1953

The Rogue in the Life and Humor of the Old Southwest.

Frank Tryon Meriwether

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/8062

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
THE ROGUE IN THE LIFE AND HUMOR OF THE OLD SOUTHWEST

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Frank Tryon Kerivether
B. A., University of North Carolina, 1948
A. A., Louisiana State University, 1949
August, 1952
MANUSCRIPT THESES

Unpublished theses submitted for the master's and doctor's degrees and deposited in the Louisiana State University Library are available for inspection. Use of any thesis is limited by the rights of the author. Bibliographical references may be noted, but passages may not be copied unless the author has given permission. Credit must be given in subsequent written or published work.

A library which borrows this thesis for use by its clientele is expected to make sure that the borrower is aware of the above restrictions.

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
I wish to express my thanks to Professor H. Arlin Turner, under whose guidance I began this work, and to Professor Lewis P. Simpson, under whose guidance I completed it; to Professors W. J. Olive and H. M. Caffee, who read it; to the staff of the library of Louisiana State University, especially Mrs. Ruth Campbell in the Louisiana Room and Mrs. Anne Dyson in the reserve room; and finally to my wife, Doris H. Meriwether, who typed it for me.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ vi

CHAPTER

I. BACKGROUNDS

A. Rogue literature, a basic definition .............. 1
   1. Geographical .............................................. 1
   2. Social ....................................................... 6
B. Area of the rogues of the old Southwest ...... 4
   1. Geographical .............................................. 4
   2. Social ....................................................... 6
C. Origins of the rogue literature ................ 8
   1. Migration from East ................................. 8
   2. Action of frontier on individual .............. 11
   3. Action of European tradition on frontier humor ........................................ 17
D. Rogue, a literary definition .................... 21
   1. European definition modified to fit frontier ........................................ 21
   2. Categories of American rogues ............ 27
E. Initial and terminal dates of frontier humor ........................................ 28
F. Approach to rogues determined by the nature of the materials .......... 30

II. HONEST MEN AND ROGUES

A. Writings of upper classes showing elements of roguery .................. 32
   1. Ministers .................................................. 33
   2. Lawyers ................................................... 43
   3. Doctors .................................................... 50
   4. Actors ..................................................... 55
   5. Planters ................................................... 60
   6. Miscellaneous ......................................... 65
B. Standards for evaluating true rogues dependent on upper classes ........ 69

III. THE REAL ROGUES AND CRIMINALS

A. Conditions fostering crime ......................... 73
B. Records of criminals showing elements of roguery
   1. Early rogues
   2. John Murrell
   3. James Copeland
C. True rogues
   1. Typical horsetrader
   2. Typical innkeepers
   3. Gamblers
      a. Johnathan Green
      b. George Devol
   4. Other roguish professions
   5. David Theo. Hines, the model picaro

IV. THE MEN OF LEGEND
   A. Process of myth-making on frontier
   B. Rogue elements in political figures
      1. Andrew Jackson
      2. Sam Houston
      3. Davy Crockett
   C. Rogue elements in other prominent figures
      1. James Bowie
      2. Mike Fink
      3. Jean Lafitte
   D. Effect of mythical status on roguery

V. UPPER-CLASS FIGURES IN FRONTIER HUMOR
   A. Uses of gentlemen in frontier humor
      1. Contrast for rougher men
      2. Central figure
   B. Limits of roguery for gentlemen
      1. Taking advantage of naivete
      2. Embarrassing undesirable person
      3. Playing jokes on other people
      4. Variations of the duel
      5. Hunting pranks
      6. Miscellaneous
   C. Two gentlemen jokesters
      1. Ned Brace
      2. Madison Tensas
   D. The gentleman joker and the 18th century wit

VI. PICAROS OF THE OLD SOUTHWEST
   A. Comparison and contrast with European picaros
   B. Some frontier picaros
ABSTRACT

This work is concerned with the rogue character as he appears in the life and in the humor of the old Southwest a hundred years ago, a territory conforming roughly to what is now called the "Deep South." The presence of rogues in the literature of the area, especially in frontier humor, has long been recognized by students of American letters, and scholars since the time of Henry Watterson's *Oddities in Southern Life and Character* have commented casually that such characters as Simon Suggs are obviously drawn in the rogue tradition. There is, however, no appreciable record of the literature read by the creators of frontier humor; and because of the absence of positive proof of literary influence, it is commonly assumed that the frontier rogue is a spontaneous development, reflecting the life of the old Southwest. This study reinforces that conclusion. It does not, however, deny the possibility of literary influence on the rogue and considers him in relation to the picaresque tradition of Europe. Finally, this study establishes a basic classification of the frontier rogues, separating them into three categories: the gentleman joker, the true picaro,
and the frontier Puck.

The original materials used are of two types: historical writings, consisting primarily of memoirs, recollections, and diaries of the residents of the area; and humorous literature, primarily consisting of the major works of writers on the frontier and various contemporary collections of frontier humorous tales drawn from newspapers. In addition, two volumes of the *Spirit of the Times*, an outstanding source of sketches and tales of the old Southwest, were surveyed in order to provide examples of the rogue from stories which were not anthologized. All of the materials, both historical and literary, were chosen for the purpose of providing a representative selection covering the entire area and a wide variety of character types.

Because of this two-fold division of source materials, the study as a whole is separated into two major parts. One part considers the rogue elements to be found in the life of the frontier society as they are documented by historical records. The other considers the rogue in frontier humor as he is manifested in the gentleman joker, the true picaro, and the frontier Puck. One chapter, serving as a bridge between materials that are historical and those that are fictional, examines the elements of roguery to be found in accounts of such actual figures as David Crockett and Mike Fink, expanded by the popular
imagination until they became myths.

The historical materials reveal that elements similar to those of the picaresque tale existed in frontier society and that many of the criminal elements of that society can be appropriately called picaros. Furthermore, even the better classes in the old Southwest present examples of minor rougeries and of rogue-like practical jokes. The rogue, then, was a matter of fact in the old Southwest, and it is quite possible that a literature of roguery could have developed in the area without any influences other than those of the society that created it. Roughly corresponding to the group of respectable citizens were the characters in humorous literature who were classified as gentleman jokers. In general, however, the jokers derive from the eighteenth century wit as exemplified in the Tatler and Spectator, but the characters were made coarse by exposure to frontier society and their jokes made more extravagant and violent. The picaros, those backwoodsmen living off society, showed a striking resemblance to the rogues of Europe, although no exact parallels in incident were found and no attempt was made to force the European definition of the type on these figures whose surface characteristics, at least, are definitely a reflection of the frontier. Finally, the frontier Pucks have but few antecedents in literature about human beings. They are related to the fairies and elves of Europe.
Frontier humor probably exerted a considerable influence on the development of American realism, for it was one of the first attempts to depict accurately aspects of American life and character without the restrictions imposed by genteel propriety. This influence is perhaps the reason that frontier humor and the rogue as he was presented in frontier humor did not die out of American literature after the Civil War when authors writing about the South turned to local color, the romantic ante-bellum South, or the New South for inspiration. As a matter of fact, frontier humor is still alive in the writings of William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, and other present-day authors who draw characters from the lower classes of the South.
CHAPTER I

Backgrounds

From the first awakenings of his social consciousness man must have been aware of the existence of certain individuals blessed with a callous unconcern for the mores of their society; and in his earliest literary endeavors man found a place to record these interesting moral atavisms. The more innocuous of them, those whose actions tend less to the destruction of others than to the preservation of themselves, are today called rogues. As it is interpreted literally, the word rogue has a wide range of application; for it suits equally well the mischievous prankster, the idle vagrant, and the dishonest, unprincipled rascal. In literature, however, the term is most often associated with the last type of individual and can be roughly equated to picaro, a more restrictive classification denoting an irresponsible young man of low birth who wanders through life obtaining material necessities by parasitism, fraud, and theft, especially as this type is exemplified in the picaresque tale of the Spanish siglo d'oro.

Understandably the literature of roguery has always
existed as a sub-literary form, never quite gaining the social acceptance of literature dealing with more respectable persons. There is, however, at least one aspect in which rogue literature is more rewarding to the student than the more conventional and more highly regarded forms; it presents a nearly accurate picture of the people and the times it portrays, albeit a picture usually limited to the lower orders of society and their environment. There is no question that a person wishing to recreate London and its peoples in the 1590's will find more to his purpose in Greene's coney-catching pamphlets than in the upper-class literature of the times—or even than in the early dramas of such a genius as Shakespeare.

In addition, rogue literature is decidedly intended for popular consumption; although much of it purports to inform the reader of the underworld so that he may avoid the snares laid for him by "sharpers," its real purpose is to entertain him with an account of an uninhibited character who makes his living at the expense of society through superior cunning. It is, then, a form of escape literature, frequently humorous in its point of view, and a form which obviously has been of considerable interest to a large number of readers. It is not surprising either that the older rogue stories have held their appeal even though the modern reader may have only the vaguest idea of the setting in which the rogue moves and no real understanding of the social and
economic problems he faces. The appeal is the same as that possessed by Br'er Rabbit, recently revived as a major American folk hero, or by the "private eye" of contemporary detective fiction.

The mention of Br'er Rabbit and the detective implies that Europe is not the only home of the rogue story, that America, too, has a literature of roguery; and the truth of the implication is obvious. One versed in the literature of Europe, however, might argue that the resemblance between Sam Spade and Gil Blas is negligible, that Gil Blas struggles for existence against the evils of a social system which would deny him and the members of his class the opportunity of obtaining an honest living, whereas Sam Spade contends with social evil only in the concrete personification of criminals—among whom Gil Blas might be listed if he lived today. Moreover, though Br'er Rabbit may represent the class struggle of the slave, it could be argued that the social implications of his struggle are buried deep under the pleasant ramifications of a beast fable designed to entertain children. In other words, this literature of roguery has little connection with the traditional genre as found in Europe. Such an argument, if the word traditional is accepted as a part of the definition of the literary type, is obviously unanswerable.

There is a body of rogue materials in American literature, however, that does follow traditional lines, that
in many instances duplicates the attitudes found in Europe. In spite of this, two interesting paradoxes exist for the person attempting to establish a connection between the American rogue and what is obviously his European ancestor. There is little demonstrable evidence to prove any literary connection between the American rogue and the European, no proof that many writers of American rogue stories ever read the European; and the prevailing opinion is that the body of humor in which the rogue is found is a spontaneous development in America. Secondly, the American rogue developed not in the slums of the large cities along the Atlantic coast, where the poverty and the oppressive nature of a fixed economic system would duplicate those of Europe, but on the frontier, particularly in the Southwest, which America has long regarded as the land of opportunity. Some exploration of these facts seems an appropriate preliminary to any detailed study of the genus rogue as he is found in the literature of the old Southwest.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, American woodsmen, foremost among whom was Daniel Boone, crossed the Appalachians and saw before them a land that was to inspire a preacher years later to describe heaven as a "regular Kentuck of a place." This was America's first Southwest, an area bounded on the north by the Ohio river; on the east by the Appalachians, except in the south where it protruded into the state of Georgia; on the south by
the Gulf; and extending westward a hundred miles or so from the Mississippi river. News of the new land spread back to the coast where the original colonies, new grown in population and prosperity, sat with their faces turned toward Europe. But not all of the settlers east of the mountains were pleased with existing conditions; some were hunters like Boone, who tended to resent the encroachment of civilization into their domain; some were poor immigrants seeking free land and fresh opportunity; some were independent souls wanting to get away from the civilization on the seaboard for their own personal reasons. "With the close of the French and Indian War, in spite of the King's royal proclamation to the contrary, this pent up population began to trickle across the mountains and down into the valleys on the headwaters of the Tennessee River."

Further to the south, in western Georgia, where the mountain barrier was not so severe and penetration into the wilds did not require the determined effort of groups of pioneers organized into convoys, individuals had settled perhaps even earlier. This class, known as "Indian country men," adopted in part the culture of the Indians, even taking Indian wives. "These were the men who for various reasons had left civilization to live among the

Indians long before the true American pioneer came."

Much has been said of the "true American pioneer."

James Hall, in 1835, commented: "Those who came first—the Boones, the Kentons, the Whitleys—were rough, uneducated men; the enterprising, fearless, hardy pioneers."

And at the end of the century, Frederick Jackson Turner commented even more glowingly:

Besides the ideals of conquest and of discovery, the pioneer had the ideal of personal development, free from social and governmental constraint. He came from a civilization based on individual competition, and he brought the conception with him to the wilderness where a wealth of resources and innumerable opportunities gave it scope.

The purpose of this work is not to quarrel with these interpretations nor to disagree with such interpretations of the poor white settlers as this of Frank Owsley:

They thought of themselves as plain folk, except they would have said "plain folks," and they would have had pride in their self-description; for to them it connoted the sum of the solid virtues—integrity, independence, self-respect, courage, love of freedom, love of their fellow man, and love of God.

Such folk there undoubtedly were in the old Southwest; such folk, however, though they may be the backbone of the nation,

2 Ibid., p. 4.


seldom become the materials of literature.

There was another group entering into the territory with, or soon after, the pioneers, who were interesting materials for literature, the lower-class whites. In sheer quantity, the literature concerned with this class of poor whites rivals in the nineteenth century that treating the much more famous Southern planter. The class had existed along the fringes of the settlements farther to the east, for one of the earliest traces of the shiftless white is seen in William Byrd's *History of the Dividing Line*, in 1728. Byrd's lubberlanders, living in the swampy frontier between Virginia and North Carolina, are certainly the same race found later in the sandhills of the Southwest frontier. Here are Byrd's squatters almost a century and a half later, on the eve of the Civil War, and the men are still lazy as ever:

Their wives and daughters spin and weave the wool or cotton into such description of cloth as is in most vogue for the time being; while the husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers betake themselves to their former idle habits—hunting, beef-shooting, gander-pulling, marble playing, and getting drunk. ... They are about the laziest two-legged animals that walk erect on the face of the Earth. Even their motions are slow, and their speech is a sickening drawl,...while their thoughts and ideas seem likewise to creep along at a snail's pace.... In physical appearance, the Sandhillers are far from prepossessing. Lank, lean, angular, and bony, with flaming red, or flaxen, or sandy, or carroty-colored hair, sallow complexion, awkward manners, and a natural stupidity or dullness of intellect that almost surpasses belief; they present in the main a pitiable sight to the truly benevolent, as
well as a ludicrous one to those who are mirthfully disposed.  

This then was the class of people on which most of the Southwestern rogue literature was based.

But where did these ne'er-do-wells come from? It has already been mentioned that Byrd had seen them on the frontier between Virginia and North Carolina. Did they spring up as a direct result of the planting of a European parent-stock in American soil? D. H. Hundley, an early commentator on Southern society, seemed to feel so, that they were the descendants of English paupers:

Just as the abolishment of the old feudal base tenures has been as yet productive of no perceptible advantages to the Old World peasants, so likewise the removal of the English paupers to the New World, to the enjoyment of all the immunities of freemen, and to a land of such cornucopious abundance that it may be said almost to flow with milk and honey, has as yet been productive of no material improvement in their condition as a class. An individual here and there may have been imbued with a more manly feeling than he otherwise would have attained unto; but as a class, as a community, they remain in status quo. Everywhere they are just alike, possess pretty much the same characteristics, the same vernacular, the same boorishness, and the same habits; although in different localities, they are known by different names.

It seems more probable that many of these rough backwoodsmen were sifted out of society from the top. Many of

---

7 Ibid., pp. 256-257.
them were doubtless originally of the poor-but-honest
class of farmers mentioned above.

The poorest of these farmers gradually merged into
the bottom rank of southern rural white people, the
listless and squalid dwellers to be found in many
widely scattered localities, but chiefly in the
sandy ridges of the plantation districts, the pine
barrens of the coastal plains, of Florida, and of
central and eastern Mississippi, and the sand hills
along the fall line...they lived in shiftless
poverty on what the half-hearted cultivation of a
few acres, hunting, and fishing could offer in the
way of subsistence, while occasional stealthy bar­
tering with slaves and stealing of cattle and hogs
made them a nuisance to planters.8

The respectable farming class, perhaps the various trades
also, furnished at least some of the rogue whites of the
frontier.

Others were a part of the migration from the east:

Near the vanguard of the throng which poured into
the West from this direction, following closely
upon the heels of Boone and other such hunters and
adventurers, came large numbers of disbanded Revol­
ationary soldiers, many of them armed with land
warrants as a reward for their services in the war.
Many of them were turbulent spirits bent on gain­
ing a competence by no matter what means. With
them began the era of the speculation in lands
which occupied the attention of a large part of the
population of the West until long after the pioneer
period had come to a close.9

Here are not only potential rogues but also their potential

8 W. T. Couch, ed., Culture in the South, University

9 Ralph L. Rusk, The Literature of the Middle Western
Frontier, Columbia University Press, New York, 1926, I,
13-14.
form of roguery—land trading. And with the disbanded soldiers may well be grouped younger sons of plantation families on the coast, ex-owners of worn-out farms further east—anyone with a desire to acquire land or to make a success by dealings in land.

Still others did not have to become rogues after they reached the frontier. As James Hall remarked:

A frontier is often a retreat of loose individuals, who, if not familiar with crime, have very blunt perceptions of virtue. The genuine woodsman, the real pioneer, are independent, brave, and upright; but as the jackal pursues the lion to devour his leavings, the footsteps of the sturdy hunter are closely pursued by miscreants destitute of his noble qualities. These are the poorest and idlest of the human race, averse to labour, and impatient of the restraints of law and the courtesies of civilized society.... A still worse class also infested our borders—desperadoes flying from justice, suspected or convicted felons escaped from the grasp of the law, who sought safety in the depth of the forest, or in the infancy of the civil regulations. The horse-thief, the counterfeiter, and the robber, found here a secure retreat, or a new theatre for the perpetration of crime.10

These ready-made rogues and villains were obviously not going to join the respectable farmers and merchants in wrestling out a living from the land; they were interested in the quickest and easiest manner of making money; in short, in living at the expense of society.

