Standing on Neutral Ground:
Charles Jacobs Peterson of Peterson’s

In yon shabby old nook, by yon shabby old stone,
In yon shabby old grave by lush grasses o’ergrown,
There PETERSON sleeps—he was heavy as lead;
If his soul isn’t damned, why his works are instead.

With this quatrain, written in the 1870’s, but purporting to be written from the standpoint of “A.D. 1900,” Charles Jacobs Peterson accurately predicted the oblivion to which the twentieth century would consign him. Only when the darkest recesses of American literature are examined does this magazinist and pulp writer of the middle of the nineteenth century come to light. Of the all-inclusive authorities, the Dictionary of American Biography gives him one and a half columns, the Oxford Companion to American Literature seventeen lines, and Kunitz and Haycraft’s American Authors 1600–1900 upwards of 40. The principal historians of American fiction—Quinn, Van Doren, Cowie—as well as the more comprehensive literary historians—Spiller-Thorp-Canby, Van Wyck Brooks, the Cambridge History of American Literature—are silent. Perhaps one ought not to wish it otherwise. Yet Peterson does emerge, to those who seek him out, as almost the representative writer of his day, a barometer of the changes and tensions which exercised American life between 1840

1 Monody on Certain Members of the “Press Club” (Believed to bear date about A.D. 1900), (Philadelphia, c. 1870), 9.
2 As a basis of comparison, Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale receives from these three publications, respectively, two and one half columns, seventeen lines, and slightly more than one hundred lines (as well as an illustration). Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, Peterson’s titular co-editor on both Graham’s and Peterson’s, has slightly over one and one-half columns in the Dictionary of American Biography, twenty-one lines in the Oxford Companion, and is not mentioned in American Authors 1600–1900.
3 The Cambridge History of American Literature (New York, 1933), II, 168, does mention Peterson once, but only as the joint owner of Graham’s Magazine.
and 1860. Writing in the decade before the Civil War from a Philadelphia which looked both north and south, and after the War for a primarily feminine audience, he epitomizes, like his competitor Sarah Josepha Hale of *Godey's*, moderate opinion toward the double-barrelled question of slavery—of Negro and of woman. In the forties he had worked on three of the most representative journals of opinion of the day, *Graham's*, where he shared an editorial desk with Poe, who later included him in a list of journalistic "ninnies," the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the magazine which was successively the *Lady's World*, the *Ladies' National Magazine*, and finally, after 1848, *Peterson's Magazine*. Three of his brothers—he was the eldest son—were partners in the publishing house which in the United States published or distributed Dickens, Dumas, Ainsworth, Marryat, Lytton, Lever, Disraeli, as well as popular American writers like Frances Hodgson Burnett, T. S. Arthur, Mrs. Hentz and Mrs. Southworth. Peterson's forebears had come to America

---

4 See William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: the Old South and American National Character* (New York, 1961), 115-141. Taylor casts Mrs. Hale as a similarly representative figure, a conservator of family virtues, one who relegated woman to her "one pursuit . . . the marriage establishment only" (p. 356), and one who projected a "fantasy-South," aristocratic yet with the tendency toward "idleness and self-indulgence," to set over against the North's potential for "selfish acquisitiveness and predatory greed" (p. 133). Mrs. Hale's first novel, *Northwood* (1827), was reissued in 1852 with amplifications in rebuttal of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Mrs. Hale wrote a further reply, *Liberia* (1853), which, sympathetic as always to the southern aristocrat, proposes the colonization solution. Like Peterson, Mrs. Hale replies to Mrs. Stowe primarily in defense of the union of the states. The view that in writing of the plight of the Negro Mrs. Stowe uses him as the symbol of nineteenth-century womanhood has been put most memorably by Leslie Fiedler, *Waiting for the End* (London, 1965), 122-123. Such a collocation persists long after the Emancipation Proclamation, as, for instance, in Brand Whitlock's *Her Infinite Variety* (New York, 1904), 34-35: "'The ladies, generally, do not seem to be interested [in obtaining the franchise],' Vernon acquiesced. 'No,' she shook her head sadly, 'no, on the contrary, I suppose most of them oppose the measure. . . . The slaves, before the war, often petitioned congress not to set them free, you will remember.'"


