of 1862. Even more than *Random Recollections* and the relationships with the Munroes, this seems overwhelmingly implausible. Since Harriet’s death, her exchange with Lincoln has attracted a noteworthy amount of attention – it is seemingly the most repeated anecdote about her. In many instances it goes misquoted or unattributed; many who reference it do not know about the controversy that stirs beneath it. And yet, the

few who do know, and who cast doubt upon it and upon Charles – Hedrick and Vollaro, for two – have not made this easy step which seems to put all the controversy at rest. Charles’s letter – in fact, all of his letters from that period – are available for free, digitally, to whoever is interested. It is just about as accessible as a hundred and fifty year old letter can be – and for the researcher interested in Stowe, it is extremely valuable. And yet the only roadblock to it seems to be a powerful one: to get to it, one must go through Charles Stowe.

The aim of this thesis is not to make Charles as famous as his mother, nor to establish his undying importance in American history; it seems quite reasonable that his celebrity remains quite minimal. Rather, it is to point out how much scholars miss when they ignore him altogether.

This work in no way covers all there is to be said about Charles Stowe, or his two biographies. Instead its purpose is well accomplished just by casting light upon a few of the gravest problems that have arisen from paying him so little attention.

Indeed, perhaps it is a goal of this thesis to raise more questions than those that are here answered. For some: In what way exactly did Kirk Munroe – a swashbuckling fiction writer – influence how Harriet’s story was written? What questions can contemporary letters from family members one step outside the Beecher family provide answers to? How much of Charles’s influence, as it is here described, is actually the work of his son, Lyman?

It seems, in the humble opinion of this author, that there is a dire need for an evaluation of the entire field that is scholarship on Harriet Beecher Stowe. As analogized in the introduction of this work: Charles’s biographies are a framework that subsequent authorship builds upon, and could not stand without – but are they truly a

good framework? It seems that as time progresses, Charles's biographies sink deeper into the consciousness of this "world" of Harriet Beecher Stowe, becoming more difficult to identify, and, where necessary, remove. In relying upon, but not always citing, Charles's work, definitive biographies like Hedrick's serve to distance him from the modern history-writing on Stowe, meaning that those who reference Hedrick are completely unaware of the problems that her work may encompass because of Charles – or, perhaps more worryingly, a reader may think that they are avoiding these issues by avoiding Charles – unaware that they are consuming it nonetheless.

Perhaps it is best stated once more: this work seeks neither to sanctify nor condemn the individual that was Charles Edward Stowe. Even though this work forms the most complete biography of his life – is it truly enough to grasp the character? Can a reader come away from this work truly knowing who Charles Stowe was?

And yet, he was human. One cannot know exactly his motivations and goals, and yet one can still recognize that he was susceptible to both the joys and follies of history writing. The field of literature on Harriet Beecher Stowe is in this way remarkable because it has lent itself so well to the errs of human nature – that is, the errs that can be so pointedly traced back to one individual, her son.

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