The poor-white class—unsuccessful farmers, disbanded soldiers, and miscellaneous ne'er-do-wells who inhabited the less desirable locales—provided the literature of the

10 Sketches of the West, II, 86-87.
Southwest with most of its rogues; but the upper classes must not be omitted, for they furnished their share of rogues also. One of Longstreet’s most engaging rogues, Ned Brace, is assumed to be at least moderately well-to-do; Madison Tensas’s swamp doctor is certainly a respectable person; and Thompson’s Major Jones is a member of the solid middle class of farmers in Georgia. What is more, the autobiographies and biographies of respectable men—doctors, lawyers, even preachers—reveal that the most upstanding among them participated at least occasionally in roguery. Of course, the roguery of these people is not so scurrilous or violent as that of the poor white, but it is roguery nevertheless.

For an explanation of this widespread tendency to do mischief, one must look to the frontier and its interaction with the character of the frontiersman. In the first place, the frontier produces almost immediate change in the appearance and manners of the man.

It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and rowing with a sharp stick; he shout the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion. In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails.

11 The Frontier in American History, p. 4.
This uprooting of men and transplanting them to an environment where all their old customs were virtually useless obviously would make some alteration in their conception of moral values.

Moreover, these men at first were not even bound by the restrictions imposed by regularized labor.

Strictly speaking, they were not farmers; for although they engaged in agriculture, they depended chiefly on their guns for subsistence and were lured to the west rather by the glories of the boundless forest and the abundance of game, than by the fertility of the new lands, and the ample resources of the country.  

These were men without roots, spending much of their time alone in the forest, free to do whatever they pleased. Lucy Hazard's comment on the social life of Joe Meeks, who went with the Ashley-Henry expedition up the Missouri in 1822, characterizes the carpe-diem spirit of the backwoodsman who lived in the old Southwest. "A big drunk at the rendezvous, a few pretty half-breed girls, a few fights and jokes—these were the things that made life worth living for the happy-go-lucky trapper." And these were the hardy pioneers who were the true makers of democracy. Could the rascals and the success-seekers who followed on their heels be expected to improve on this example?

But even more important in the development of the

---

12 Sketches of the West, p. 55.
rogue is that quality of the frontier which made guile as important as strength.

The pioneer, as well as the Indian warrior, felt as much triumph in deceiving his enemy by a successful device, as in conquering him in battle; and usually acquired more lasting fame among his comrades for the former, than from the latter exploit; for in the circumstances under which they were mutually placed, cunning was a more valuable quality than courage. 14

Of course, it was commendable to out-trick the tricky redskin; one needed to keep his scalp. It was also all right to get rid of a poor horse or a load of furs for considerably more than actual value; that was just sharp trading. The fact remains, however, that selling worthless land to greenhorns and "shearing suckers" at the old shell game are just one step removed from the respectable customs of the hunter and trapper. The rogue was at home in the old Southwest, except that he always had to be on his guard to avoid getting tricked by his honest neighbor.

Important, too, is the fact that for many years there was little or no legal restriction in the Southwest. Many settlers had left their homes back east just one jump ahead of the law or "at the suggestion of friends," and the frontier was the place to go. By the time law and order had arrived, the wayward citizen could have established himself as a well-to-do resident of the area—or could have moved on farther west. For the time being, the frontier

14 Sketches of the West, pp. 55-56.
provided a convenient loss of identity and responsibility.

If the old South West was the Happy Hunting Ground on this earth, it was also the Paradise of pirates and picaroons. It was perhaps even better than the later Southwest or the Old West. The motto was the same for all—"Be shifty in a new land!" But the swag and the getaway were superior in the lower South of 1800-1860....The booming and crashing thirties and the roaring and exploding forties were the golden age of con and greengoods men.15

Nor can the rejection of old ideas and culture be over-emphasized as a potent force in the creation of the character of the frontier settler. Ralph L. Rusk has noted:

...the conquest of the Western wilderness was on the whole a business of prosaic economic causes exceedingly destructive and wasteful of the human material used in the process. The price paid for the conquest was great for that generation, and it precluded for generations to come a generous devotion to cultural ideals.16

Many of the settlers recognized this fact and accepted it as a necessary part of getting ahead in the new life.

Turner quotes a letter from one such settler to a friend back east:

If you value ease more than money or prosperity, don't come....Next, if you can't stand seeing your old New England ideas, ways of doing, and living and in fact, all the good old Yankee fashions knocked out of shape and altered, or thrown by as unsuited to the climate, don't be caught out here.17

16 Literature of the Middle Western Frontier, p. 76.
17 The Frontier in American History, p. 348.
All along the frontier, the individual was forced to lose much that was valuable in the way of tradition, and the settlers of the old Southwest were no exception. Conventional moral codes had at least to be suspended until civilization caught up with the pioneer.

Another aspect of this cultural loss had even more influence on the development of the rogue. It was the excessive emphasis placed on material advancement. As has already been stated, many of the residents of the area had come with one thing in mind—to acquire cheap land and to make a fortune by exploiting it or reselling it; everywhere prosperity was the goal. Farmers leaving worn-out farms in the east, younger sons wanting to establish their own dynasties, traders wanting quick returns, and professional cheats and sharpers looking for an easy dollar—all these helped set the tone of the new land.

The deification of Success, the moral obligation of 'making good,' that is of making money, was an inevitable development of the frontier morale. The elements of sordidness, of greed, of chicanery increased, until the frontier spirit had apparently become identified with the acquisitive instincts, until apparently the glory of the creative intuition had departed.

Such was the moral environment of the American frontier.

Success on the frontier demanded, too, a versatility unknown in a later age. On the primary level of existence, a man had to be hunter, trapper, fisherman, farmer, tanner,

18 The Frontier in American Literature, p. 277.
tailor, blacksmith, and carpenter; he had to be able to do or make for himself whatever his survival or comfort demanded. And even in more thickly settled areas life might make heavy demands, for fortune was never more fickle. A moderately well-to-do merchant might awake in the morning to find himself possessor of only a pile of ashes; a poor farmer might find his river-front farm the best available site for a dam; a man with a wagon might discover himself suddenly set up in a hauling business when he had been trained for the law. The possibilities for change were as numerous as the days on which they could occur, and the settlers had to be ready to take advantage of them. A. P. Hudson has commented:

...it is...difficult to classify a people as fluent, mercurial, casual and cantankerous as were the men and women of the lower South a hundred years ago. If not so numerous, they were as ubiquitous as the pigs of a famous story, and in places and times when "Shifty" was the motto they changed calling and character like Proteus. A man grown tired of being an unsuccessful lawyer could knock off for a couple of weeks, rub the paint off his shirt, and devastate the next county as a doctor.19

In much of the area, a shift in professions seemed to be the rule rather than the exception.

The writers who lived in the old Southwest provide ample illustration of the varied careers of the times. Even such a man as Judge Longstreet was a lawyer, legislator, editor, and educator, in addition to being a writer.

19 The Humor of the Old Deep South, p. 516.
Madison Tensas said of himself, "I was scarcely sixteen, yet I was a student of medicine, and had been, almost a painter, a cotton picker, a ploughboy, gin-driver, gentleman of leisure, cabin-boy, cook, scullion, and runaway." The list of authors with similar experiences would be long. It is no wonder that such men were able to write about rogues, considering their own picaresque existences.

These then were the people and the environment that produced the rogue literature of the old Southwest. The next questions which occur are two: How did this literature arise? and what is its relationship to the European rogue tradition? Of the literary possibilities of the frontier, Constance Rourke has observed:

Never was a place less likely to produce art if popular theories may be accepted. On our frontiers and indeed elsewhere throughout the long period of our development we are supposed to have been much too occupied by the utilitarian business of living to concern ourselves with art, too much on the move to permit that residue of social experience to form from which the artist in one way or another must draw.

Considering the lapse of culture and the relative isolation

---

20 Madison Tensas, Odd Leaves of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor (in The Swamp Doctor's Adventures in the Southwest), T. B. Peterson, Philadelphia, 1858, p. 35.

21 For a partial history see Walter Blair, Native American Humor, American Book Company, New York, 1937, pp. 63-64.

of the area from institutions of learning, cultural centers, and even books, such a statement is quite valid.

The literature then had to originate from the folk mind, carrying with it only those conventions which did not require books for their perpetuation.

To cross the Alleghenies and come with appealing force to men like these, a convention had indeed to be strong. Of literature in its refined essences they knew nothing and cared nothing, but they could tell stories with effectiveness, and they had stories worth the telling—stories often overcolored and overstrong, full of exaggeration and unheard-of metaphors, tales of Indian fights and wild beasts, stories of unrecorded tragedies, of mighty wrestlings with forces that made demi-gods of the men who won.23

In other words, the origin of this literature was the oral tale, the hunting story told around the campfire at night, the humorous relation of a horse-swap, or the graphic portrayal of a fight between two human behemoths of the frontier. All these situations are common in the literature of the Southwest, and many tales even preserve a framework—the teller in a backwoods cabin, around a campfire, or on a steamboat—clearly indicating their origin.24

As a result of its crude origin, the frontier literature was different from other American literature of the day.

---

24 For elaboration of this point see Native American Humor, pp. 70 ff.
The conscious literature was consciously edifying, it was not only polite but also moral. The Saxon insistence on ethical motivation was seldom relaxed at any section of the Atlantic seaboard. But the unconscious, or unliterary, literature of the backwoodsmen, plainsman, riverman, was frankly un-ethical, amoral. The prevailing practice is summed up in Simon Suggs' favorite saw, "It is good to be shifty in a new country"—which means that it is right and proper that one should live as merrily and comfortably as possible at the expense of others.

Thus, most of the literature is the literature of the un-educated, the crude, the adventurer—in short, of the rogue.

And yet, "What was primitive and unsophisticated about this south-western humor was not the authors and their point of view but the materials." In spite of picaresque backgrounds which had familiarized them with many phases of frontier life, the writers of tall tales were relatively cultured men—doctors, lawyers, journalists—aware of the older tradition in the East and capable of developing effectively the contrast between it and the frontier environment. They were in essence, too, local colorists, knowing that their civilization was unique and seeking to interpret it to an audience living outside their area.


27 Vid. Native American Humor, p. 64.
Baldwin, Thompson, Thorpe, Robb—all announced in prefaces that they were attempting to present an authentic picture of the frontier, a picture with a forceful appeal like none the world had ever known, a picture that was losing its verity even as they wrote because civilization was moving westward into the area.

But what of the influence of the older tradition of rogue literature on these men? The question seems unanswerable, for despite the fact that they were of the superior element culturally speaking, there are no records available to show that any of these men ever read European rogue literature. On the other hand, Marion Kelley points out that J. J. Hooper knew Roger Ascham's *Toxophilus* well enough to quote from it in his *Dog and Gun*. It is reasonable to assume from this fact that his range of reading was wide enough to have included *Gil Blas*, *Lazarillo*, or some of Smollett's heroes, but evidence is lacking to support the assumption. Walter Blair comments on Hooper's *Simon Suggs*:

Three forces, conceivably, may be back of this book: the influence of European picaresque fiction, the influence of life on the frontier, and the influence, direct or indirect, of oral literature. How much Hooper knew of the literature of Europe which detailed the adventures of rogues it is impossible to say, and it is likewise impossible to presume that, even if he knew this literature, he would have been any quicker to imitate it than most of his countrymen were. But it is possible

---

to perceive that with nothing except a knowledge of life on the frontier and acquaintance with Southwestern humor, Hooper could have learned how to draw Simon Suggs.29

Because of the absence of concrete evidence, the problem of the origins of American rogue literature cannot be finally resolved. Arthur Palmer Hudson has commented: "In my opinion, then, there is no use in seeking literary origins and influences upon much of the most interesting and vital portions of the material of this book [i.e., his anthology]. Gideon Lincecum, Reuben Davis, Lorenzo Dow, and David Theodore Hines must have read something; they could, indubitably, write."30 Thus it is impossible, and perhaps needless, to contradict such statements as this of Grant C. Knight: "Reflection upon their writings makes it clear that some of them, like Hooper (Simon Suggs), represent something akin to a spontaneous development of the picaresque in American literature, a development softened by the Anglo-Saxon's characteristic impulse to add fun and repentance to roguery."31 One is inclined to wonder, however, when Simon Suggs or Sut Lovingood repented.

The term rogue, like other general terms, can be

29 Native American Humor, p. 87.
30 The Humor of the Old Deep South, p. 15.
applied to innumerable variations of humanity; but in spite of the wide application, some definite limitations need to be set which will enable the student to distinguish the rogue and his literature from other types of characters. Frank W. Chandler has made some observations on the type which seem pertinent here:

Determined by subject matter rather than form, and depending upon observed actuality rather than ideals, it presents low life in lieu of heroic, and manners rather than conscience and emotion.... At the outset roguery must be distinguished from villainy. The latter is the creature of malice, if not of pathological conditions; its evil proceeds to extremes. The former is less vicious; it regards rascality with humor, or explains it as the result of social environment. Between the two no hard and fast line can be drawn; for the rogue may vary from the practical joker bent on mere mischief to the swindler and the highwayman; while the villain, like Hamlet's uncle, may smile and sneer, or with Iago carol a drinking song....Falstaff is not to be mistaken for Iago, and the contrast between them, as between every rogue and villain, hinges less upon the relative venality or atrocity of deed committed than upon the rascal's and author's point of view....As the typical crime of the villain is murder, so the typical crime of the rogue is theft. To obliterate distinctions of meum and tuum is the rogue's main business. He aspires to win by wit or dexterity what others have wrought by labor or received of fortune. He may cheat at cards or snatch purses. He may forge a check or a will. He may beg with a painted ulcer, or float a commercial bubble.... He may play the quack, levy blackmail, crack a safe, or even rob on the highway. But the use of personal violence usually ends his career as a rogue and stamps him the villain....He must also occupy the centre of the stage, or at least with his fellows command attention. So long as the conflict between good and evil is dealt with, so long art of necessity will employ the anti-hero as a foil to the hero. But where the former exists simply to be worsted by the latter, he cannot be
claimed for the literature of roguery. The rogue character then has definite limitations and cannot exceed them and remain a rogue.

Chandler's definition, although set up for European literature, applies well enough to American; but certain alterations in the conventions must be expected, for the American frontier was a far different environment from the crowded European slum, and the individuals emerging from it should differ in many respects from the products of Europe. The questions of "observed actuality" and "low life in lieu of heroic" have already been examined and need little further development here. It might be worthwhile, however, to mention that the central figures in frontier tales were more often than not based on real persons: Davy Crockett and Mike Fink were real people; in addition, Simon Suggs is supposedly based on an individual named Bird Young, while Sut Lovingood had his model in Harris's assistant. Identification for many other persons could possibly be made.

The second point, that of distinguishing the rogue

33 Ibid. Kelley, Johnson Jones Hooper, pp. 260 ff.
from the villain, also calls for some comment. In the first place, Chandler does not have scruples about including the biographies of notorious highwaymen in the category of rogue literature. Secondly, and perhaps more important, the frontier environment was such that its people were conditioned to violence. Even after the removal of the Indian menace, the citizenry of the old Southwest often went armed, and it is common knowledge that fatal gun or knife fights were not at all rare. In addition, numerous accounts of frontier exhibitions in "the manly art" leave no doubt that the gouging out of eyes, biting off of fingers, ears, or noses, and even disabling for life was looked upon as the natural outcome of a fight, much as the school boy today expects a black eye or cut lip to stand as the symbol of his fisticuffs. In a land where everyone goes armed and violence is to be expected at any moment, in such a land as the old Southwest was, such deeds as murder committed in the act of robbery—or even in the perpetration of a practical joke—are no events to disturb any but the over-squeamish.

Lucy Hazard's generalization about the distinction between picaro and villain holds up well when applied to the American frontier:

From the picaro to the bad man is but a step. For while the picaro is by definition a rogue rather than a villain, the distinction is, after all, a matter of relativity. To the Puritan "every sin was a crime"; to the frontiersman, even a crime
might take on the aspect of a good joke.\(^{35}\)

The matter, as Chandler says, hinges upon the point of view of the hero and of the author, but it might be added that in America the point of view of the frontier is also to be considered. Because violence was the rule, then, it need not be considered as barring the American rascal from the category of rogue, and the fact will justify the inclusion for at least a cursory examination of some of the desperadoes of the old Southwest.

For the true rogue, however, some emphasis must remain on the qualification that his success is achieved primarily by wit and dexterity rather than by physical force. It is worthy of note that such a requirement is implicit in the social status of the rogue. Being of the lower classes, he cannot expect to have a monopoly on force, the privilege of government, whether aristocracy or democracy. In addition, being poor, he lacks the material means for control of his environment. He must then be prepared to triumph over whatever unexpected situation he meets, and he must do it by outsmarting the forces which impose the situation on him or by taking advantage of other individuals placed in the same situation.

The American rogue is even more the central figure of

his story than the European. The reader of *Gil Blas* is plagued with innumerable interpolated histories of whom-ever Gil meets; the reader of Thorpe's "Big Bear of Arkansas" will find interpolated stories of bear hunts, but all build up to a climax and the Big Bear himself is always the focal point. Perhaps this focus is one of the reasons that none of the American narratives reach the length of *Gil Blas*. It is certainly one of the reasons why the American rogue story is, as a rule, superior in reader interest to the voluminous rogue chronicles of Europe.

It may be observed that the frontier rogue is as versatile in his occupations as his European predecessor. The crooked gambler, the quack doctor, the highwayman, the dishonest businessman—all of these can be found on the frontier. If the cut-purse and the vagrant student are missing, their places are admirably filled by new American types, the politician and the land speculator. The attitude of disrespect for the clergy is altered also. No longer need the rogue serve as a means of satire on the corruption and worldliness of the Catholic church; in America he has a new objective, the evangelical Protestants, who after the time of the Great Revival had presented ample opportunity for satire in their frequent and well-attended camp meetings.