6 An account is given of the founding and subsequent progress of Peterson's in Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865* (Harvard, 1938), 306-311. Circulation figures are there quoted of 140,000 in 1869, ahead of *Godey's*. "Peterson's," writes Mott, "was thus a combination of fashions and light literature. The stories were all very much alike: virtue in poverty, a broken heart, the dangers of frivolity, with occasionally a thrilling incident like a runaway or a rescue" (p. 309).

7 From the advertisements in the end papers of *The Old Stone Mansion* (1859), 8 (the Yale University Library copy).
in 1638, and the very titles and subtitles of his works—The Military Heroes of the Revolution, as well as of the War of 1812 and the War with Mexico, Arnold at Saratoga, Philadelphia in 1776—testify to his chauvinistic patriotism. He would write as well a highly regarded history of the United States Navy, and in The Cabin and Parlor one of the more notable "replies" to Uncle Tom's Cabin, though less as a defender of slavery than as a preserver of the Union.

His interest to us, therefore, is that he is the quintessential middlebrow. To invoke two exact contemporaries, he had no intuitive genius to take him to the dark interior of man's mind, as Melville had; nor does he have the transcendent vision of America and unified mankind that is Whitman's primary greatness as a writer. His mind was distinctly average—he could hardly otherwise have been the editor of the most popular journal of the post-war era; yet in that role he was both creator of public opinion and its typical representative. With Peterson, certainly, one will hover over no Descartian vortices, nor hear, hissing melodious, the word out of the sea. But to read him and his magazine one may properly feel in touch with what the average man—and, especially, the average woman—was thinking in those years. Catskill eagles, after all, are of interest to those who are seeking the blackest gorges. If it is the plain we seek, Charles Jacobs Peterson may be a safer guide.

Not only was Peterson of almost precisely average intellect, he was also, on almost any question, a moderate, a steersman between the extremes of abolitionism and slavery, of feminism and female subjugation. "We stand on neutral ground here," he wrote in 1842, "though we don't quite throw up our caps and shout as either party are visitors": his very location in pre-war Philadelphia made of him a border-sitter who saw to the South a way of life he admired and even idealized, yet whose weaknesses he feared, and who saw to the North a great civilization whose enterprise commanded his respect, but whose uncourtly qualities aroused his disdain. It was not the city of brotherly love alone which made him a moderate; he had the temperament, self-professed, of the mediator: "I am no tee-totaller, no abolitionist, no transcendentalist, no peace-man, or any of that sort. . . . Heaven intended me for a

8 Peterson to James Russell Lowell, Feb. 8, 1842, Lowell MSS, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
conservative in everything except politics. I hang on to the old religion & the old doctrines, until the evidence in form of a novelty becomes not only equally strong but preponderating. . . . It takes strong testimony to persuade me I am wiser than my fathers."

Peterson’s writing career, extraordinarily prolific even as it stands, including some one hundred tales or sketches and eighteen fictions of novel or novella length, as well as his historical works, is none-theless confined to less than twenty of his sixty-eight years, and is to be found, the great bulk of it, in two Philadelphia magazines, Graham’s, and his own Peterson’s. A glance at the titles of some of his sketches may suggest the ephemerality of subject, but also the range: “Going a Maying” (May, 1843), “Popping the Question” (July, 1846), “Nutting in the Woods” (October, 1849), “Mormonism and the Mormons” (June, 1853), “Life in an Oriental Hareem” (February, 1854), “In the Clouds: A Rhapsody” (August, 1855), “The Poetry of Mrs. Browning” (December, 1855), “Christmas and its Customs” (December, 1858). Beginning in the forties, he kept up an average supply of two or three contributions per half year to Graham’s and Peterson’s until the late fifties, when he turned his attention more exclusively to his editorial duties, and thereafter, until his death in 1887, his contributions are confined to an occasional poem or sketch.

Under its third name, Peterson’s was no less of a woman’s magazine than under its first two. It “surpasses all others,” wrote the Bloomsburg Democrat in the sixties, “The ladies fairly worship this Maga-

---

9 Peterson to Lowell, Apr. 1, 1842, ibid.
10 Separately published in book form were: Agnes Courtenay: a Tale of the Old Dominion (Amherst, 1847); The Oath of Marion; or, a Story of the Revolution (Boston, 1847); Grace Dudley; or, Arnold at Saratoga, an Historical Novel (Philadelphia, 1849); The Valley Farm; or, the Autobiography of an Orphan, edited by Peterson (Philadelphia, 1850); Cruising in the Last War (Philadelphia, 1850); The Cabin and Parlor; or, Slaves and Masters, by J. Thornton Randolph, pseud., (Philadelphia, 1852); Kate Aylesford: a story of the Refugees (Philadelphia, 1855); The Old Stone Mansion (Philadelphia, 1859).