In defining the picaresque novel, the one definite sub-type of rogue literature, Chandler states that it is "the comic biography (or more often autobiography) of an
anti-hero who makes his way in the world through the service of masters, satirizing their personal faults, as well as their trades and professions." The condition here described, that is, the relationship of master and servant, does not occur in frontier rogue fiction; for although such a character as Madison Tensas is apprenticed to a doctor to learn the medical profession, the satire remains centered on the primary character. The reason for such a change is obvious; on the frontier Negro slaves occupied, as a rule, the traditional place of servant and there were few professions requiring a formal apprenticeship. As a matter of fact, it was easy enough for a white bondsman in the older colonies to slip away to the frontier and become just as free as anyone else. Then, too, the frontier symbolized freedom, and it would be highly unusual if the servant or bondsman occupied a prominent place in frontier literature. Chandler's qualification, however, need not deny to such an obvious picaro as Simon Suggs his appropriate title, for satire on occupations and manners has sufficient range within the biography even though Simon is always the focal point of the story.

There is one significant variation from the European tradition to be found in the rascal of the old Southwest. If Simon Suggs can be said to represent the European rogue

---

36 The Literature of Roguery, p. 5.
best in that he is struggling to survive under adverse economic conditions, Sut Lovingood stands for a whole new rogue category, that of the rogue who acts without economic motivation, simply for the enjoyment of the escapade, or as Sut says, for the "skeerin' uv folks generly...." This type of rogue does appear in European literature but it is rare that he is entirely devoid of economic motivation; in America he is a distinct rogue type. The class includes a vast number of frontier characters from the rather mildly innocent Major Jones to Longstreet's almost vicious Ransy Sniffle, who likes nothing better than to start a fight between other people. The distinction between the "sharp­er" and the frontier Puck is more than a difference in degree. Simon Suggs' heinous crime of stealing the collection from a frontier camp meeting is far less deplorable in its outcome, if not in its intent, than Sut Lovingood's prank of frightening the horse at Mrs. Yardley's quilting, for Sut's prank results in the death of Mrs. Yardley. Somehow in America the tradition of the mischievous elf or fairy seems to have been blended with the rogue tradition to produce a rogue who is distinctly American.

Simon and Sut, Major Jones and Ransy Sniffle, Davy Crockett and Mike Fink--these are the rogues of the old Southwest who flourished in literature from the 1830's to the 1860's. True enough, the tales began earlier--for instance, Oliver H. Prince's "Militia Muster" was first
published in 1813—and they continued longer—the collected edition of Sut Lovingood's tales did not appear until 1867; but these two dates encompass the main stream of Southwestern humorous literature. The initial date is easy to understand; the frontier had to make a few steps toward civilization before it could be expected to produce any literature.

The terminal date, too, is quite explainable. By 1860 the old Southwest was no longer the American frontier. Although primitive backwoods areas still exist in the South today, the frontier had moved further west. Law and order were established, two things which tend to discourage roguery in many of its forms. Finally, the South was preoccupied with the war for a few years after 1860; and when it returned to literature, the two dominant streams were devoted rather to the portrayal of a utopian ante-bellum South or to the advocacy of a New South. Only the work of the local colorists carried on the traditions established by the frontier humorists, and local color writing is notably weak in the virile qualities which had distinguished the humor. In the three middle decades of the century, however, the old Southwest had produced a notable contribution to the literature of roguery. "The age, one of the most vivid of American experiences, has no other authentic record in our literature. Nothing is more essentially American than the frontier; and these sketches, humble
enough in interest, were the earliest literary realization of the frontier, and, [sic] remain its most revealing expression.  

As a matter of fact, historical records of the old Southwest provide ample evidence that the rogues in frontier humor were actually little more than reflections of the real life of the area. Even among the respectable people there are roguish attitudes and rogue-like pranks; for these citizens, removed from the traditional restraints which affected the eastern colonies, were infected by the lawless exuberance of the backwoods. Among the criminal element also can be found touches of cynical humor, a flamboyance of action, and the multitude of minor crimes that have long been the property of the picaro. Furthermore, there was a race in between the honest citizens and the villains, a race of true rogues—gamblers, swindlers, and thieves—whose stories rival those of fictional rogues in the European tradition. To carry the matter further, it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction; for the anecdotes of Guild and Foote are sharpened and colored by the passing of years, and the fictional accounts of Longstreet and Baldwin are based on actual happenings and are filled with sketches of actual characters.

37 Franklin J. Meine, Tall Tales of the Southwest, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1930, p. xvi.
The very nature of the materials, then, suggests the proper approach to the study of the rogue in the old Southwest. Since he stemmed from the actual life of the area, some consideration of historical materials as they reflect roguish tendencies in the population is necessary to an understanding of the rascal in frontier humor. The historical figures, as has been suggested, fall naturally into two groups—the respectable people and the criminals, both of whom illustrate some of the characteristics of the American rogue. Among the criminal element also will be considered those individuals who were American versions of the true picaro; for in real life if not in fiction the occupations of the rogue, even though his sins be slight, place him outside the circle of honest citizens. For the fictional characters a somewhat different approach is necessary. There is a group of upper-class jokers who must be separated from the lower-class rogues because the nature of their pranks tends more to follow the patterns established by the English wit than to partake of the extreme crudeness which characterizes the pranks of the race of Sut Lovingood. Finally, there is a group of people in the old Southwest who do not fall entirely into either a fact or a fiction category. These are the men whose names are found in the legends—men such as Davy Crockett and Andrew Jackson. These demand consideration by themselves.
CHAPTER IX

Honest Men and Rogues

If the people of the frontier were mercurial and fluent, if they were too busy to produce an extensive literature, some of them at least stopped long enough to record in diaries, histories, and reminiscences the life they lived. Sometimes a busy planter merely jotted down in a day-by-day journal a record of crops, sick Negroes, and business transactions. Sometimes a preacher, inspired to reveal the West, wrote a volume of history or an autobiography; or a lawyer, a catalog of biographical sketches of prominent members of the bar. These writings, published or simply deposited in old trunks, were not works of fiction but of historical record, intended not for amusement but for instruction. And yet, one thing they had in common, for tucked in between the number of bales of cotton or the sketches of valiant, honorable, and gentlemanly lawyers lie anecdotes of life as it was lived, touches of breath and color among pale dead biographical facts. These are incidents proving the verity of the tall tales that decorated the newspapers, and, even more important to the present
purpose, illustrating how fine was the line between gentleman and rogue on the frontier.

The anecdotes, though occupying only a small fragment of each work, are clearly indicative of the milieu of the Southwest, showing the rogue just under the skin of even the most respectable citizens—the preachers, the doctors, lawyers, and planters. More often than not the rogueries of these men are of the milder sort—practical jokes, unusual methods of collecting a debt, and records of migratory hand-to-mouth existence—for they were honorable men; but in their records appear too encounters with more practiced rogues and professional sharpers. And the rogues not infrequently belonged to the better classes of society. Such a one, for example, was Richard Graves, elected treasurer of the state of Mississippi, who "abstracted" over a hundred thousand dollars for his own purposes and escaped to parts unknown.

It would be expected that the ministers of a community would be least susceptible to rogueries, but such was not the case. True, some pastors were well-educated, settled persons, going about their duties in the same quiet manner as their contemporaries on the Atlantic coast. "But," as Ralph Rusk observes, "for the most part, the preachers who carried on the religious campaigns among the backwoodsmen were men of more zeal than culture. No doubt a great number of them, including some of the most
successful, were only one stage removed from illiteracy.\(^1\)

Such a statement as this immediately brings to mind the character of Lorenzo Dow, perhaps the most famous of the itinerant preachers of the old Southwest, for though able to read and write, Dow had so little formal education that he frequently was refused credentials by officials of the church. His methods were simple. Not being qualified to hold a regular post, even as a travelling preacher, Dow persuaded friends to equip him and started out on horseback. He would leave furbished as became a preacher, well-dressed, well-mounted, and with at least a small amount of cash; but he frequently returned on foot, ragged and half-starved. His horse, his good clothes, his watch, and even his handkerchief would be missing; for in order to travel he would sell, pawn, trade, or barter everything he had. His tours were almost frenetic in their speed, and he hired fresh horses, begged carriage rides, and raced miles on foot to preach, with the seal of one hotly pursued by the devil himself.\(^2\)

Despite what might be considered an excess of religious zeal and despite the fact that Dow was obviously very earnest in his endeavors, he did upon occasion stoop

---

\(^1\) The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier, p. 49.

to rogueries—if the cause seemed just. A. P. Hudson anthologizes two anecdotes that will illustrate this characteristic. In one of the tales Dow tells of having hired a horn-playing Negro boy named Gabriel to climb into a tree and blow a blast at the significant moment in his sermon when he mentions Gabriel and his trumpet. The confusion resulting from such an effort can only be imagined. In the other anecdote, Dow stops overnight at a household where the husband is absent. After he has retired in a back room, a man who is obviously not the housekeeper's husband enters and begins to jest with her, the general tenor of his intentions indicated by the fact that he hides in a "gum" full of cotton when the husband, tipsy and inclined to be querulous, appears at the door. On hearing of Dow's presence, the husband demands that the parson demonstrate his fabled ability to raise the devil. Dow, stationing the husband at the door to give the Old Boy a few whacks as he passes out, obliges by setting fire to the cotton and "flushing" the visitor. The verity of the anecdote need not be questioned, but the fact remains that analogues of the tale are abundant in the folklore of Europe.

Other itinerant preachers, such as Timothy Flint and

---

3 The Humor of the Old Deep South, pp. 222-226.
4 Cf. Hans Christian Andersen's "Great Claus and Little Claus."
W. H. Milburn, were better educated than Dow, and their records, autobiographical and historical, would not be expected to reveal as many roguish traits as The Dealings. The atmosphere was the same for them, however, as it was for their less cultured brothers; for preaching on the frontier meant dangerous wilderness trips, stopping overnight at the houses of complete strangers of any social class, and coming into direct contact with the varied types of humanity on the frontier. C. H. Gratton has commented upon Flint: "He was not a Daniel Boone nor a David Crockett. His prowess as a hunter was nil, his ability to wrest a living from the soil was never tested in a serious fashion (luckily for him!) and his capacities for whiskey-drinking, gouging, and swearing cannot be exploited to give romantic color to his stories."\(^5\) And yet it is hard to picture Timothy Flint as a milquetoast. Frontier parsons could not afford to be sissies.

In the first place, in spite of the Great Revival, not all denizens of the backwoods were inclined toward religion. At every camp meeting there was sure to be a gang of rowdies loafing around an open barrel of Monongahela. These rascals could be depended upon to cause trouble, sometimes by giving catcalls during the sermon and not infrequently by engaging the preacher and his deacons in a

And often the better classes were little more amenable. Flint preached once in a French settlement in Louisiana where the congregation was so indifferent to his speech that the gentlemen wandered in and out during the sermon, dividing their time between the chapel and a near-by billiard room. 6

Religion was just not a necessary commodity to many in the old Southwest. Bennet Barrow was convinced, for example, that it was a bad influence on the slaves, for in his diary he records: "Mr. Turnbulls negroes are cutting up a great many shiners--16 ran off & have defied him--are well armed killed two of his dogs while in pursuite of them--all this grows out of his having them preached to for 4 or 5 years past--greatest piece of foolishness any one every [sic] guilty of." 7 Even the whites might not feel ashamed of a lack of religious belief. Timothy Flint relates a conversation with a Louisiana Dutchman on the subject of religion: "This is a bad country for religion. I know, that I have lost him,' he continued, 'but never mind, by and by the good preacher,' as he phrased it, 'will come along, and I shall pick him all up again.' 8

6 Ibid., p. 264.


8 Recollections, p. 226.
Unfortunately for the poor parson, too many people preferred to occupy themselves with other affairs than religion, confident that at some vague date in the future they could "pick him all up again."

Even more intriguing is the fact that on the frontier an evangelistic inclination was often considered sufficient preparation for the ministry. In the beginning, licensing boards of the various denominations were likely to be several hundred miles from the preacher's area, and by the time church authority reached the community the self-ordained minister, if he had been zealous, could have become indispensable to religious life in the community. If he had not been zealous, the frontier lay just to the west. Noah Ludlow tells of one Charles Parsons who, finding the stage not as remunerative as he desired, became a preacher and succeeded well until his congregation uncovered his association with "the stage." Ludlow once attended a sermon by the ex-actor and comments wryly: "I thought his style of delivery, though, was a trifle too stagey for the pulpit. In fact he was an actor when a preacher, and a preacher when an actor." And people did not consider at all odd the rumor that Sol Smith had turned parson, having given up the dissolute life of the stage. As a

\[\text{N. M. Ludlow,} \text{ Dramatic Life As I Found It, S. I. Jores and Company, St. Louis, 1880, p. 352.}\]
result, the people of one small Tennessee town begged him to speak to them; and Sol, accustomed to one-night stands in transit, agreed, finding only at the last minute that he was supposed to deliver a sermon instead of his customary comic recitations. The result could have been appalling, but the inimitable Sol managed to provide a worthy sermon off the cuff. Such were the preachers and congregations of the frontier.

If the new land produced unusual difficulties for the preachers, it also conditioned them mentally and physically to meet them. They were not pampered pets, those old preachers, and many of them were as ready to prove their physical prowess as were the ruffians. Lorenzo Dow once leaped out of the window in mid-sermon to catch and chastise a young tough who had sought to disrupt the meeting by throwing sticks of wood through the window. Peter Cartwright, another travelling preacher, crossed the river with a ferryman who had promised to duck him if they ever met, and revealed his identity in order to test the man's veracity. After a considerable struggle in the water, Cartwright not only ducked his opponent but succeeded in


11 The Dealings of God, Man, and The Devil, p. 113.
making a good churchman of him by the simple expedient of holding him under water repeatedly until he promised to attend meeting.\textsuperscript{12} And Reuben Davis once commented about his father, a respectable and respected Methodist preacher; "Minister as he was, my father never doubted that it was part of his Christian duty to knock down any rascal who happened to deserve such discipline."\textsuperscript{13} Preaching for the travelling ministers meant days of hardship in the saddle, fording streams, sleeping in the woods when no habitation could be found, and even avoiding Indians. For the minister settled in the backwoods community preaching often as not meant earning a living by farming or other means, for few small churches provided well for their pastors. No wonder the preachers of the frontier were horny-handed, vigorous men.

For one thing, the attitude of the Protestant sects toward liquor was not as strict during the first years of the nineteenth century as it has now become. "Since drinking was almost as common as eating, it is not surprising that nearly all good church people drank. One never thought of entertaining without liquor is some form.


\textsuperscript{13} Reuben Davis, Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston and New York, 1891, p. 19.
Ministers regularly took their morning eye-opener and their nightcap in the evening. Some even made whiskey or trafficked in it. The idea of a Methodist minister running a still behind his house is so incongruous to the contemporary mind as to appear ludicrous, and yet it happened on the frontier. And whiskey-making was not the only way a poor parson could augment his income. Bennet Barrow recorded one variant in his diary: "Parson Burruss called to see me yesterday--wishes to sell his blood stock mares and colts--he is the most perfect connoisseur in the Horse line I ever met with." Furthermore, the hunting parsons of England had nothing on these versatile gentlemen of the old Southwest. Plantation records frequently show a pastor listed in a hunting or fishing party. Even Timothy Flint mentions casual hunts on his trips along the Mississippi.

The varied experiences of the frontier preacher moulded him into the form of the frontiersman rather than the conventional shape of the eastern minister. Milburn's comments on Cartwright, then, seem appropriate to many of the pastors of the old Southwest:

The crowded years of this long and busy life were marked from week to week with the strangest occurrences, the natural results of the wild unfeathered thoughts and life of the West; often most

---

14 The Dixie Frontier, pp. 168-169.
15 Davis, Plantation Life, p. 100.
grotesque and at first sight coarse, and even ridiculous, silly or absurd to an eastern man; and yet requiring but brief consideration to discover how peculiarly fit and proper were the rough repartees and even the comical tricks, practical jokes, and ready physical force with which this hardy soldier of the church militant upheld his authority, or silenced his opponents at campmeetings, or in controversy with the ignorant fanatics, the deceivers, and the rabid sectarians of his rugged field.16

Thus, the history of the frontier pastor exhibits, surprisingly enough, several of the typical components of the rogue tales, for the very nature of the country accentuated the picaresque in all men. The travelling parsons were vagabonds, not irresponsible beggars it is true, but wanderers, living off the hospitality of the land as did the wandering minstrels of the middle ages. Furthermore, they were all forced by circumstances into a disregard for decorum and convention that would have shocked their Eastern brothers. Life in the backwoods was rigorous even for the favored few, and the preachers as well as the ordinary men found that hardship was endured best with a smile. In fact, some of them—Lorenzo Dow and Peter Cartwright, for example—displayed in their pranks a "certain jollity of mind" that is almost Rabelaisian in its earthy freshness. Finally, in their efforts to supplement their meager livelihood, some of these old pastors engaged in activities such as moonshining and horse trading, which seem rather

16 Milburn, Pioneers, Preachers, and People, p. 362.
the occupation of the rogue than of the minister.

If preachers sometimes stooped to roguery, it is not surprising that lawyers too transgressed; and yet in the South the law was considered the highest, the most gentlemanly, the noblest calling of all. Among the aristocracy of the East this was especially true. Younger sons, freed from the responsibilities of public life by the laws of primogeniture and entail, might become doctors, ministers, or even merchants; the first-born must prepare himself to govern as had the aristocrats in England. Such was the attitude until "that remarkable migration to the state of Mississippi, of barristers from other states of the Union—a little anterior to the close of the fourth decade of the...[nineteenth] century."¹⁷ The flush times that Baldwin was to capture were on. People poured into the old Southwest seeking land, quick money, or escape from the law, and with them came the lawyers. In a day in which the settler of years' standing might find himself outbid for his improved property at public auction by ruthless combines of land speculators taking advantage of government sales, in a day in which any man might become careless with his fire arms on slight provocation only to discover that civilization, now moving in, disapproved of

¹⁷ Henry S. Foote, The Bench and Bar of the South and Southwest, Soule, Thomas and Wentworth, St. Louis, 1886, p. 53.
murder, in a day in which wealth was abundant and the woods offered refuge for thieves—in such a day lawyers were needed.