Some of these fictions were first serialized in Graham’s or Peterson’s, and were revised for book publication. The Old Stone Mansion, for instance, shows extensive reworking in its progress from Peterson’s to its final form. There are, in addition, ten fictions of from two to six monthly parts in length in Graham’s or Peterson’s which seem never to have been republished. Of uncertain status is Mabel, or Darkness at Dawn, which is listed in a number of Peterson’s advertisements (see Old Stone Mansion endpapers, p. 8) but which is listed neither in the Library of Congress catalogue nor in Lyle Wright’s American Fiction.
Peterson's own fictions certainly do not lag in catering to the same tastes. His heroines, whether they be called Kate Aylesford, Grace Dudley, or Isabel Courtenay, are all resolute, fearless within the bounds of proper femininity, each a Joan of Arc, an Amazon, or a "second Minerva"—"feminine, but still heroic."

For the Peterson hero, Walter Carrington of *The Valley Farm* (p. 35) may stand as prototype, Byronic, a young girl's fantasy wish, always rich by the last chapter if not in the first: "A broad, massive forehead; overhanging brows from which a dark eye gleamed like a coal of fire; a mass of thick almost raven hair. . . . The bold, finely cut nose, and the resolute-looking mouth, spoke of firmness and power in every curve and line."

What serves to highlight the representative, moderate quality of Peterson's mind are the factors he so often shows impeding the union of these two paragons, who might otherwise have married within ten pages. There are three principal impediments: politics, the heroine's dutiful bond to marry another, and the couple's differing views about woman's role in marriage. Where it is politics that divides hero and heroine, the division is regularly that of American versus Tory, with the heroine finally converted to the Patriot viewpoint. In Peterson's reply to *Uncle Tom*, there is no ideological argument between hero and heroine, for both are of the planter class, but the same American-Tory axis is central to the novel, with the southern moderate point of view identified with the Patriot and the critical Englishman and northerner being identified with the Tory. Any inconsistency here is resolved within Peterson's consistent nationalism, for though the Patriot of 1776 is clearly the American, the Patriot of 1850 is only less clearly *not* the abolitionist, but the gradualist, who defends the continuance of slavery until such time as the Negro may sustain himself by his own efforts, and who recognizes that to destroy the slavery system in a single stroke is to destroy the Union. So consistently determined, in fact, is Peterson not to fracture national unity that, though he himself was unequivocally on the Union side after the outbreak of hostilities, one

---

11 *Peterson's Magazine*, LIII, 1 (January, 1868), "Editor's Table"; also *Peterson's*, XCI, 6 (June, 1887), 570: "No lady should be without this queen of the lady's-magazines."
12 *Kate Aylesford*, 74; *Grace Dudley*, 9, 19; *Old Stone Mansion*, 106.
can read *Peterson's* in the years 1861–1865 without being at all aware of the war raging beyond.\(^{13}\)

If his concern for national unity led him to transpose the Patriot of the Revolution into the southerner of 1850, Peterson is further drawn to the South by his romantic attitude toward the past. Even in his romanticism, moreover, he moves toward the characteristic average, combining the nostalgia of an Irving with the desire of a Cooper, Emerson, or Whitman for a past truly national. Peterson may linger over frescoes from the past, but they are emphatically, again patriotically, American. To the sublime superiority of American nature he added that of American military heroism:

A people with such battle-fields to point to, needs no baronial ruins, nor ivied abbeys, nor monumental cathedrals where slumber its long forgotten kings. There are purer and loftier associations connected with these storied fields than with all the regal mausoleums on earth. Here, beneath this same sky—here, on this very soil, our patriot fathers won our freedom. We look on the heavens they looked on, we see the forests they beheld: and what need we more? ... I never experience them without feeling I am a better man.\(^ {14}\)

The superiority of things American to the European is omnipresent to Peterson: an essay on "The Ancient Greek Costume" serves to point the moral that though Americans tend to follow slavishly the fashions of Europe, they have more innate taste in dress than the English.\(^ {15}\) A discussion of folk legends yields the *obiter dictum* that this field is "one of the few things in which the Old World contrasts favorably with the New"\(^ {16}\); a chance encounter between an English and an American ship prior to 1812 reminds the novelist (*Cruising in the Last War, 12*) that this was "before we had taught them our superiority." It is not, therefore, for this Old World past that Peterson feels a romantic nostalgia, but for an Americanized version of it, characterized by values unmistakably southern: "a race,

\(^{13}\) From January through June, 1862, for instance, as the two sides vied to take Richmond, Farragut sealed off the mouth of the Mississippi, and the second Battle of Bull Run approached, Peterson's "The Murrays of Murray House" was running through his magazine—"How the news of Lexington came to town."

\(^{14}\) *Graham's Magazine*, XXIV, 5 (May, 1844), 228.

\(^{15}\) *Peterson's*, XXXVI, 1 (July, 1859), 17–20.

\(^{16}\) *Ibid.*, XVI, 4 (October, 1849), 223.
whose like we shall never look upon again . . . the gentlemen frank and brave, the ladies beautiful as morning.”

“In this age of hoops,” women are “but indifferent rivals of their more graceful sisters of Ancient Greece.”

(Was not the Old Dominion essentially Athenian?) The ball which climaxes Kate Aylesford’s wedding to Major Gordon “eighty years ago” is not to be looked for in this modern day: “The minuet was the only dance sufficiently courtly for that high-bred age . . . a lightness of step, a tender coyness, and a formal grace, which seemed to be the poetical realization of that lordly and perhaps pompous, yet knightly age!”

Peterson’s professed heroes—John Randolph and Francis Marion, “our first and favorite hero,” whom he compares to “some Paladin of old,” a King Arthur—testify to the fixity in his mind of a chivalric ideal associated with the South, and his choice of pseudonyms—J. Thornton, Harry Danforth, J. Thornton Randolph—as well as the names he gives his fictional heroes—Thornton and Danforth again, Dudley, Talbot—testifies to his identification with that aristocratic ideal.

Peterson’s patriotism, so evident in all his historical works, where it merges with his pervasive hero-worship, calls him inevitably to the side of Manifest Destiny, again allying him, generally, with the South in the War with Mexico: “The war of Independence gave the United States a political existence. The war of 1812 enfranchised the popular mind from a state of colonial subserviency. The war with Mexico has . . . elevated the republic to a position in European eyes which a century of prosperity in the arts of peace would not have obtained for it.”

On the vexed question of who was the greater captain in that war, Winfield Scott or Zachary Taylor, he endorses Taylor as having “more of the hero,” Scott, “more of the General,” though one may think with difficulty, in visual terms at least, of Old Rough and Ready as the quintessential cavalier (surely Old Fuss and Feathers better suits the role). Peterson’s ruminations on the inevitable outcome of the Mexican War find him racially stereo-

---

17 Agnes Courtenay, 1-2.
18 Peterson’s, XXXVI, 1 (July, 1859), 17-18.
19 Kate Aylesford, 348.
20 Graham’s, XXVI, 1 (January, 1845), 75-79.
21 The Military Heroes of the War with Mexico, with a Narrative of the War (Philadelphia, 1848), 15.
22 Ibid., 137.
typing, asserting that superiority of the northern European which dictates, in other contexts, his paternal attitude toward Negro slavery:

There is more in race than is generally supposed. Of the five great divisions into which the human family is separated, the inferior species have never permanently, rarely even temporarily triumphed over the superior ones. The Mongolian has never been subdued by the Malay, nor the Malay by the African; but both have been, at various periods, the slaves of the Caucasian. . . . In every collision between the Romaic and Teutonic stocks, the latter has proved too strong for the former. The one, supple and wily, is well represented by Saladin in the novel of Scott: the other, triumphing by sheer strength, has its type in his antagonist, Richard! 23

Or, as one might say, the one, supple and wily, is well represented by the Tory in the novels of Peterson, the other, triumphing by sheer strength, has its type in his antagonist, the Patriot! Peterson's American Patriots always triumph by open strength of intellect or arm, his Tories are characterized by cunning and trickery. In Grace Dudley, the Patriot General Gates, as he rides to parley with the English, "shone with a lustre that showed how well he was fitted for acts of knightly courtesy and princely condescension." Yet the same general, beside Benedict Arnold, takes on Tory qualities, "conjured up vividly the idea of elegant mediocrity." 24 The reasons for the change center upon Peterson's ambivalent attitude toward Arnold, who is presented with Sophoclean irony as the arch-traitor of years to come, yet also as the Patriot knight of Saratoga, whose foreshadowed treachery is to some extent mitigated by his sense of injured merit at the hands of superiors less knightly, the petty Gates especially. As knight, therefore, as American cavalier, Arnold stands as a representative of southern values, and in him Peterson expresses certain qualms about the southern potentialities for evil. Might not the Patriot prove eventually a traitor? Might not Lucifer turn Satan? We glimpse in Arnold, therefore, something of Peterson's misgivings about the cavalier class, not least because we find in him, within a single character, the Patriot-Tory division.