Henry S. Foote's book is full of anecdotes which illustrate the quality of these lawyers and judges; and they were a marvelous race, for what they lacked in education they compensated for in confidence. A ship captain, one of three appointed justices of a Baton Rouge court, took it upon himself to be chief justice and called for the only murder case on the docket. "I intended to show all such ruffians," he said, "that no man is hereafter to be killed in this parish except with the consent of this court first had and obtained." And a certain Judge Child, though educated to the law, felt no doubt about his omnipotence, for in the midst of a trial he once commented to a colleague: "Judge Coalter, put down that book; I have read all the law in the world and recollect what I have read. I want no aid from the musty volumes you have brought into court. If you have any original views to bring forward, I will listen to you; otherwise I think you will do well to take your seat." The bench certainly partook of the self-assurance F. J. Turner attributed to the frontiersman.

---

18 Ibid., p. vii.
19 Ibid., p. 21.
The men in the legislature were no more commonplace than their compatriots of the bar. Representatives Larry Moore and Philemon Thomas of Louisiana, for example, became famous for their persuasion in getting the Florida parishes admitted to the state. They changed the minds of the French representatives from New Orleans, Blanc and Raphignac, with a most effective argument—a poker placed in the fire and heated red hot. And outside of session, the legislators proved that they too were human. Larry Moore succumbed to the lure of the "tiger," or faro bank, and his losses caused him to instigate a law to prohibit gambling. These were individual actions, however; it remained for the legislature of Mississippi to demonstrate its qualifications en masse. Reuben Davis tells of it:

It was far on in the depth of a winter's night when I was awakened by a confusion of sounds in the street, music predominating. I threw open a window and beheld a long line of well-dressed gentlemen proceeding in single file down the middle of the street, and loudly singing the popular melody of "Buffalo Bull came down the meadow." It was the legislature of Mississippi indulging in an airing, after having spent an evening in the worship of Bacchus.

Such incidents as these leave no doubt in the reader's mind as to the origin in actuality of the frontier tall tale, exaggerated and improbable as it may sound to the

20 W. H. Sparks, The Memories of Fifty Years, Remsen and Haffelfinger, Philadelphia, 1870, p. 293.
If the ministers were not averse to violence on occasion, the lawyers seemed to relish it. Aside from the duels, which for their unique variations from the code duello deserve separate mention, these hot-tempered barristers demonstrated their prowess frequently. Their books are full of examples of fist fights and impromptu pistol matches, centering around such personages as S. S. Prentiss and Colonel McClung. The latter ("to his friends he was always the same—kind, generous, and devoted") is especially noted for having terrorized a New Orleans restaurant.22 The Colonel, being in an unpleasant mood, had run all the other patrons out and placed two pistols and a bowie knife on the table to assure privacy while he dined. Of course, he was only having his little joke.

Even more astounding to one accustomed to regard the profession of law as one of considerable dignity is Reuben Davis' confession of one of his own escapades. Disagreeing with the judge on a point of law, Davis became so infuriated that he decided to attack the judge. He threw his pocket knife at the bar with such force that the blade snapped, hoping all the while that he would be summoned to the bar and cited for contempt, and that being thus within easy reach of his honor he would be able to inflict

22 Ibid., pp. 216-218.
considerable personal damage before the bailiffs could stop him. This ruse failed, but soon another opportunity presented itself; and he and the judge met in the corridor of the hotel where they stayed during the session of court. After exchanging words, the two began to fight. The judge, however, picked up a claw hammer and Davis drew his broken knife. The outcome might have been disastrous had not friends, attracted by the commotion, managed to separate them before either was seriously hurt. It must have been considerable encouragement to realize that his lawyer would literally fight tooth and nail to save him.

If physical violence is not the proper forte of the rogue, acquiring money by questionable means is; and frontier lawyers, dealing with clients of questionable financial integrity, often had to deviate from accepted procedure to collect. Judge Child, mentioned previously, was quite direct in his collection of rent in arrears from a tenant: "I told him that I had come to force him to 'attorn to me,' and if he did not do so at once, I should certainly give him a severe caning...." Alex Porter, after he had acquired a considerable reputation as a lawyer, demanded a thousand dollar fee to defend a prospective client, five hundred for his services and the other because

---

23 Ibid., pp. 149-152.
24 Bench and Bar, p. 22.
the man had set his dogs on Alex in the latter's less lucrative days. And such a man as Reuben Davis felt certain that having his fee in his pocket enabled him to get one Billy May freed from the charge of murder, for Billy's father was known to be careless in paying his debts. The most rogue-like of all, however, was John R. Grimes, who managed never to get out of debt himself. On one occasion Grimes, about to be arrested for a debt of two thousand dollars, persuaded the sheriff to wait until he had begun to try a case in court the following day. His client, rather than acquire another lawyer in mid-trial, lent him the money, and unfortunately never saw it again. The ruse is worthy of any rogue in literature, for two thousand dollars, so neatly achieved, was a considerable sum in those days of cheap land and cheap food.

One essential characteristic of these lawyers, one necessary quality for retaining a roguish rather than villainous point of view, was a sense of humor. Travelling about after the court as they did, enduring hardships, and associating with men of violence, they nevertheless found time for conviviality in the evenings spent at country inns and city hotels. Anecdotes and jokes were traded around until they became the common property of the legal

---

26 *Memories of Fifty Years*, pp. 434-435.
profession, and a lawyer might find that he had acquired considerable reputation among his colleagues even before he met them. The most important point of consideration in this humor, for the present purpose, is the fact that these men lived the parts they played in humorous anecdote. Those jests preserved for us—and they probably amount to a small percentage of those in circulation a century ago—range from the youthfu prank of W. H. Sparks, who, intending to frighten the family's overseer with a jack-o'-lantern, actually scared his father enough that he fell off the bridge into a creek, to the ludicrous cavortings of Judge Mitchell in his later years. The Judge tells of attending a dance in Tennessee and dancing with a lovely young lady who thought to flatter him:

"Oh, Judge Mitchell, how I wish that you were not a married man." To this I promptly responded: "Most adorable lady, I assure you that at least one thousand of your sex have expressed the same wish!" On uttering these last words, seeing a vacant space to my right, I leaped from the side of my partner, full ten feet, turned a graceful and impressive somersault, and, lighting firmly upon my feet, I faced the astonished lady, and waving my hand in token of respect, I said: "Miss, pray tell me what you think of that?"

Such was the vitality of the bar of the old Southwest; and in a land where superior court judges turned somersaults in public for astonished young ladies, who was not potentially a rogue?

---

27 Bench and Bar, p. 246.
The body of anecdotes devoted to doctors is considerably smaller than that devoted to lawyers, but even among these records there are to be found some of the elements of a literature of roguery. As a matter of fact, the doctors had no convivial gatherings such as those occurring among lawyers wherever court sat; thus there was a lack of incentive for the development of a tradition of oral anecdote. Nor did the doctors feel the need of recording the history of the times as did the ministers. Finally, perhaps the medical profession lacked the prestige of the legal and legislative, and therefore there was not so great a demand by the public for reminiscences and memoirs. There were doctors, however, who kept diaries or wrote autobiographical sketches for family or friends, and some of these are available to the modern reader. Possibly such records are of purely historical interest. The diary of Dr. M. W. Phillips, for example, is little more than a journal of transactions on his plantation. There is one doctor, however, who did write an autobiography full of the materials of roguery, Dr. Gideon Lincicum.

Son of an unsuccessful farmer who could never find land to suit his tastes, devoid of any appreciable formal education, and possessed of no financial competence, Lincicum would not seem the type to acquire a reputation as a scientist; and yet before he died he corresponded with
Charles Darwin, was well known as a naturalist, and was an authority on the Choctaw Indians. His occupations varied from those of a common wood Sawyer, manager of an Indian ball team, and backwoods school teacher, to those of planter, doctor, and civic leader. The record of his life is as full of peregrination as a Cook's tour; and except for the point of view, which is that of a man writing for his grandsons, deserves to be called picar-esque. The earlier chapters, in particular those recounting the lean years of his life when living meant doing anything to keep from starving, present as varied a picture of the social milieu as any rogue story of Europe; only the satirical intent is missing. And in the various episodes of his life one can find a mass of material ready-made for the writer of frontier humor.

From a purely literary point of view, the most obvious fault of the biography is its brevity, which prohibits full development of anecdotal material. For instance, Lincecum tells far too briefly the story of one of his father's moves. His father had hired a teamster to help drive the wagon, but the two soon discovered a mutual conviviality and stopped to buy a jug of whiskey. After a short while the teamster became so intoxicated that he

28 His works include a Life of Apushmataha, the Choctaw chief, and Traditions of the Choctaws.
fell off his seat, frightening the team and causing them to run away. The incident ended only when the wagon turned over with considerable damage to household goods and severe injury to Lincecum's grandmother. Of such a happening Sut Lovingood would have spun a full-fledged yarn, elaborated in minutest detail; in Lincecum's autobiography it occupies a short paragraph.

There is, however, a Defoe-like realism in Lincecum's writing that gives it an almost unique charm. Incidents like the one above are told in a matter-of-fact manner that makes one think immediately of Robinson Crusoe. Perilous escapes from Indians, hazardous adventures in the woods, and scenes of back-breaking toil are presented as daily experiences in the life of every man and nothing to become upset or excited about; for Lincecum, writing in retrospect, knew that things would turn out all right. Furthermore, if the reader feels a lack of elaboration, he also is blessed in escaping the lush portraits of everyone the author meets, the "flower of Southern manhood" portraits with which the members of the legal profession often plague their readers.

As has already been stated, the facts of Lincecum's life read like a picaresque tale, and it is worthy of note

---

that his preparation for a medical career was only slightly more thorough than that of Gil Blas. He never attended a medical school nor apprenticed himself to a doctor, but he was unusually perceptive in his observations of medical practice, and to this fact, perhaps, can be attributed his ultimate success. Early in life he read a few medical books, but he read them casually, seemingly without intent to practice; for he refused a suggestion that he study medicine and went into the lumber business, forced by poverty to do his own sawing. His living was derived from everything he found he could do, including, in addition to the jobs already listed, such widely diverse occupations as teaching school and operating a rented billiard table. It was not until he became ill with a fever which local doctors could not cure that he renewed an interest in medicine. Having travelled to Columbus to see a famous doctor, Lincecum described so effectively his symptoms and the cures which had failed that Doctor Hann simply handed over the key to his drug shop and told him to cure himself. It was then that he developed a serious interest in medicine, and yet it was not until several years later, when a friend gave him one hundred dollars to buy drugs, that he became a doctor.

His fund of knowledge was acquired in diverse ways. He observed that sick deer ate sparingly and from this concluded that sick people should restrict their diets.
He hired a Choctaw medicine man, his only real teacher, and camped with him until he had compiled a complete classification of all the herbs known to the Indian. He bought Samuel Thompson's *Guide to Health* and learned the practice of "steam doctoring," with such drugs as lobelia, cayenne, nervine, skunk cabbage, and bay berry. He learned from observation that calomel, a conventional cure-all, was frequently fatal in cases of the bloody flux resulting from cholera, and that the poisons the doctors were accustomed to prescribe were more often injurious than beneficial. From this welter of sources, Lincecum achieved an encyclopedic knowledge of medical fact that was scarcely equalled in his day.

But underneath his determined and systematic mood lay that restlessness and drive for success that has led A. P. Hudson to speak of Lincecum as "the incarnation of the pioneer spirit." This is, in many ways, the spirit found in the rogue, even in the rogues of Europe; for it demanded that the individual overcome unfavorable circumstances by the exercise of his wits. The frontier version of the rogue is never far below the surface of the character of Lincecum: he buys a race horse to ride on his calls and collects his bills on the pretext that he needs the money to buy drugs to help his patients; he contents

---

30 The Humor of the Old Deep South, p. 62.
a group of rowdy adult school-boys by setting up a democracy, complete with elected officers, a device which makes them keep order among themselves; and, best of all, he selects his Indian ball team from a crowd of over four hundred applicants by the democratic method of drawing names but from a hat containing forty slips bearing the names of the best players and three hundred and sixty-five blank ones. Only the roguish point of view, the tongue-in-cheek cynical humor, is missing.

Among the actors who travelled along the frontier, however, the rogue point of view is much more in evidence; for actors lived a precarious life in the old Southwest, hanging midway between the better classes and the disreputable ones. The stigma of being on the stage and the uncertainty of financial success conditioned the actor not only to a humorous outlook but also to the necessity of occasional shrewd rogueries, the latter quite often taking the form of practical jokes played not for economic purposes but for the sheer fun of outwitting each other.

Of the actors and theatrical managers who wrote recollections, two stand out as sterling examples of the frontier thespian, Sol Smith and Noah M. Ludlow. These two, though born in the East, conducted their business almost exclusively in the Southwest. They toured from Cincinnati to

---

New Orleans and from Knoxville to St. Louis, and their records of performances are a key to the tastes of the frontier—from Richard III to the Hunters of Kentucky—which is invaluable to any student of American drama.

Sol Smith, who was perhaps the best known comedian in the West, began his theatrical career by running away from home to become an actor. Unfortunately, the profession did not accept him as a boy wonder, and he was forced to work as a farm hand and printer in order to earn a living. This period of his life is full of picaresque adventures, including an unusual display of irresponsibility. Apprenticed to a Cincinnati printer who had a rather irritable wife, Smith and another boy decided to end their apprenticeships one evening and left that night, as Smith said, "Without troubling my worthy master or mistress about the matter." Later in his career he started a singing school, hoping that the income from this venture would tide him over until he could find another job. After only one session of instruction in the use of the shape notes, he got an opportunity to open a newspaper in another town "on a credit" and forgot completely about the school. For the most part, however, Smith and Ludlow both concerned


33 Ibid., pp. 45-48.
themselves primarily with the acting profession as performers and, after the accumulation of some wealth, as managers and theater owners.

Both of these actor-managers enjoyed playing practical jokes on their compatriots, but these jokes were of the more innocuous type, at least if compared with those of Sut Lovingood. Ludlow tells, for example, of his first trip down the river on which the party camped out. One member of the company, Alex Drake, was deaf, and Ludlow, feeling cold, scared his comrade into believing that there were wolves howling nearby so that he would keep the fire burning all night. On another occasion, one Caldwell, who was the comedian in the company, had sought to josh the backwoods people with whom the group had stopped overnight by quoting lines from tragedies, all the while rolling his eyes. Ludlow and some others, however, explained that they were taking Caldwell to the insane asylum and warned their host that he would probably try to trade horses before they left, saying his own had gone lame. They then proceeded to stick a locust thorn in the horse's hoof to assure the scene's success. The host, needless to say, never forgot the madman and on meeting Ludlow sometime later asked about him.34

Sol Smith has similar anecdotes. A Dr. Carr, who

34 Dramatic Life, p. 300.
was both actor and dentist, was sent to the home of a
stage-hating justice of the peace under the impression
that the justice had asked him to dinner to discuss some
prospective dental work.35 Another time, while travelling
through the woods, Smith's company passed through an
Indian village. Noticing that John C., an actor who was
driving the property wagon, seemed nervous, Smith advised
him to start, as he obviously had done something to dis­
please the Indians. John drove away, feigning nonchalance,
but Smith had hired two Indians to run along beside the
wagon yelling and whooping. The result of the subsequent
wild chase could have been a catastrophe.36

Both Smith and Ludlow on occasion committed rogueries
for other motives than fun. Ludlow's group on the way
down the river decided they needed fresh meat but were
unable to find any, for a group of boats had preceded
them and bought all the surplus meat. The problem was
solved by "confiscating" a sheep from a woman who had re­
fused to sell. The fact that they paid the woman adequately
did not mitigate the wrath of her husband, who arrived
just as they were leaving.37 Smith went through even
harder times early in his career and says of his first

36 Ibid., pp. 136-140.
venture as a manager: "At the close of the theatre I found myself in debt eleven hundred and fifty dollars. Rather an unfortunate beginning." This droll understatement does not exhibit fully his financial deshabile, for he was forced to return to New York and look for work there. Unfortunately, the theaters were not hiring, and Smith lived a hand-to-mouth existence for several months. On this most roguish of his escapades—which included borrowing money, pawning articles whether or not they belonged to him, and pretending not to have change so that a passenger he was conversing with would pay his ferry passage—Smith was using a friend's telescope to sell passersby a look at the moon, for the friend was ill and Smith had been promised half of the profits. Smith soon discovered three drunken sailors and spent the evening giving them a glimpse at all the heavens, complete with lecture, taking in $18.62 instead of the usual two or three dollars.39

It might be added that both Smith and Ludlow were serious actors, not vagabond rogues like Mark Twain's Duke and Dauphin. They were not trying to defraud the frontier people of money but were attempting to provide genuine dramatic entertainment, and each regarded himself as a pioneer and leader in the theater of the old Southwest.38

38 Theatrical Apprenticeship, p. 55.
39 Ibid., p. 78.
Despite this, however, they were forced to live a vagrant life, enduring many of the hardships of the true pioneers and making expenses somehow in spite of the caprice of uncultured audiences. It is a wonder then that they were as scrupulous as they were, for each says he was thoroughly honest, although each accuses the other—-they were at one time partners—-of some degree of duplicity.