Yet the true hero of Grace Dudley is Malcolm, Arnold's aide-de-camp, a man who is seeking the heroine through acts of valor as

23 Ibid., 17-18.
24 Grace Dudley, 40, 94.
Arnold is seeking military glory. "What my mistress is to me, glory is to you," he says to the general (p. 79). Like Arnold, Malcolm is a man who has won his military reputation through merit, not through connections. He is an unflawed Arnold "who never joined in the indiscriminate censure" (p. 111) of his erstwhile chief. When Malcolm turns out in the final chapter to be the scion of the same aristocratic English family as Grace herself, Peterson is not endorsing decadent English nobility (the family is Hanoverian and in its opposition to the Jacobites almost surrogate American). Rather is he presenting, full-fledged, his ideal hero, the perfect gentleknight whose sympathies are entirely American; Malcolm goes to England to claim his estates, but returns to live in America. So Walworth, the planter of *The Cabin and Parlor*, "the heir of one of the few rich old families we have left in America" (p. 166), has polished his native American-ness by travel in Europe, just as Walter Carrington and Talbot, even if their names did not so signify, are English noblemen in American guise. Peterson, like many nineteenth-century Americans, loved a lord, but could only admit his love if he could invest his lord with American qualities.

Yet in assigning his heroes cavalier qualities, even where these are united with such northern attributes as industry—many of his heroes are successful lawyers—and the civic-mindedness, supporting his own concern for national unity, which prompts so many to enter politics, Peterson cannot fail to notice the very ambiguity of those cavalier qualities, similar as they are to those of the English Tory classes. Arnold’s Tory qualities are in balance with his Patriot qualities, and so make of him a tragic hero. But the tragic villains of Peterson’s fiction are distinctly southern, with their Tory qualities outweighing their Patriot ones. Even they, however—Aylesford, and Cranford of *Cruising in the Last War*—attract Peterson by their aristocratic grace, and reveal his unflagging admiration for the southern type, even when fatally flawed.

The second impediment to the union of hero and heroine in Peterson’s fiction is that she is already betrothed, usually as a familial duty. That she adheres to her involuntary arrangement is

25 As Major Gordon of *Kate Aylesford* and Talbot of *The Old Stone Mansion* both do. Typical is Carrington of *The Valley Farm* who runs for Congress as an independent, defeating "the old parties"—the knight unmarred by politics.
but further testimony to her Amazonian heroism. That the intended
bridegroom is so often a cousin finds Peterson rejecting another
symbol of decadent European aristocracy, the forced, loveless
dynastic marriage. Yet his attachment to the cavalier ideal leaves
him unable to reject out of hand the caste system; the cousin has to
be a scapegrace, a kidnaper and murderer like Aylesford, or a deserter
turned pirate like Cranford, to justify its rejection on other grounds.

The third impediment, the divergent views of hero and heroine
as to the nature of the marital relation itself, is of much greater
significance, summoning up the analogy drawn, consciously or
otherwise, by many nineteenth-century writers—and most notably
by Mrs. Stowe herself—between the Negro shackled in bondage and
the wife-mother shackled in marriage. Seen thus, Peterson’s concern
for a greater role for woman in nineteenth-century marriage, yet
his rejection of the notion of her autonomy, is one with his defense of
the institution of slavery in *The Cabin and Parlor*, and his projection
of eventual emancipation for the Negro. The wife and the Negro
slave are well cared for; are there not worse slaves than these? The
question posed in so many of the replies to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
appears early in Peterson’s writings. When Margaret in *The Old
Stone Mansion* becomes a town dressmaker and when the orphan
in *The Valley Farm* has similarly to make her living in the private
houses of the rich, they are treated as slaves. Strictures against a
“defective social organization” which allows the exploitation of
one human being by another, where the rich are “blood-sucking
pelicans,” are to be found frequently in Peterson’s novels and
sketches. Thus he perorates in “The Seamstress,” a sentimental
two-page anecdote of the death of such an indigent exploitee: “She
had found relief. But there are others, almost, if not quite as desti-
tute, who struggle and struggle on. Is there no one to care for
these?” In a later story, “Ye Pay Tithe of Mint,” he has a rich
man recognize in a corpse his own deprived child, and sees the
world praise the rich man for his charity as he buries in the family
plot what seems to be but an indigent stranger. “But there is a God
in heaven,” Peterson closes. “There will be a Judgment Day!”