The other respectable men on the frontier—-the planters, the merchants, and the like—-had little reason to publish memoirs during their lives; but a few diaries are preserved and occasionally in the pages of books by others one of these will show his face for an instant. Bennet H. Barrow, a Louisiana planter, kept a diary which, though primarily a plantation record book, is filled with memorable comments and anecdotes about the planter class. Although not a rogue in the strict sense of the word, for he is if anything over-honest for the times, Barrow displays many of the qualities that make up the background of the rogues. For one thing, he enjoyed the more colorful aspects of leisurely living—-horse-racing, hunting, or fishing—-to such a degree that no matter how serious affairs at the plantation became, no matter how deep he was in debt because of poor crops or low cotton prices, Barrow was always ready to go off on a jaunt.

Barrow was a friend of T. B. Thorpe and a subscriber to W. T. Porter's *Spirit of the Times*, the leading sports
paper in the nation and a treasure house of tall tales. It is no wonder then to find compressed into his diary the outline of hunting or fishing stories which would make good tall-tale material. The following is an example of his best:

Foggy morning—Went driving. My nephew R H Barrow here last night—Ruffin shot a Large Buck in No one drive—shot one eye out. The Deer ran at him blind side & knocked him—side of his horns hitting him only. I came up—he shot as he came at him—missed—he ran us both round & round—the 3 hounds & one cur hanging to him—we gained a large tree—the Deer took off I after him—on horseback dogs stopped him some short distance—went up to shoot him—dogs pointed, 'til he came so near me as to compel me to shoot in self defense—shot his underjaw off as I jumped behind a tree—after a while I found a chance to shoot him in the head & end his life after some very narrow escapes—5 prongs—very fat & Large—

Perhaps the sketch lacks the precise and comic development of the usual frontier tall tale, but the incongruity of the basic situation, that of the hunter treed by his quarry, is quite typical of the genre. Barrow's retelling of the story on winter evenings may well have developed into true frontier humor.

The diary contains, in addition, brief comments on manners, morals, and people of the times that are intriguing in their terse expression. A Mr. King is "as ill-natured as a Bear with a sore head in Fly time—." The figure is perhaps not as graphic as J. R. Lowell's

40 Barrow, Diary, p. 136.
"stumped-tailed bull in fly time," although it antedates it; but it does size up King concisely for the reader. Behind "jack broke his Fore finger last night Whipping his wife" lies the suggestion of a tale about marital relations in the slave quarters. And Barrow too is portrayed neatly in his diary. He obviously loved a good fight, as did most citizens of the old Southwest, and was inclined to dismiss infractions of civilized rules of combat with a gentlemanly lift of the eyebrow. "Went to town. Saw a Fight between Boyles and Kelly 'the Editor.' Considerable blood spilt by blows on both sides, nothing serious, several on Kelly at once—very foul conduct &c." The &c is an anticlimax that Mark Twain would have appreciated. Again, Barrow was not free from a tendency to bombast. "Dennis came inside on Tuesday—ran off again yesterday—without my even seeing him. will carry my Gun & small shot for him— I think it will break him of his rascality." Barrow constantly begs his diary for a shot at Dennis or some other recalcitrant slave, on one occasion offering to pay $100 for the chance, but he seems to be almost all bark. Only once does he actually shoot one and then only sprinkles his legs with bird shot.

These points are minor ones, however; but Barrow did meet with rogues on occasion, and because of his own

---

1 Ibid., p. 194.
2 Ibid., p. 136.
honesty and eagerness to help a friend he got into financial difficulties. His greatest troubles seem to have resulted from endorsing notes for friends who were not overscrupulous in paying their debts; but times were hard when the price of cotton dropped, and it was not at all unusual for a group of planters to endorse notes mutually, insuring the solvency or failure of the group. Barrow even endorsed for relative strangers:

Dr. Desmont an Englishman has left here. Very strangely a villain no doubt—and left me to pay between 10,000 & 16,000 for him—his uncommonly gentlemanly manners—modesty & chastity caused me to be discerned by him—I’ve allways been opposed to Yankee speculators coming out here to seek their fortunes. by marrying or any thing else that suits their purpose—particularly the D--- professional preachers—stragling foreigners, are no better—

Dr. Desmont did return, but only to borrow more money—and there is no record in the diary of his ever making any payment.

The attitude toward Yankees seems a little strange as early as 1644, although the fame of the Yankee peddler had spread long before the Civil War. On another occasion Barrow comments: "& Who should come but two D. Yankees to see Mr. Hurlburt [his overseer] and the impudence of their section of the country, gave them a Hint to Leave that no southernor would mistake." Unlike his attitude toward

---

43 Ibid., p. 158.
44 Ibid., p. 317.
the Yankees, which remained constant, Barrow’s attitude toward borrowers improved. At one point in 1844, he comments: "...to conclude wish every one I’ve had to pay money for was in Hell."\(^{45}\) A few months later when money was even scarcer, he remarks: "And sincerely wish every rascal & persons causing me to be in Debt in Hell riding on a red hot iron."\(^{46}\) Barrow, then, if not a rogue himself, was not unaware that some people were rogues, even if he found out too late.

Other planters who got into financial troubles were not as scrupulously honest as Barrow. Frederick Law Olmstead, who travelled extensively over the area, reports a conversation between a fellow traveller in Louisiana and their host for the night: "Then he turned to our host and began to ask him about our neighbors, many of whom he had known when he was a boy, and been at school with. A sorry account he got of nearly all. Generally they had run through their property; their lands had passed into new hands; their negroes had been disposed of; two were now, he thought, 'strikers' for gamblers in Natchez."\(^{47}\) Strikers, of course, were people hired to lure customers into

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 322.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 325.

gambling houses, and aristocratic-looking young men were well-suited to the part. Nor did Olmstead find the southern planter over-honest even when still possessed of his plantation. Travelling long distances as he did, he felt he needed corn for his horse, and since he was forced to pay for each night's lodging he felt within his rights to ask for it. Aside from the fact that the grain was often not supplied when he was assured it would be, he found that his hosts or their stable boys did such tricks as greasing the corn so the horse would not eat it, and thus one small supply of corn could be offered over and over again to the horses of guests. Such roguery is, perhaps, rather picayune, but it is roguery.

The picture of the better people on the frontier can hardly be completed without some mention of the merchant class. Noah Ludlow tells an interesting story of a joke played by a storekeeper friend of his, which will serve as an example. Mr. Dwyer, the storekeeper, had a mountaineer customer who, being interested in music, decided to buy a violin. Unfortunately he lacked the necessary twenty-five dollars. Dwyer, always ready for a joke, traded for the man's shot gun an extra pump for a whiskey barrel, which he called an Irish bassoon. The next day when the mountaineer returned complaining that he was unable to make music, Dwyer showed him the zodiac signs depicted on an almanac and persuaded him that this was the
"gamut," essential to making music on the Irish bassoon. The mountaineer gave up being a musician on the following day and wanted his shot gun back. "Look here, 'squire, I've been blowing into this cussed thing until I've nearly blewed my brains out, and I'll be d---d if I can get a single squeak out of it!" The joke is typical of those perpetrated by the Pucks of frontier humor, who commit rogueries for the enjoyment of the deed rather than for economic motive.

The duel naturally should be classified as an act of violence rather than roguery, but some of the unique variations on the duel illustrate the ingenious mind of the residents of the old Southwest. In addition, the taking of life was regarded more lightly on the frontier than in even the most violent sections of Europe. Colonel James R. Creecy, a resident of Louisiana, gives an apt anecdote of this characteristic nonchalance about violence. While travelling through the woods, Creecy was stopped by a ragged looking man, armed only with a large stick. The man explained that he had been suspected of distributing abolition tracts and had been thrown out of his inn sans baggage. Creecy, giving him some money, cautioned him not to stop travellers again, for he would surely be shot. By the time he had reached the inn where he had planned to

48 Dramatic Life, p. 383.
breakfast, Creecy had decided to see whether his warning was justified. To a man the travellers at the inn asserted that they would have shot him without stopping to ascertain what his difficulty was. These were not a crew of rough-necks but gentlemen, wary of strangers in the woods because of the ever-present danger of robbery. A gentleman who would shoot down an unarmed man certainly would not quail from a little blood shed in an act of honor.

In the Southwest, despite the French influence which should have tended to regularize duels, a great many challenges stipulated conditions considerably at variance with conventional requirements of the code duello. There were, of course, duels with small swords or pistols at twenty paces, but the resident of the old Southwest was likely to add flamboyant touches. There are tales of engagements with pistols loaded with buckshot at ten feet, of combats with rifles, and even of such dangerous fights as the one in which two citizens of St. Louis, each armed with two pistols and a bowie knife, were locked in the darkened back room of a bar. Judge Child, previously mentioned, however, provided an example of the extremes to which these variations were carried; for the Judge, challenged to a duel by General John Joor under the condition that each

---

was to bring any weapons he chose to fight with, arrived on the field of honor with a cart loaded with pistols and muskets and complete with a mulatto servant to hand his arms to him as he needed them. Such informal procedure is common enough in humorous literature but seems doubly comic in actual life.

Such duels as these, in spite of a wry humor back of them, were designed to be much more lethal than the ordinary duel; but there were occasions on which the humorous point of view of one of the combatants prevented fatalities.

A fine example is related by H. S. Fulkerson about one Billy Button, an ex-comedian who had turned bartender. The town bully, Dick B., had tormented Billy beyond endurance, so that Billy decided on a ruse to rid the community of the villain. A duel was arranged between the two, with the pistols firing blanks, a fact unknown to Dick. After the shots were fired, Billy fell on the ground, "bleeding" profusely as a result of the generous application of ketchup. Dick, placed under arrest and allowed to hear the murmurings of the citizenry, took the first opportunity to avail himself of the better part of valor and left no forwarding address. This duel is one of the few examples

---

50 Bench and Bar, p. 22.

in which a roguish prank resulted in good to the community, and Billy Button, as well as all the practical jokers on the frontier, belongs definitely to the category rogue.

These then—the preachers, lawyers, doctors, and planters—represent the better classes of society in the old Southwest. The usual survey of Southern society makes little of the elements of roguery among the better people, preferring to accentuate their function as proponents of aristocratic culture. On the other hand, the samples of frontier life and character presented here are selected for the purpose of illustrating the fact that roguery never lay far from the surface of even the best people in the old Southwest. There were preachers who tended their flocks in the conventional manner; there were lawyers who were absolutely honest and fair, lacking perhaps even a sense of humor; there were doctors trained in medical schools and lacking the wanderlust. But, on the whole, the citizenry of the old Southwest partook in some degree of the attributes of the rogue, leading a roving life, regarding violence and crime with an almost objective dispassion, and turning an occasional fast dollar or playing a practical joke without economic motivation.

In any society it is the respectable population who establish the optimum standards of behavior and who are responsible for the interpretation of legal restrictions
on most criminal acts. Even in our day the actual enforcement of prohibitions against such things as gambling and the consumption of alcoholic beverages depends less upon statutory limitations than upon the social milieu of the individual community, which in turn is dependent upon the prevailing attitudes of the respectable classes in that community. In the old Southwest, where adverse environment and the remoteness of adequate means of law enforcement conditioned the individual to make his way as best he could without too much regard for the niceties of social behavior, where pleasures were likely to be crude both physically and morally so that the settler took his recreation in the less acceptable modes, where the European or the Easterner was impressed with the necessity for success and damn the consequences, in such a land it is not in the least extraordinary that the less respectable people should turn to roguery and villainy; nor that writers, interested in preserving the vivid life they saw rather than in making a contribution to formal literature, which after all was fostered in that geographically and culturally remote place New England, should seize upon the colorful character of the rogue as he appeared in his guise of the American backwoodsman.

Any correlation of the environment of the hero of European picaresque fiction with that of the resident of the old Southwest seems at first glance to be impossible; yet when all the surface dissimilarities are stripped from
the two, a basic correspondence remains. The European rogue was socially and economically insecure. He belonged to the bottom link of an aristocratic hierarchy which was controlled by a concentration of power in the hands of the few; he was poor and consequently was unable to control his immediate sphere of action even to the extent of guaranteeing for himself the basic necessities of existence. But above all he was smart and he knew, or he learned from experience, that control of environment could be achieved by those who first achieved material success. All around he could see examples of the fact that honesty and industry are not adequate to gain wealth in a hostile society; roguery, or the application of his wits to the problems evoked by his environment, with disregard for conventional moral codes, remained his only chance. On the frontier the settler also was faced with social and economic insecurity, the result of being exposed to an indifferent if not hostile natural environment. The difference lies in the facts that the frontiersman's environment was not controlled so much by individuals at the top and that the potentialities for material success and the psychological drive to attain success were far greater than they had been in Europe. And here too honesty and industry were not infallible guides to security: they could not guarantee that a man would not be murdered by Indians or robbed by highwaymen, that his house and goods would not be
destroyed by fire or storm when he lived far from his neighbors, that drouth or flood would not destroy his crop and with it his fortune. As a result of this insecurity some of the settlers on the frontier became out-and-out rogues; most of them found it necessary only to keep their wits about them to prevent their being easy marks for the rogues, and they sharpened their wits on the twin grindstones of petty roguery and practical jokes. Most of all, by their acceptance of roguery they established a social milieu in which, encouraged by the potential reward and easy escape which the frontier offered, roguery could flourish.
CHAPTER III

The Real Rogues and Criminals

Mariano Lorento, in his introduction to Lazarillo of Tormes, attributes the prevalence of picaros in Spain to the great wealth that nation was reaping from the New World during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Further, he states, "Given the requisite surroundings—a wealthy and populous country or town—the picaro—who is a parasite—will not fail to show up."¹ It may not be far wrong to extend this statement into the generalization that wherever wealth is abundant there will be those who seek to acquire it without going through the rather tedious process of earning it by honest industry and that the seekers will not be confined to picaros alone but may include in their numbers a wide variety of individual types ranging from the more-or-less honest businessman to the most cruel of highwaymen and murderers.

Though the old Southwest lacked the concentrated population of the Spanish peninsula, it was possessed of

¹ Mariano J. Lorento, Lazarillo of Tormes, John W. Luce and Company, Boston, 1924, p. 22.
comparable wealth. Gamblers flourished because they knew that on any steamboat, on any train, anywhere people congregated, it would be easy to find suckers ripe for picking at faro or three-card monte; and the suckers they found were not penny-ante prospects either, but wealthy planters, merchants, and professional men accustomed to carrying thousands of dollars in their wallets. "It was the day of 'inns' and 'taverns,' a time when if you had asked a landlord if he was keeping hotel he would have answered 'no, I am keeping tavern,' and many a time these inns and taverns housed in a single night guests, whose combined wealth, in the money carried upon their persons, would have reached the million dollar mark."  

The money was there for the taking and experienced rogues found it easy to take. George H. Devol, prominent among the river gamblers, reports the profits of a few years of a four-way partnership in gambling as follows: "Brown got $240,000 for his share of the profit, and Chappell went North with his portion, and is today as poor as myself."  

Devol, like many of his fellows, partially compensated society for his ability to acquire money by an equally great ability to put it back into circulation with enough rapidity.

---

2 J. R. S. Pitts, Life and Confessions of the Noted Outlaw James Copeland, n.p., Copyright by A. S. and L. S. Pitts, 1901, p. 8.

to prevent any serious currency shortage in his immediate vicinity.

In addition to the potential wealth available, the old Southwest offered another great advantage to the man seeking to live on the gains of other men. Although it did not provide a teeming population so that the rogue when necessary could lose his identity in the crowd, the frontier furnished even better concealment, miles and miles of forest and swamp land capable of concealing entire armies. The Natchez Trace, main thoroughfare for boatmen and businessmen who sold their goods in New Orleans and wished to return northward, ran for five hundred miles through trackless wilds inhabited by Indians and banditti, with only the occasional habitation of a farmer or ferryman; and there were other such places throughout the Southwest, offering concealment for highwaymen and haven for all those too closely pressed by the minions of the law. Imagine Lazarillo of Tormes presented with adequate refuge in an area so immense that its main and only street would stretch across Spain from Andalusia to Navarra!

Unfortunately, this adequate hide-out doubtless encouraged the operations of individuals whose actions transcend the bounds of roguery; the Trace, in particular, was fertile ground for highway robbers whose brutality marks them at once as villains, not picaros. And yet this class
deserves some mention in a study of roguery in the old Southwest for two reasons: criminals established the limits of social behavior at its lowest level just as the respectable people set the upper limits, thus providing a definition of the contemporary distinction between roguery and villainy; and they partook, in their multifarious transactions, of many of the characteristics of roguery as a result of the quirks of their personalities and of the social milieu of the frontier.

The history of outlawry in the old Southwest began just before the turn of the nineteenth century when Micajah and Wiley Harpe, together with their women companions, started a career of robbery and murder that was not to end until the citizens of Tennessee rose up in arms to drive criminals from their state. Actually, the Harpes could not, through any stretch of the imagination, be considered rogues; and yet "Big" Harpe--Micajah--utilized the disguise of a Methodist preacher to travel with relative security through territory that was in a turmoil looking for him; and he was not the only rascal who was to find the cloth an effective concealment.  

wandered about in clerical garb.

There are other colorful touches in the *modi operandi* of the early land pirates. A man named Wilson first conceived the idea of using Cave-in-Rock on the Ohio as a base of operations for acts of piracy against river travellers and put out his sign, rather euphemistically reading "Wilson's Liquor Vault & House for Entertainment." Then there was Colonel "Plug" Fluger who hid in the holds of riverboats and picked the caulking from the seams or bored holes in the bottom, calculating the rate of sinking so exactly that the boat became helpless at that particular point on the river where his men would be able to rescue the merchandise carried on board. Unfortunately, the Colonel miscalculated once and drowned along with the passengers and crew of the boat. Finally, there was Joseph Thompson Hare, who operated with his gang along the Trace. Hare was essentially a town man and a dandy, and he found long sojourns in the woods conducive to melancholy. As a result, he became very religious, preaching to his men and reading to them from "John Wesley's magazine" in between forays against travellers on the Trace. He was at last captured in Baltimore, where he had stayed overlong in a haberdashery debating whether to buy a plaid coat or one

---


of crimson silk.\textsuperscript{7}

John A. Murrel, born somewhere in Tennessee during the year 1804, is a finer example of the admixture of the rogue and the criminal than are most of his predecessors. His suave confidence and his readiness to put into execution even the most fantastic schemes—valuable assets to any picaro, who must cover up his true nature under a confident exterior—led Murrel into dreams of a rogue empire in the Southwest; and before the bubble burst he had assembled an army consisting of eight officers, three hundred lesser agents, and an unknown number of Negro slaves ripe for rebellion.\textsuperscript{8} It is ironical that Murrel's confidence in his ability to judge character caused him to reveal his plans to Virgil Stewart, the young man who proved his nemesis.

In his early days Murrel had been more of a picaro than a villain. He had evolved an almost fool-proof method for stealing slaves, and evidently practiced it extensively. It was his custom to induce a Negro to run away to a place of concealment which Murrel had prepared and to hide there until the owner had advertised him as a runaway. According to the law, the fact of advertisement constituted a power of attorney for whoever captured the

\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., pp. 102-103.
\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., p. 241.
slave, and Murrel was thus provided with a legal device to avoid prosecution if discovered taking the Negro away from the area. If he was caught, he could only be sued in civil court for breach of trust; without the power of attorney he would have been subject to criminal action for theft. Such a use of wit in preference to violence is typical of roguery.

In addition, Murrel early became aware of the potential rogueries that could be perpetrated by one disguised as a minister. For one thing, the garb was excellent for travel; in the days of Timothy Flint and Lorenzo Dow, preachers were charitably received wherever they went. Murrel had also found out from an acquaintance named Carter that such a disguise had other advantages. If one dabbled in counterfeiting, as Murrel and his associates did, he could go to camp meetings and, being above suspicion because of his supposed calling, could pass his counterfeit money. Considering the fact that the pseudo-preacher would probably be well entertained, even if he did have to give a sermon or two, Murrel and men of his ilk found the ministry very profitable as an occupation.

Just as villainous as Murrel, but with an eye for the flamboyant possible rather than the grandiose impossible,

---

9 Ibid., pp. 184-185.
10 Ibid., p. 221.
was James Copeland. Copeland became the leader of a group of outlaws known as the Clan, which had its chief "Wigwam" in Mobile, but which operated all over the Southwest. Although the Copeland and Murrel gangs used the same secret code and perhaps had a few members in common, it seems that they maintained their separate identities. Copeland, for example, in his confessions does not mention Murrel's plot to encourage a slave revolt. He, in general, maintained a more practical outlook on his enterprises than Murrel; he refused to engage in counterfeiting, although several of his friends found it profitable, and he was far too cautious to confess his deeds to a stranger as did Murrel. Copeland's confession was to Dr. J. R. S. Pitts, then sheriff, who acted as his jailor after he had already been convicted and sentenced to death.

Actually Copeland's career began with picayune operations; as a boy he pilfered from other children and as he grew older he advanced to hog-stealing. Perhaps if his mother had not called in an old friend, Gale H. Wages, to help her son escape punishment for hog-stealing, Copeland would not have become an outlaw, for Wages was a well-known desperado. After managing to get the trial delayed time and again, Wages and the boy Copeland decided that further procrastination would be worthless; so they set fire to the court house one dark night and destroyed the indictment, along with all the other records stored there.
The two then proceeded to Mobile, where Copeland, under the auspices of his new-found mentor, joined the Clan.  

Nor was the court house burning Copeland’s last experience with arson, for the first large-scale robbery he participated in made use of it as a method of concealment. After a short period of petty theft, during which apprenticeship Copeland was with a group pretending to cut shingles and burn charcoal, the gang was ready for what was probably the most spectacular of its operations—the pillaging of the city of Mobile. The Clan had secured positions in the City Guard for six of its members, and on an evening when all six worked the early night shift, the other members proceeded to enter several of the larger stores, load goods in bulk into waiting wagons, drive them to the harbor and unload them into small ships, also waiting. At eleven-thirty, just before the friendly policemen were to be relieved, the first set of stores was fired. Amid the resulting confusion, the robbers proceeded to transport merchandise from stores endangered by the fires to the safety of the ships in the harbor. The crowning touch is that the whole systematic robbery was a fancy-dress affair; Copeland, all of sixteen years old, and the others were disguised with false whiskers and moustaches, black eye patches, and appropriate

---

11 Life and Confessions, p. 35.
costumes. This successful piracy—Copeland's share alone was over $6,000 in merchandise—appears to the modern reader to have been the masterpiece of some Tom Sawyer of the underworld. Certainly it ranks with the deliverance of Jim in Huckleberry Finn for its meticulous but colorful attention to detail.

Although there were some members of the Clan who acted as receivers for the stolen goods, Copeland and certain of the others preferred to take on themselves the identity of itinerant peddlers and sell at attractive prices to planters and other residents of the backwoods. It was on the trip after the Mobile robbery that Copeland first discovered another form of roguery, slave stealing. His methods were different from those of Murrel. Customarily Copeland lured the Negroes away with promise of freedom; but in the first instance he found an attractive mulatto girl and proposed that she run away and marry him. Although he obtained a thousand dollars by selling her after he had concealed her for a few months, he did not escape twinges of remorse. He said, "I must bear acknowledge that my conscience did at that time feel mortified, after the girl had come with me, and I had lived with her as a wife, and she had such implicit confidence in me." It must be remembered that Copeland was still

13 Ibid., p. 43.
a callow youth at the time of this experience. He was later to participate in a wholesale robbery which would have furnished enough bizarre materials for a dime novel. The slaves were stolen from a camp meeting and taken on board a boat far up the Red River. The entire transaction involved bandits disguised as storekeepers and as United States marshalls; furthermore, the act made accessories of two Negro abolitionists who, thinking they were aiding in freeing slaves, actually ended in slavery themselves.14

Although Copeland himself never used the disguise of a preacher, one of the gang named McGrath found it much to his liking. Copeland, Wages, and McGrath had gone to investigate a group of slaves they wanted to steal, and finding that the owner's family was staunchly Methodist, they agreed that one of their member should become a preacher—McGrath was nominated. The other two, after considerable coaching of the candidate in the ways of the ministry, separated from him; but they could not resist dropping by the church to hear his first sermon. The sermon was a success and the two pious rascals, well pleased with their creation, joined whole-heartedly in the singing. Copeland memorializes the incident: "Wages sang bass and I tenor and we all made that old church sound like distant thunder."15 Next day, on being presented with a new suit,

14 Ibid., pp. 60-76.
15 Ibid., p. 46.
new saddle and bags, and fifty dollars in cash by his grateful congregation, McGrath decided to continue to walk in the path of the righteous.

Wages and Copeland left for a quick tour of the Southwest and McGrath stayed behind to travel from camp meeting to camp meeting. The pair returned richer in pocket than they had been, but they had also passed from the category of rogue to that of villain, for on their hands was the blood of innocent people murdered for material gain. Horse stealing, like many other actions, is a criminal or roguish act not by the simple fact of its perpetration but according to the manner in which it is perpetrated. Wages and Copeland got seventy-four horses and mules by cheating an old man who had befriended them and by murdering the old man's servants in their sleep. 16 McGrath had stayed within the bounds of roguery. He had simply sold his horse, his clothes, and everything given him at one camp meeting to fellow members of the Clan. Then he had gone to the next camp meeting, announced that he had been robbed, and thus he received a new outfit. His profits had amounted to only one thousand dollars in cash and four fine horses held by friends for him, but his hands were free of blood. 17

16 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
17 Ibid., p. 67.
These men then—Wilson, Hare, Murrel, Copeland, and the others—are a few of the many criminals who plied the trade of robbery and murder in the old Southwest. They were not rogues but villains, for they found too rapidly that dead men tell no tales and that murder was easy; but on the whole they partook of the exuberance of the frontier and demonstrated again and again the rogue's propensity for quick wit and extravagant action. Gil Blas had disguised friends as officers of the law centuries before the villains of the American frontier were born; rogues had swindled, lied, and cheated centuries before James Copeland stole his first pig. The materials were different—Lazarillo cut mouse holes in his master's food chest; McGrath had himself robbed between his meetings—but the attitude toward society was the same: a man should take what he can get and take it in the easiest way he can devise. The criminal simply overgoes the rogue: he obliterates not only the distinction between meum and tuum but also between desire for gain and greed for wealth, between humanity and barbarism.

There was, however, a multitude of true rogues in the old Southwest, men who remained aloof from acts of criminal violence but who were set apart from the planters, doctors, and lawyers by an elegant disregard for convention and the rights of ownership. The frontier was rich in opportunity for the man who possessed the Puritan
virtues of industry and economy; for the rogue it was a cornucopia, and the philosophy of the rogue—be he hog-stealer or land speculator—bore no relation to Puritanism. Its most graphic expression, perhaps, was given by an Irish woman Colonel Creecy discovered begging in New Orleans: “Who the devil d’ye think ’ud work,” she said, when d’they can git a hoonderd dollars a mouth be beggin’?

Among the lower classes in the South, petty swindlers seem to have been fairly common. D. H. Hundley considered two of these—the horse-trader and the small-town groggy keeper—sufficiently indicative of the baser aspects of Southern culture to include characters of them in his study of society in the old South. Of the former Hundley comments: "The Southern horse-jockey varies somewhat from the usual type, but chiefly in his outward man only; for inwardly he is ever the same sly, cunning fox, and thinks it a monstrous noble action to get the better of a credulous purchaser in a sale, and the very apotheosis of wit and shrewdness to swindle a poor country man in a swap." The horse-trader was a common enough sight in the agricultural Southwest, and in addition, trading was for many people almost an avocation; but it was in a fictional

---

19 Social Relations, p. 234.
sketch—A. B. Longstreet's "Horse Swap"—not in historical or sociological writing, that the custom was to be recorded most vividly.

On the subject of the groggy keeper, a character he evidently equates with that of the keeper of a small town inn, Hundley manages to wax more violent. "A groggy keeper in the South," he says, "is usually a man of uncultivated mind, devoid of principle, habitually a blasphemer and a Sabbath-breaker, a reviler of religion, and is sometimes also an abolitionist." 20 Then follows a description that would make Johnson Jones Hooper's "Ugly Man" hang his head and Ransy Sniffle seem like a cherub.

He is usually stout of person, being bloated from constant imbibing, and possesses a coarse beard, a blotched and otherwise spotted face, a red nose, hard, cold, watery, and inflamed eyes, a dirty and badly fitting dress from crown to sole; and in speech is low, vulgar and obscene, a retailer of stale jests and disgusting stories of scandal and intrigue, and with every sentence belches forth from his accursed throat oaths and blasphemy. 21

Because his tavern is in a small town and located off the main-travelled roads, the innkeeper is not too meticulous with his establishment.

Indeed, a "solitary horseman" even, or other way-faring man, hardly makes his appearance once in six months....The most profitable customer who ever patronizes the village Boniface of the South is the Horse or Hog Drover....Hence, the village

20 Ibid., p. 226.
21 Ibid., pp. 226-227.
Boniface makes no preparation for the entertain-
ment of strangers, and in consequence keeps the
vilest of vermin-inhabited beds, the mustiest of
feathers, and the dirtiest of bed-linen; while
the floors of all the rooms are bare, the walls
are bare, the chairs are rickety, the window-
shutters are ragged in the extreme, and rattle
and bang unceasingly at the sport of the wind;
and the whole is looked after by a single slovenly
wanton of a negro-wench...who will wink a modest
man out of countenance any day.22

Obviously such a place was the ideal resort of rogues and
villains of the lowest social order, and so Hundley pro-
claims it.

The inn-keeper's primary roguery, according to Hund-
ley, consists of the adulteration of spirits for sale to
his unsuspecting customers.

Given the whiskey, or neutral spirit preferred,
he proceeds to manufacture his own wines and
brandies from recipes furnished by dealers in
New York, who promise (we have seen their pre-
cious circulars) to forward the desired inform-
ation on the reception of twenty dollars. The
remainder of his liquors he mixes pretty thorough-
ly with wholesome water and with unwholesome in-
gredients of some other description designed to
give the requisite strength. Log-wood, juniper
berries, dog-leg tobacco, and even strychnine,
are all said to be used; and owing to their dif-
ferent effects, have originated the expressive
names of "bust-head," "rifle-whiskey," "Tangle-
foot," "red-eye," and "blue-ruin."23

With adulterants available at little or no cost, it is ob-
vious that what these vintners sold was not half so pre-
cious as the stuff they bought.

22 Ibid., p. 232.
23 Ibid., p. 227.
The portrait of the Southern tavern keeper as rogue would not be complete, however, without Henry S. Foote's anecdote of a landlord who was probably more cultivated and certainly more accommodating than Hundley's subject. Judge Buckner C. Harris, stopping in a small town to hold court, had been sent to a room by this innkeeper but found it occupied; he was sent to another with the same result. His conversation with the host is delightful and revealing:

"Pray, sir, are you keeping a bawdy-house? I found the first room you directed me to occupy already in the possession of a man and woman—the latter of whom I understand to be your wife—who were lying together upon the bed. On opening the door of the second room, I found the same woman lying on the bed there, but attended by another man. I wish to know what all this means?"

"My dear Judge," explained the good-natured tavern-keeper, "I beg you will be composed. It is not possible that I can for the present say a single word concerning the matter of which you complain. You see, my dear Judge, I am a candidate for constable in this beat, and very hard run for votes."24

The reader who would question the application of the term roguery to the actions of this innkeeper should remember that Lazarillo of Tormes ended his days in relative comfort under the protection of the church as a result of certain visits—the object of which Lazarillo did not question—made by his wife to the worthy father who lived next door.

24 *Bench and Bar*, pp. 107-108.
The innkeeper was, nevertheless, a rogue only by avocation, for he earned his living at a reputable trade. There were, however, rogues in the old Southwest who lived entirely by their rogueries. There were speculators and swindlers, petty thieves and beggars aplenty in this area; but the most distinct class of rogue, the one achieving most prominence in its day, was that of the gambler, particularly as it was manifested by the elegant habitue of the Mississippi river steamboats. "His distinctive clothes, his 'code,' his manners, the fabulous legends of his dealings, have never been equalled since his hey-day. The only other group which approached him in color, the gambler of the West, suffered from being followers and copyists of the greater original." 25

One of the best known of the ante-bellum gamblers is Johnathan H. Green, who after reforming earned his reputation by publishing several works on the subject of gambling. These books, both autobiographical and semi-technical, immediately call to mind the "coney-catching" pamphlets of the Elizabethan Robert Greene, especially as they consist of reform-biography and didactical revelation which occasionally give way to the less moral purpose of recording merely interesting anecdotes. Such titles as The Reformed Gambler, Gambling Unmasked, The Gambler's Mirror,

and Green on Gambling sufficiently indicate the contents of the volumes.

The picture Green presents of himself in Gambling Unmasked is that of an innocent youth led into the ways of sin by the association with vicious persons forced upon him by his extreme poverty. As a result of this effort, the young Green appears naive to the point of stupidity, rivalling Gil Bias as a youth in gullibility. Unfortunately, Green's protestations of innocence are not over-convincing. On the occasion of his first arrest, for example, in spite of the fact that he protested the affair as a gross miscarriage of justice, it was Green who manufactured pass keys from pewter eating utensils and engineered the jail break.26 Like that of European rogues, then, Green's innocence seems but sham.

Because of the reformist nature of his writings, Green is more inclined to present himself as an exposé of gamblers than as a gambler. Many of the incidents he recounts in this vein fall naturally into the folk-tale category of the cheater-cheated. For example, he tells of a small town on the Ohio river which had become infested with gamblers, who operated primarily in an old mill just outside of town. The irate citizens were on

26 Johnathan H. Green, Gambling Unmasked, Burgess Stringer and Company, New York, 1842, pp. 30-34.
the verge of referring their complaints to Judge Lynch, when Green volunteered to rid the area of this plague by winning the operating capital of the group. With some trepidation, the citizens decided that giving the gamblers a taste of their own medicine was a better plan than driving them off by violence. Unfortunately, Green discovered on his first attempt that in spite of the fact that he was able to introduce a marked deck into the game he was unable to win from his opponent, the chief among the gamblers.