---

27 *Peterson’s*, XV, 5 (May, 1849), 158.
This latter sketch, suggestively, is written under the pseudonym of J. Thornton Randolph, the name which Peterson used in 1852 to publish his reply to Uncle Tom's Cabin. The seamstress, the starving poor, the slave (and like many southern apologists, Peterson does not confine this term to the Negro servitor; the planter's wife, and even the planter, might be slaves no less than the blacks) are all brothers under the skin. Yet if in The Cabin and Parlor Peterson is willing to see good in the institution of slavery without becoming any more of a Legree than he is a Garrison, so, in The Valley Farm (1850) and The Old Stone Mansion (1859), is he neither feminist nor domineering patriarch. The basic plots of these two novels are almost identical, with a young orphan girl taken into an unsympathetic uncle's house, the rivalry between the poor relation and another more favored girl (the employer's daughter in one novel, the girl's cousin in the other) for the hand of the hero, who is alienated from the narrator-heroine by a misunderstanding, the heroine's acceptance of menial employment, and the final reunion with the hero, the scales fallen from his eyes. The exchanges between Margaret Gray and Talbot her fiancé in the later novel constitute Peterson's fullest discussion of the proper balance of power in nineteenth-century wedlock. Margaret is going to join her cousin, who has made a disastrous marriage to an adventurer whom Talbot the lawyer has recently confounded as an impostor, and Talbot forbids her to go. The argument which follows is essentially one-sided, for Peterson does not allow his heroine to argue with much conviction, and the line is that the man's will must prevail, else in irreconcilable disputes no unity of action would be possible. "A house divided against itself," says Talbot, using a phrase which had acquired an added pregnancy of meaning only a year before the writing of the novel, "cannot stand." The second prong of the pro-masculine argument is that women should not be employed in public life, for woman is "more delicate, more refined, more ideal, more religious than man is." Women who "play the part of man" become mannish. Margaret does not deny the validity of Talbot's arguments; it is his suspected impugnment of her femininity—does he think her mannish?—at which she takes umbrage, and indeed their potent validity is confirmed later by her experiences in the world of labor: "What I had seen . . . had proved to me that it was the social code, less than
any legal one, which was in fault, and that the great oppressor of woman was her own sex."\(^{29}\)

"A house divided against itself cannot stand." Marriage can only exist where the man is the breadwinner and protector, for woman is of a different temper altogether, to be protected and indeed mastered, short of tyranny; all this justified by the Scripture: "Would husband ever oppress wife, or wife infringe on a husband's rights, if both lived up to the Bible, and exercised Christian forbearance and love toward each other?"\(^{30}\) But the ultimate justification lies in the social organism which has created such a system: "Society holds the husband responsible for the wife's behavior; he ought, therefore, to control it. . . ."\(^{31}\)

Thus the marital system, even though it harbors injustice, can only be altered by subverting the society that sustains it. Yet even within that social structure, the worst injustices to women come not from the men who made the laws, but from the women who take advantage of them. Women are betrayed by their own sisters.

It is not necessary, perhaps, to labor again the parallelism in the minds of writers like Peterson and Mrs. Stowe, between the situation of woman and black. The slavery system, too, is sustained by a society which would be destroyed by its removal, the system is justified by Biblical precedent, and the master is conscientiously responsible for his slave. Moreover, as the southern apologists were quick to point out, the worst injustices are suffered by Negroes at the hands of northerners and abolitionists, in a sense by their own brothers. The Negro who works for himself, too, no less than the woman who does so, is denying his own destiny, and is no longer the happy dancer-singer of the plantation.

This then is Peterson's woman: noble, heroic, but of necessity subordinate to man, whose protection she needs. Just so his blacks are not the obsequious darkies of pro-slavery fiction, but are nonetheless closer to Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom than to Nat Turner or Toussaint L'Ouverture.


\(^{30}\) *Peterson's*, XX, 3 (September, 1851). This is a review of Catherine Beecher's *Wrongs of Women*.

\(^{31}\) *Old Stone Mansion*, 123.
The American woman, much more than the European, is, even when the necessarily qualified definition is given the term, her husband’s “equal”:

How fortunate the female whose lot is cast in America.... Man approaches to his highest development only where woman is free. As an equal she ennobles him, as an inferior she but degrades. In the one case he is refined, elevated, strengthened in true manliness; in the other he is brutalized in proportion to the depth of her bondage.32

How fortunate, too, is the Negro whose lot is cast in the South! “I regard slavery,” says the hero of The Cabin and Parlor, “as the rudest of the relations between capital and labor. It is fit only for that state of society where the master is highly civilized and the slave is at the bottom of the human scale, and the fitness ceases as soon as the serf progresses in development” (p. 258). To hold one’s equal in bondage would be as degrading, in Peterson’s view, as to brutalize one’s inferior; the black must be prepared for emancipation, prepared to take his rightful place beside the white. The principal apologia for slavery that The Cabin and Parlor contains is the point that, imperfect as the system is, the black is better treated under the patriarchal system than the northern wage-slave or the European serf. The Cabin and Parlor, the only “reply” which Mrs. Stowe deemed worthy of counterstatement,33 is also more literally than any of the others a “reply” to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. In Uncle Peter, it reminds the reader that to be a saint a black does not have to be martyred, in Mrs. Courtenay that a hypochondriacal plantation mistress does not have to turn monster in her widowhood, in Isabel Courtenay that little Eva is quite as likely as Eliza to perish in snow and ice, for “de life of de slave is hard, I ’fess. But harder is dat of de white man in season, ‘specially when de Lord sends poverty on de widders an’ orphans” (p. 44). When the plantation owner Mr. Courtenay dies suddenly in the midst of his daughter’s birthday celebrations—silencing the happy blacks singing and playing the banjo—his financial improvidence is revealed. As a result of his dealings with a typically corrupt northern firm—Messrs. Skin and Flint—the estate is ruined, and his wife,

32 Peterson’s, XXV, 2 (February, 1854), 102.
33 A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin (Boston, 1853), 133.
daughter and two sons consigned to poverty. Not so the slaves, who
are sold to kind masters and who continue to live the carefree
existence they enjoyed under the Courtenays. The plot follows two
northern journeys, that of the house slaves Charles and Cora, who
flee in advance of the sale and who suffer intolerable privations—of
which Charles dies—in the North, and that of Horace Courtenay,
thirteen, who goes to seek employment to sustain the family, and
who also dies, under the taskmasterly treatment of an employer who
is intractably and volubly opposed to Negro slavery. Isabel, a
typical example of Peterson's noble heroine—"The carriage of her
fine person was instinct with her high and heroic soul" (p. 14)—
teaches school for a living, and sinks under the rigorous experience,
the family being kept alive primarily by the victuals which Uncle
Peter anonymously leaves at their door. The *deus ex machina* is a
slaveholder living in the North, Walworth—"The broad, massive
brow; the deep-set eye; and the firm mouth were full of majestic
power" (p. 167)—who rescues Cora from a northern mob bent on
killing Negroes and burning their homes, attends the deathbed of
Horace, defends the slave institution against Horace's employer
Sharpe, as well as against the English M. P. Brawler who, "dis-
comfited," "slunk from the room" (p. 176). Walworth arranges the
restoration of the Courtenay property, and marries Isabel, as Uncle
Peter and the others dance and sing, in the general restoration of the
status of the opening chapter, to the tune of "immortal 'Dan
Tucker'" (p. 10).