On investigation it was revealed that the gamblers had concealed on the floor above the gambling room a man who was able to examine Green's hand through a knothole and signal his partner by pulling on a cord which ran through the outside wall of the building, under the floor to a signalling device under the gambler's foot. Enlisting the aid of a reputable merchant, Green set out once more to rid the city of its vice. After a few hands had been played, the merchant, who was concealed outside the building, reached under the clapboard exterior and seized the rope to prevent signals from reaching the gambler inside the building. Of course, Green with his deck of marked cards made short work of obtaining the gambler's money. After this night the town was free of gambling, for the rascals departed to recoup their fortunes. Green too was invited to move on by the ungrateful residents,
but with the rogue's disregard for adversity departed, being heavier in pocketbook than in heart. 27

Other tales in Green's works belong to the same category as the one just cited, but have other figures than Green involved. There is the anecdote of Captain Howard and his gang of gamblers who met a wealthy old hog-drover on shipboard and proceeded to cheat him of most of his fortune, consisting of a huge roll of thousand dollar bills. They learned to their sorrow, however, that their victim was really Spurlock the counterfeiter and that he had taken their good five hundred dollar bills in change while he played only with his spurious notes. 28

Then too, there is the story of General William Montgomery, operator of a gambling den at Montgomery's Point on the Mississippi. Having entertained a Frenchman and a Yankee peddler at black-jack one evening, the General decides to ride down the river on a barge with them and complete the process of emptying their pockets. He initiates the Frenchman into the game of "dead open and shut," a simple pastime in which the victim bets he can guess whether the General, who has his hands behind him, has his fists open or shut. The Frenchman is rather unsuccessful in his guesses, and the General offers the

27 Johnathan H. Green, The Reformed Gambler, T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1858, pp. 140-145.
28 Ibid., pp. 161-173.
Yankee peddler a chance to play one fast game for large stakes just as the boat reaches the General's landing. Allowing the Frenchman to hold the stakes, the General puts his hands behind his back. The peddler wins the game with a strong hand, carefully doubled into a fist, and knocking the rogue overboard, pushes the boat into the river as the General picks himself up out of the mud. The General and his servants attempt to shoot the travellers only to find that the flints of their guns, sold them by the Yankee, are made of horn rather than flint. 29

More rogue-like than Green, in that he is obviously unrepentant, is George H. Devol, whose Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi is the anecdotal autobiography of one of the most colorful of all river gamblers. Devol began his picaresque career early, for he ran away from home at the age of ten to become a cabin boy on a river steamer at the splendid salary of four dollars a month. This early apprenticeship—it was as a cabin boy that he learned to play seven-up and to "steal card"—stood him in good stead when he was hired as a bartender on a government boat operating on the Rio Grande during the Mexican War. While holding this position, he acquired the ability to "stock a deck," as he calls it, and practiced his skills among the soldier-passengers with such success that he was

29 Ibid., pp. 130-138.
able to return to New Orleans with the considerable sum of $2,700, and this at the ripe old age of seventeen.\footnote{30}

After this rewarding adventure, surprisingly enough, Devol returned home to begin working at the prosaic job of caulking steamboats. But it could not last; there was too much "sucker money" around for the young picaro to remain long in dirty, tar-stained clothes. First there was keno, and George was amazed to discover after his first night's venture, in spite of the fact that he limited his "take" to ten percent of the receipts, that he had earned $1,300.\footnote{31} From keno Devol gravitated to three-card monte, which became his mainstay, for he considered poker a form of entertainment primarily and not a source of income. Why should he bother trying to make a living by competing with other card sharps when there were hundreds of suckers ready to wager huge sums that they could locate the jack among the three cards spread face down on the table? Of course, Devol was not lacking in the qualifications of the successful card player; for he could mark a deck, stack it, and deal from the bottom with the best of them. There was only one game in which Devol did not excel, the game of faro, and it proved his nemesis. After winning considerable sums on the boats, he and his compatriots would

\footnote{30} \textit{Forty Years a Gambler}, p. 7.
\footnote{31} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
visit the "faro banks" in New Orleans and other cities. He comments rather sadly near the end of his book, "I won a great deal of money, but as the good old game of faro followed in the track of civilization and the railroad, I lost nearly as fast as I won."32

Along with his other attributes, Devol acquired a considerable reputation up and down the Mississippi as a rough-and-tumble fighter, and it must be remembered that the ability to fight was regarded as a virtue by the rugged sons of the frontier, although it was hardly such to the virtuous citizen. He was a large man, possessed of hands so huge that he could palm one entire deck of cards while dealing from another, and his strength would have made him a formidable opponent even fighting under the rules established by the Marquis of Queensbury; but his chief advantage in a fight was his granite-hard head. In the numerous combats related in his book there usually is a comment on his favorite weapon: "Well, to tell you the truth, it was a pretty hard fight; but I got one good lick at him with my head, and that won the battle for me."33

32 Ibid., p. 251.
33 Ibid., p. 47. Butting was a common method of fighting with some of the frontier toughs and perhaps was known even in Chaucer's day, for the "Prologue" calls attention to the fact that the miller's head was so hard that there was "no dore that he nolde heve of harre" immediately after mentioning his prowess as a wrestler.
Apparently people up and down the river paid careful attention to the fights Devol participated in, and frequently they could learn in advance that his enemies were planning to send a new champion against him. Of one particular instance, for example, in which he had defeated the representative of a rival faction and the pair were hauled into court, Devol comments: "...when we appeared in court, the Judge said he had a notion to fine us $100 apiece for not sending for him, as he wanted to see it himself."34

Many of the more picaresque of Devol's activities fall, as do those of Green, into the cheater-cheated category. As a matter of fact, even in three-card monte, it was usually necessary for the "capper," Devol's accomplice, to mark or bend the corner of the key card in order to induce the sucker to bet. Thus, the victim, thinking he saw a sure thing, was actually trying to cheat Devol and was only too eager to wager heavily on the turn of the card. These suckers, for the most part, were potential rogues themselves. Lacking only the quick wit and the shrewd perception of the true rogue, they were always ready to get something for nothing, and the only challenge such dolts presented Devol and his ilk was that of convincing them that they could not lose. They were the suckers who,

34 Ibid., p. 48.
said Devol's one-time partner Canada Bill, had no business with money.

There were more accomplished cheaters, too, whom Devol outsmarted. A wheel-of-chance operator once found to his dismay that the ivory ball was stopping on Devol's number with uncanny regularity, the result of the gambler's having first touched the number with a finger dipped in molasses.35 A Mr. Picket, who had made himself obnoxious by warning passengers away from the monte table, saw a safe bet in wagering with Devol that a package he was warming in the stove to apply to an aching tooth did not contain salt, for Picket had seen with his own eyes a fellow passenger empty the salt and refill the package with ashes while Devol stepped out of the cabin.36 Then, too, there was the traveller who, having lost heavily from his company's funds, arranged a scene in which Devol was to pretend to give him back his money. Such a device, he reckoned, would prevent his losing face with the passengers. Unfortunately, when he sought to have Devol arrested in New Orleans, the latter was able to produce witnesses who had seen him return the money in question. Such anecdotes as these are numerous in Forty Years and all provide excellent examples of the rogue operating in

35 Ibid., p. 119.
36 Ibid., pp. 221-225.
the crude American environment with a mental dexterity that would amaze his European counterpart.

Devol seems to have regarded people who stole or absconded with money as especially apt victims for his games. He tells, for example, of meeting an acquaintance from Cincinnati who had absconded with a married woman and eight thousand dollars belonging to a pork house at which he was employed. The woman was very attractive, and Devol comments: "I did not blame him very much for being infatuated, but I wondered how much money did he get away with, and how I am going to get my share; for I always felt that it was my duty (as an honest man) to win stolen money."37 To Devol the inexperienced thief who would help himself to a large sum and run away was a fool; even if he escaped the law his wealth was certain to attract sharpers of all kinds. In fact, since it was unlikely that the thief would even retain his money long enough to get out of the United States, Devol felt he was actually doing him a favor by saving him the long trip. The poetic justice of such a happening is, however, probably not beyond question.

As is typical of the rogue, Devol avoided trouble wherever possible, especially if it involved the law or irate citizens. To effect his escape he occasionally resorted to disguises, the simplest of which was that of a

37 Ibid., p. 60.
wealthy planter. If the passengers on a steamer began to suspect that he was a professional gambler rather than merely a fellow traveller, Devol would simply get off the boat at a nearby plantation, and the Negroes on the dock never failed to greet him as if he was their master returning, for all of them knew Devol and knew that there would be a silver dollar apiece for the service. On other occasions it was not so simple; Devol once had to exchange his elegant clothes for those of a deck hand and black himself with soot in order to escape an enraged gang of toughs he had cheated. And Canada Bill once had to be hastened off a train in clothes surreptitiously borrowed from a woman passenger. Neither Devol nor his immediate associates, it must be pointed out, habitually resorted to disguises or false names; they were quite willing that fame, be it ill or good, attach itself to their proper names. Other rogues, especially those who specialized in thefts and swindles, could not afford to be so honest.

Of course, Devol occasionally ran afoul of the law; but gambling was only a misdemeanor, and unless it could be proved that he had cheated his victim—no easy task, that—he would be let off with a small fine. The judges, as a matter of fact, frequently sided with Devol instead of his accusers, for he was well known for his generosity. On one occasion a group of passengers on a train going to New Orleans had stopped off at Amite and sworn out a
warrant for Devol's arrest for cheating, so that an officer pursued Devol to New Orleans and arrested him. The situation was serious, for Devol had no friends in Amite. He did, however, have friends in New Orleans, and one of them obligingly stole the warrant from the arresting officer's pocket. Devol calculated carefully so that he could entrain for Amite just as the officer, who had gone back for another warrant, got on the train for New Orleans. Devol continues the story succinctly:

When I got there I took the Judge and Prosecutor out and we had several drinks; then we went to a shoe shop and ordered two pair of boots for them, and took the size of their heads, and sent to New Orleans for hats. When they came back, and the case was called, the Judge heard their story, and then mine, and decided it was nothing but a case of gambling, and that he would have to fine us each five dollars and costs.38

The rogue had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that such an open-handed gentleman as he could not possibly be a swindler.

The European rogue is often critical, if by indirection, of the officials of established religion; Devol is far more charitable in his attitudes, for although he does not exactly approve of ministers who would eliminate gambling, he does adopt a live-and-let-live policy toward them. Ministers, he had found, could even be enticed into

38 Ibid., p. 104.
wagering on the three cards if encouraged properly. He exhibits his benevolence in such a selection as the following: "I caught a preacher once for all his money, his gold spectacles, and his sermons. Then I had some of those queer feelings that come over me (and when they came upon me I could not resist their influence), so I gave him his sermons and specs back." 39 The Lord, he feels certain, is not so partial; for he recounts with some degree of levity a steamboat explosion that happened one Sunday afternoon, being careful to point out that although fourteen preachers were killed, none of the thirty-five gamblers playing roulette in the barbershop were even injured. 40

Such then is the autobiography of a Mississippi River gambler, sprightly and full of the color of the old Southwest. Technically it is a true picaresque novel, an anecdotal life history of a nomad full of joie de vivre, who made his way through the world by means of a superior wit which enabled him to live off the foibles of his fellow men rather than by the sweat of his brow. But more than that, Forty Years a Gambler is the record of an era as vivid and exciting as any the world has ever known, and of the passing of that era; for George Devol lived on after

39 Ibid., p. 42.
40 Ibid., p. 23.
the Civil War, complaining that the suckers were gone, that five dollars was an unusually large bet for anyone to risk at the old three-card monte game.

Although the gamblers probably comprised the largest single class of rogues on the frontier, other varieties did not lack representatives. Among the more common were the directors of phony banks and the land speculators. The former type even found that they could begin operations with the consent of the law. "The procedure was simple: anyone could procure a bank charter, issue currency, unload it in the settlements. In the end the profusion of these practically counterfeit notes almost cut off trade."41 But, of course, the bank director could have exchanged his worthless currency for liquid assets and land, which could be so tied up by legal red tape that he would be immune to bankruptcy proceedings.

The land speculators have already received some general comment and require no extended discussion here; but one of them, who perhaps cannot be considered a true speculator as he never actually bought any land, will serve as an extreme example of the methods by which rogues deceived land-hungry Americans. This man, William Haddock, founded an imaginary town on the Ohio River and christened it with the appealing name Rolling Stone. To stimulate

41 The Outlaw Years, p. 201.
the sale of lots he issued maps, circulars, engraved perspective views, and even published a weekly paper, the Rolling Stone Messenger. Obviously the people who bought these lots of Haddock's, sold at a premium because located in a thriving metropolis, were disconcerted to find nothing but a wilderness on the spot designated as Rolling Stone. "Some of the immigrants gave up the search; some others cleared land and settled; still others, worn out by cold and privation, died. Mr. Haddock went on, to sell more town-lots."42 It seems facetious to wonder how much moss the gentleman gathered with this particular Rolling Stone.

There were other rogues who specialized in masquerade and managed to enjoy the fat of the land, at least until they were exposed. The "Count Garavalo of Southern Spain," who was rescued from the wreck of the steamer Magnolia bewailing the loss of his clothes and a chest of precious jewels, was entertained as befits royalty by the planters of Natchez. It seems that the Count, who was delicate in appearance and even supposed to be consumptive, appealed especially to the fine sentiments of the better ladies of the town. Unfortunately, some crude American who had served in the Mexican War identified him as an ex-barber from Monterey, and the Count's social success terminated

42 Ibid., p. 200.
Another masker, Shocco Jones, was more successful in his operations than the Count. Jones simply announced himself to be the agent of the United States Treasury Department, and his equipage—a package of official-looking documents and several trunks, suspiciously heavy as if they contained specie—supported his assertion. Quite naturally the bankers of the state of Mississippi, which he toured extensively, were only too eager to provide lavishly for a man who might select their bank as a depository for federal funds, or who might demand an audit of their books at a moment's notice. Jones acquired a friend, Sargent S. Prentiss, whose legal pecadillos have already received some discussion, and the two of them travelled about for several months, enjoying the best of Southern hospitality. Because of his supreme confidence and his frequent removals from place to place, Jones was never apprehended; for by the time the bankers had bolstered their courage enough to examine his trunks and papers, he had vanished.  

By far the most protean of all frontier rogues, however, was David Theodosius Hines, whose Life, Adventures and Opinions, like Devol's Forty Years a Gambler, belongs

---

43 Random Recollections, pp. 22-23.
44 Ibid., pp. 66-75.
in the category of the true picaro. Hines posed as a lawyer, doctor, planter, and preacher; but essentially he remained the same, an unregenerate, even boastful, thief. He is the prime example of the tenuousness of the line drawn between rogue and villain, and his claim to the former title is supported by the facts that he avoided criminal violence and that he maintains a cynical and humorous point of view as an author rather than by the fact that he preyed, as did Devol, on would-be rogues; for Hines's victims more often than not were innocents to whom he showed no mercy. Even his own mother was not immune, for he decided to "free" five of her slaves; but realizing that manumission was illegal in South Carolina and that the poor ignorant things would not be able to take care of themselves even if liberated, he sold them to a slave trader, thus cleansing his mother of the moral stains inculcated by slavery.45

The whole of Hines's career does not belong to the annals of the old Southwest, for he was born in Pineville, a little town near Charleston, South Carolina; and his area of operations included some of the larger cities of the North. As a matter of fact, the autobiography is in the form of letters ostensibly written to James Gordon

Bennet, editor of the New York Herald at the time of Hines's imprisonment in that city waiting trial for some crime he pointedly refuses to record in this work. A large percentage of his rogueries, however, were perpetrated in the frontier region, and for an obvious reason. Back East, be it South Carolina or New York, the law had caught him with disconcerting regularity and had even succeeded in sentencing him to prison; in the Southwest people were not so inhospitable, and he was able to follow his profession almost without let or hindrance.

George Devol once paraphrased the old saw: "Some men are born rascals, some men have rascality thrust upon them, others achieve it." David Hines achieved it deliberately and purposely, and he regarded, at least for literary purposes, the most flagrant rogueries as the consummation of his art. According to his account, his family had once been well-to-do; but on the death of his father the family fortunes declined considerably, so that he found himself, as he says, "but poorly provided with any of those aids of fortune to which my passions, tastes, and appetites, equally inclined." 46 It was necessary then for David, as head of the family to choose a profession; and the question of what to do was not hard to answer:

Fortunately, the answer was at hand in the

46 Ibid., p. 22.
valuable library transmitted by my venerable and deeply searching sire. Carolina had her warriors, her poets, her statesmen, her philosophers; the world was ringing with their greatness and her own; but where was her gentleman of the road— the bold asserter of his own and the natural rights of his race?  

Hines had found his career and he determined to become famous not only for his own honor but for that of the state.

With the elegant sophistry of the rogue, Hines tried to explain his philosophy in a prefatory letter to M. N. Noah, editor of the New York Star. He said: "If, as a partisan in politics, it is your avowed faith that right and wrong are works of indifferent signification, what hinders that I should apply your doctrine to goods and chattels; and where is the substantial distinction between mine and thine in society?" His mother, in her farewell speech to him as he left for his first tour of the Southwest, seems to have hit more exactly upon the mainspring of his philosophy: "'Git money, Dave,' she exclaimed in the simple energetic idiom of the country—'Git the dollars; them's all we wants now to make the pot bile. ...Look to the main chance—scratch in the dollars. I've hearn there's a mighty smart chance on 'em to be picked up in Alabam, and fudder on down to Massissipp.'" But Dave

\[47 \text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 27.}\]
\[48 \text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 6.}\]
\[49 \text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 78-79.}\]
had already made up his mind, and his kindly old mother's advice served only to reinforce his convictions.

Once having settled on his career, Hines decided that the proper arena for his operations would be Charleston, a far more populous area than Pineville. The next problem was one of transportation to the city, and a neighbor owned a fine horse and gig. Fortunately, too, this neighbor was overweight and in poor health because of his excessive laziness; walking would be good for him. With considerable satisfaction at being able to serve a friend, Hines relates the obvious conclusion to the incident: "I borrowed horse and gig without the knowledge of the owner; and warmed with the happiest convictions as I went along, that the health of my worthy neighbor would improve with every hour of my absence, I occupied the seat which he used to fill, and drove with due rapidity to Charleston."50

One of America's foremost rogues had launched himself on his career.

Hines's career as a physician began even less auspiciously than his career in theft. He was making his first enforced trip through the frontier, and, discovering that his pockets contained only five shillings, he decided that by practicing medicine he could make his expenses en passant. As a doctor, Hines was a conservative rather

50 Ibid., p. 31.
than an inquirer and experimenter like Gideon Linnaeus.

He sums up his career admirably:

The old women got all sorts of disorders, for which I had one unvarying remedy, in pills made of pine gum rolled in clay. Providence, fortunately for the country and the profession I had chosen, had bestowed upon the former a never failing supply of these excellent medicines; and I had the satisfaction of knowing that while there was every prospect that a new physician must often effect great good with an imaginary disorder, there was no possible case in which medicines such as I administered could do evil. But I soon grew tired of a practice which offered me so few chances of distinction. To feel pulses is a smaller business than to feel purses. 51

Although he resorted to it on several occasions, Hines never considered his pose as a doctor to be anything but a sideline activity to his thievery.