This, then, is Charles Jacobs Peterson, patriot (or jingoist),
racial moderate (or stereotypist), patron (or patronizer) of American
womanhood, who above all gave the American public for nearly
fifty years what it wanted to read. In one last role he demands
attention, that of literary mentor and critic. His published literary
criticism deserves the barest notice; his literary friendships shed
much more light on the man. It may be of antiquarian interest to
see him hail Elizabeth Barrett Browning as "the first of English
female poets, living or dead," and it may be of even more decided
interest to see him refer, in 1854, to "A Summer Night" as "evoking
the full tragedy of modern life," and comment that "of both Massey
and Arnold the world will yet hear more" (though the coupling of
Gerald Massey's name with Arnold's might suggest a lack of true
critical acumen). What is much more suggestive is the relationships Peterson had with other writers, and with one in particular, for, casting aside the correspondence he had with Charles Kingsley, Bret Harte, William Archer, casting aside the much closer friendships he had with George Henry Boker, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Ann S. Stephens, his co-editor for many years on Peterson’s, casting aside what may be called his tutorship of Lowell, who seems to have basked in Peterson’s praise of his promise until that promise began to be fulfilled, we are left with the only connection in which Peterson survives in print after 1920—his association with Poe. That Poe learned anything of writing from Peterson is not likely, and that Peterson learned anything from Poe is only less so. It is true that in one of his “nature” pieces Peterson sits at the edge of Niagara and has an “insane wish” to jump—akin one might say to Pym’s “longing to fall” or the promptings of the imp of the perverse—but Peterson’s general attitude towards the supernatural, which rarely enters his sketches, is one of healthy skepticism: an anecdote of childhood finds him mistaking the family donkey for a spirit (“The ridicule of that day cured me of my belief in ghosts”), and when the supernatural seems to lower in the mystery of the haunted chamber in The Old Stone Mansion, it is discovered that a pair of counterfeiters are using the reputation of the room as a mask for their criminal activities.

What does, however, seem probable, is that Peterson had his small part to play in the convoluted relationship between Poe and his evil genius Rufus Griswold. The first number of Graham’s appeared in January, 1841, with Peterson already working for the magazine; Poe joined the staff in February. Griswold, who met Poe in April

---

34 Peterson’s, XXV, 4 (April, 1854), 330-332.
37 Peterson’s, XXVIII, 3 (September, 1855), 183-186.
38 Ibid., XIX, 6 (June, 1851), 251.
while compiling his *Poets and Poetry of America*, was called in by Graham to replace Poe in the spring of 1842, after Poe’s long absence from the magazine on account of his own ill-health and that of his wife. It has been suggested that a quarrel between Poe and Peterson may have caused Poe’s dismissal from *Graham’s*, which came in April, 1842, but it may be that here too Griswold’s underhand testimony is at work. When Poe, at thirty-two, joined *Graham’s*, the twenty-two year old Peterson was moved from literary editorial duties to fashion editing, and Graham himself testified many years later to the lively arguments between the two. Poe’s duties on his dismissal were taken over by Griswold—is it possible that this tormented figure procured the dismissal himself?—and a year later Griswold himself was dismissed, this time certainly at Peterson’s instigation. What followed was characteristic of Griswold—a series of anonymous letters, aimed at discrediting Peterson, and attributed to Poe! What may stand as the final word on the whole matter, substantiated by Peterson’s continuing favorable attitude toward Poe, and the not infrequent financial assistance he gave him after Poe left *Graham’s*, is contained in a letter Peterson wrote in 1880 to Poe’s biographer, J. H. Ingram. Protesting—and not, surely, too much—his characteristic unwillingness to enter the controversy, especially after the other two writers were dead, Peterson goes on:

I may say, however, that Griswold’s biography of Poe was (not to mince words) a malicious libel, that he knew this when he printed it. As I told Mr. Griswold this, to his face, I feel no hesitation in stating it to you. The truth is that Griswold hated Poe, but also feared him: however this libel on Poe was kept back till the latter’s death. It is, I suppose, what Griswold meant, when he told me once, “if I survive Poe, I’ve a rod in pickle for him.” For Griswold was a coward, among other things, & certainly not restrained by any high sense of honor.\(^{39}\)

When Griswold’s *Prose Writers of America* appeared in 1846, it contained, of course, no sample of Peterson’s writing, though it anthologized some who, his peers in age, might be called his peers in quality—Cornelius Mathews as novelist and magazinist, J. T. Headley as popular historian, E. P. Whipple as critic. Yet, as these names suggest, inclusion in Griswold’s collection was no warranty of

\(^{39}\) Ingram MSS, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, quoted by Prestwich, 43.
posterity's continuing attention. That attention, in Peterson's case, ought to be fleeting. That he wrote what is probably the representative fictional apology for slavery of his day, that he was friend to Poe and literary counsellor to the youthful Lowell, that he was editor of the most popular magazine of the period ought, however, to be enough to keep a man's name at least in the footnotes of literary history.

*University of Toronto*  
*BARRIE HAYNE*