The study of law, however (and Hines did apparently read seriously in law), had a more vital function; it would acquaint him with the legal loopholes through which he might escape punishment for his crimes. On the first occasion when Hines required legal advice, he was somewhat scornful of lawyers, for they obviously had an improper attitude toward life. He says of his counsel:

"They persisted in calling that felony which I esteemed the very perfection of art." And of his trial: "They... succeeded, by some hocus-pocus, in convincing the jury that I was not myself—that I did not do that which I was only too happy to avow—that, in brief, I had no sort of

51 Ibid., p. 54.
merit as an artist in that profession, the glowing achievements of which it has been for me to relate and for you to eulogize." 52 His lawyers had persuaded the jury that he was not the check forger in question, for Hines had a known aversion for drab breeches, in which article the culprit had been dressed. In spite of his scorn for lawyers, however, Hines decided it might be well to learn their peculiar profession and began to prepare himself for it. After a time he was convinced that his new knowledge needed a test and he stole a Negro slave, allowing himself to be caught. His alibi was similar to Murrel's; Hines simply asserted that he found the man on the highway without a pass and that he was returning the property—albeit, travelling in the wrong direction—when unduly accosted by the officers of the law. He was, of course, acquitted. 53 Hines's usual role was that of the accomplished and benevolent gentleman, always ready to help a fellow man. If the people he met were inclined to mistake him for the son of a well-known man—the governor of South Carolina or some rich Mississippi planter—because of some purely coincidental resemblance between the name Hines happened to be using and that of the man in question, the rogue to keep from disappointing his new friends never

52 Ibid., pp. 86-90, passim.
53 Ibid., p. 91.
bothered to destroy the illusion. It was relatively easy then for him to plunder several guests at the same hotel and avoid suspicion by his genteel commiseration. In one letter, which purports to furnish extracts from his journal, Hines tells of his experiences with a collection agent for a Philadelphia company. The young man had collected a considerable amount of money, so that Hines was greatly concerned for its safety, for Murrel was abroad, and persuaded him to leave his trunks in the custody of the hotel at which they both resided. The journal on the following day records: "A great hubbub this day at the hotel. The collector's trunk has been sacked last night, and he pretends to a loss of seven hundred dollars.... Pity the poor youth's distress and lend him fifty dollars." Needless to say, Hines's generosity was applauded by all the guests at the hotel.

In his attitude toward violence, Hines was more refined than many of his contemporaries. Although he does not record his participation in a lynching, there are no fist fights or gun battles among the pages of his book. And yet he was not a coward, even demonstrating on occasion an excessive bravado; but his bluff always held, perhaps because he always seemed so confidently ready to back it up. He comments, for example:

54 Ibid., p. 107.
Vague reports and rumors did reach me more than once, of a design to bring me before Judge Lynch; but prudence came in to my succor, and discouraged the prosecution of their purpose. ... I had a double-barrelled deer gun, which chambered fifteen pelters, and was always stuffed with as large a mouthful as she could well carry.  

It took more courage than many of Hines's contemporaries could muster to call the hand of a man with such an obvious ace up his sleeve. As a matter of fact, Hines once succeeded in putting to inglorious retreat three officers who had come to arrest him. One of the officers felt especially ashamed of his flight. "Doe, under his disgrace, was seized with a profound melancholy, which made him take to gin and the methodist church."  

Although some demonstration of physical prowess was not out of order for the frontier rogue--Devol is no less rogue because he was a fighter--Hines was more appropriately the miles gloriosus. On one occasion, having set out to administer a thrashing to an old woman he suspected of tarring the eyes of his horse because the poor creature had somehow gotten into her cornfield, he was met by the woman and her two sons, all armed with pokers from the fireplace. He was immediately convinced that such a fine lady would not perpetrate any heinous crime, and concludes the account of the event with a generalization which applies

---

55 Ibid., p. 51.
56 Ibid., p. 63.
equally well to his own attitude toward his fellow men and his interpretation of their attitude toward him: "The readiness to resist injurious aspersions or hostile attacks, has always been to my mind a conclusive proof that the party is free from reproach...." 57

Obviously David Theo. Hines fairly well ran the gamut of roguery; he was thief, forger, swindler, masquerader, and miles gloriosus rolled into one, ready to apply his clever wit to any circumstance, accepting fortune and misfortune, wealth and jail sentences, with the stoic indifference to the vicissitudes of life that is an essential characteristic of the true picaro. But where the picaresque author commonly satirizes the institutions of society—although that satire is for comic effect rather than to incite corrective measures—Hines's Life, Adventures and Opinions is a burlesque after the manner of Don Quixote, treating as it does the matter of crime and rascality in the manner of gentility. From its inception, with hints of genteel decadence in his background and a noble old lady who is his mother—and whose grammar betrays her to the reader—through comments on the lawyers who mistake the consummation of his art for a felony, on to the very end, Hines's book is such a well-sustained work of literary burlesque that the reader is inclined to question its

57 Ibid., p. 53.
authenticity as a biography. In spite of Hines's realism as a character in literature, it is difficult to conceive of the fact that such a thorough-going rogue could actually exist.

It can readily be seen from these samples of the outlaw and the picaro that the prevalence of rogues and roguery in the old Southwest cannot be questioned. All around the early settlers lay opportunities for wealth and power, and ingrained in their natures was the drive to success at any cost. It was relatively easy for the planter or merchant to make a fortune in a short time, and wealth was loosely held where so easily acquired. It is no wonder, then, that the area teemed with robbers and picares, attracted by the wealth like flies to molasses. It is no wonder also that they found an ideal theater for their actions in the sparsely settled country where news travelled slowly and the woods offered ready concealment. Coates has observed of the outlaws: "They were no better and no worse than ordinary men, but their feet were planted on the dark soil of the West and their souls fed on its profuse lustiness."58 Worse than ordinary men these rogues certainly were; but it cannot be denied that their rogueries, particularly in the more flamboyant aspects, found ideal ground for flowering along the American frontier of the early nineteenth century.

58 The Outlaw Years, p. 119.
CHAPTER IV

The Men of Legend

Standing between the men who walked the paths of the old Southwest in the flesh and those whose existence was only in the world of fiction is another race of men, men who had a foot in each world. These were the gods of the frontier, the colossi who bestrode the world in a Saturnian age when all men were giants. From the time when men first read the words "D. Boone killed a bear" hacked rudely on the trunk of a tree until they heard that a lanky ex-congressman named Crockett had died with his back to the wall in the battle of the Alamo, the titans lived among the lesser people of the South; and after they were gone men remembered them, telling of their prowess around the fires of night and inscribing their feats for others to read, blurring a line here, enlarging there until those who had been men were deified. True, some of the gods lived on beyond their years of glory; and another race arose whose Olympus was the plains and mountains of the Far West, not the canebrakes of the South; but the older gods had lived and could not be forgotten, and are not yet forgotten.
Exactly why the people of any race at any time weave a cloth of legend about the figure of a human being is a question that cannot be answered simply. Always there is a man who lived or is supposed to have lived, and always the people see in the man characteristics that they themselves would like to possess. Sometimes the symbol is of religious, social, or political significance; sometimes he represents the manly virtues—strength, bravery, and honor—as they are interpreted by the society that produces him. But always he appears in a primitive society, one proud of its accomplishments although a little insecure in its objectives, never in a complex, sophisticated one given to scorn and self-deprecation. Beowulf, Achilles, Samson, and Davy Crockett—all must belong to a society that permits them to flex their biceps and hurl their boasts into the audience, not for them the polite society of the drawing room with its murmured conversation fragile like the stems of its wine glasses.

Once the folk hero is selected—and the reasons for selecting one rather than another may be unexplainable—the process of developing his adventures from mere historical fact into a full-blown legend is readily apparent and can be traced through all of its steps. True, the figures of ancient myth, the Beowulfs and the Joves, are too far removed to be evaluated in the light of historical accuracy; but in the United States only a century ago men
were being made into gods, and the intervening time serves only to give perspective to the process of transformation. A man such as Davy Crockett or Mike Fink is found possessing certain personal characteristics admired by his contemporaries and having in his own right achieved some degree of prominence among them. Even before his death stories of his adventures—roughly divisible into two categories, those which illustrate the ideal traits of the race and those which illustrate the personal eccentricities of the man—are circulated by word of mouth, and even, as is the case in the old Southwest, through means of mass communication such as the newspaper. Needless to say, these accounts tend to exaggerate rather than minimize the stature of the man and they gather into the common center tales which in actuality belong to other men and reissue them as a property of the myth. Then, at one point or another, the imaginations of the tellers of stories run riot; Davy Crockett ceases to be a mighty hunter and becomes a true god, unfreezing the axis of the earth and cutting the tails from comets. When this point is reached, the man is no longer the possession of historians, but owns a portion of history and of legend in his own right.

When the armored knights of Europe fell before the English long bow, an era of romance ended; and aside from the sea, which generates still its own breed of romance,
there was little fresh material left for the lovers of adventure. Tyl Eulenspiegel, travelling through the age of the Reformation discomfiting the clergy, provided but a poor substitute for Roland and his mighty sword, and consequently the chanson of Eulenspiegel is of a lesser genre. With the settlement of the American continent, however, a new nobility arose, the order of the woodsman, whose Saracen foes were naked redskins. The matter of a new romance, the matter of America, was created, and the literary exploitation of the frontiersman as a hero has not yet ended, perhaps has not yet reached its apex. This American heroic age lacks the golden plumage of the ancient ages, is a heroic age in a minor key, but its authenticity is undeniable, and it is from a heroic age that the figures of myth are usually taken.

If the frontiersman was adequate as the hero of romance, he was suitable too as the material of legend; but the legend was not the same as that of other heroic ages, for the pioneer did not represent a restricted class, a titled aristocracy, as did older gods. He was the symbol of a new society based upon the common man and therefore his characteristics would necessarily be not those of the wealthy and privileged few but those of the people at large—in other words, the characteristics of the mass of the settlers of the old Southwest. And it is through this relationship that the legendary backwoodsman partakes of
the qualities of roguery, for a touch of roguery was a common ingredient in the personalities of those who made him into legend. Doctor and lawyer, planter and squatter, preacher and card-sharp—in the old Southwest all knew roguery first hand, and all at least appreciated the characteristic shrewdness and quick wit of the picaro. It is only logical then to expect these qualities to become a part of the character of the Mike Finks and Davy Crocketts these people were building to legendary stature. But here again the problem of defining exactly the process of myth creation becomes complex, for some of the heroes with the greatest potentialities for capturing the common mind are only minor figures of legend, and Crockett, potentially an ideal rogue, has only a few qualities of the true picaro.

The number of men in the old Southwest who achieved legendary status in their lifetimes would be legion, for obviously such figures as S. S. Prentiss and George Devol were widely enough known to become magnets attracting anecdotal materials; but with the passing of time many have faded from the popular mind, leaving only a handful of heroes to buoy the weight of historical fiction and scholarship. Nevertheless, all of these men had certain common characteristics of existence which lend themselves to picaresque interpretation, although contemporary usage may prefer to make heroes, villains, or mere background figures of the actual characters. For one thing, they all
led wandering lives, the course of their perigrinations being naturally westward, following the tide of immigration that was flowing over the mountains from the Atlantic states. Furthermore, the stories preserved of these men are anecdotal in nature, giving brief scenes of significant action rather than continued biography. Thus two of the qualifications of picaresque literature are met, but they alone are not enough, of course. Unless the hero is a rogue in his own right, the anecdotal biography of his rootless existence cannot be classified as truly picaresque.

Of the three men—Crockett, Houston, and Jackson—whose mythical careers originated primarily as a result of their political pursuits, Andrew Jackson achieved the greatest prominence; for he became not only President of the United States but, and perhaps more important, the symbol of the brawling democracy that had grown out of the West. His career certainly provided ample raw material for the makers of legend; he was soldier, statesman, and defender of womanhood, but possessed of a fiery disposition that would add the necessary individuality. His early life too would have its appeal to the rugged appetites of the old Southwest, for his career as a lawyer found him an authority on dog fighting, cock fighting, and horse racing—all manly pastimes—but poorly equipped in law, showing the freshness of common sense rather than the
pedantic command of legal precedent. The career is flavored with such adventurous anecdotes as that of Jackson's arrest of the Kirkendalls, two roughnecks who felt that a district court impinged upon their authority and ordered it adjourned. After a rough-and-tumble fight Jackson, who had volunteered to bring the men to jail, appeared herding them along with his two bulldogs.

As a military man, Jackson was no less sensational. He began his campaign against the Greeks with an arm broken by a bullet as a result of a "recontour with Thos. H. and Jesse Benton," indifferent to his own suffering and concerned only for the welfare of his men. He quelled a mutiny among his troops by facing them alone and recklessly daring any one of them to desert, and he managed to inspire such terror in the Indians that a whole tribe of Redsticks deserted the British during his Florida campaign because the English leader made the mistake of mentioning Jackson's name in his exhortation of the troops. In addition to all this, he was celebrated to the bounds of the nation for his victory at New Orleans. It was a

---


3 Ibid., p. 131.

4 Lewis, *When Men Grew Tall*, p. 117.
military record to pale the wildest imaginations of the contrivers of fiction.

Even more to the tastes of the romancers was the duel with Samuel Dickinson over the latter's insulting remark to Mrs. Jackson, who through a mistake had married Jackson before her divorce from Lewis Robarbs. The fact that the legend makers worked with this incident is demonstrated by Joseph G. Guild's listing in his *Old Times in Tennessee* of the variant tales in existence only half a century later. The stories say, for example, that Jackson did not intend to kill Dickinson at all, that he killed only because he thought he himself had received a mortal wound, or that he realized that Dickinson, an excellent shot, would kill him and had come to the duel determined to live long enough to kill his opponent. The implication of a connection between this sensitivity about his wife's honor and his actions in the famous Eaton scandal, which disrupted the entire cabinet, is only too common among the writers on Jackson.

This then is the man possessing the potentialities for becoming a legendary figure; but there is no true Jackson legend. He remains only a figure of historical importance for a bygone age and a personification of an outworn political creed. His friends created a Jackson

---

who was the vigorous defender of national unity and the rights of man; his enemies created a crude backwoodsman needing the aid of such an able friend as Major Jack Downing to cover up his faults and weaknesses. More pertinent to the present study is the absence of Jackson the rogue. His neighbors were not strangers to roguery, and his own life provides tempting opportunities for a rogue legend, for tales of his interest in horse racing and other such half-developed stories as the one of his gambling with his landlord in Salisbury, North Carolina, for bills incurred during his study of law are tempting; but nowhere is there a sharp-witted, quick-eyed rascal turning the foibles of his fellow men to his own advantage.

Sam Houston is no less tempting to the legend makers than Andrew Jackson, and his life contains far more of the elements that could be easily converted into a picaresque tale, for it was marked by more wandering than Jackson's and exhibited far more fluctuation between the extremes of fame and disgrace. From being a runaway boy living among the Indians, he rose to the office of Governor of Tennessee, fell from grace to such an extent that even among the Indians, to whom he returned, he was called the "Big Drunk," and rose again to become President of the Republic of Texas, and George Washington of the West. Furthermore, his enemies made capital of his moral defections and on the occasion of his election to the governorship
of Texas celebrated with an anonymous pamphlet entitled "Houston Displayed, or Who Won the Battle of San Jacinto; by a Farmer in the Army," accusing him of being a profligate, coward, drunkard, and drug addict. But by this time Houston had risen to a point where he could ignore the slander, and he did not bother to answer the charges made in the pamphlet until 1859, near the end of his second term in the Senate.

No less heroic than Jackson's beginning the Creek campaign with a broken arm is Houston's exploit at the battle of the Horse Shoe. Wounded in the thigh by an arrow while leading the charge, he fretted while one of his men, white-faced, drew the barb out—or, in another version, he brushed aside help and pulled it out himself. Then, disobeying Jackson's order to stay out of the battle, he rushed into the van again, collapsing only after he was wounded twice more. This young giant, who at his prime was six feet six inches tall and weighed 215 pounds, had the qualities of a leader of troops; and his later military duties in Texas showed him quite capable if not spectacular in that regard.

There exist about Houston a number of anecdotes which

---


7 Guild, Old Times, pp. 188-189 and 281.
illustrate quite well the fact that he had captured enough popular interest to become a minor legend. These tales range from the sordid accounts explaining his sudden departure from Tennessee and his subsequent degradation as the result of discovering his wife in the act of adultery, to comic anecdotes of innkeepers making insulting remarks about the ex-governor to a guest who they do not realize is Houston. It is the latter class, of course, stories with motifs common to folklore, which would provide the researcher with an opportunity to discover original sources and analogs in the literature of other heroes and which would exhibit the tendency of myth makers to glean anecdotes from the life of one man and attach them to another.

A most familiar motif in anecdote is that of the outspoken person skeptical of the identity of a famous man, and there is at least one Houston legend in this pattern. After his fame had reached its height in the liberation of Texas, Houston, travelling back East, was fishing from the landing at Cairo, but found that his line kept getting entangled with that of a young boy who stood near. The General identified himself and suggested that the lad move a little further down to avoid additional difficulties.

"Now look here, old Skeezicks," cried the boy, fully agitated, "I don't want to quarrel with you, nor nobody like you. Your name is Sam. Dawson, and you live in Texas; and like everybody else, you stole a hoss, and had to go there; and now you're putting on a big shine, you old thief,
and calling yourself Sam Houston. 8

With that, the young man snatched the General's pole from his hand and threw it in the river, leaving the George Washington of Texas open-mouthed and empty-handed.

In the body of Houston anecdotes, as is the case with Jackson, the rogue element is conspicuous by its absence. Surely the young white man learned a few sly tricks from his Cherokee foster parents; surely the "Big Drunk" obtained a bottle or two for which he was unable to pay; but the tales of roguish practices, if they ever existed, have dropped from the Houston legend. The nearest approach to Houston the rogue is made by the "Houston Displayed" pamphlet, and without a doubt that display is of a villain, not a rogue. Nevertheless, the picaresque pattern of his life, which lends itself to anecdotal biography presenting a wandering hero buffeted about by the fickle winds of fortune, provides for the legend of Houston a basic similarity to the rogue legends of Europe.

If his political prominence was less than that of Sam Houston and Andrew Jackson, David Crockett's stature as a figure of myth far exceeds theirs. Perhaps, in achieving no greater rank than that of Congressman, Crockett did not climb to a position exalted enough to overawe the mind of the common man, and Crockett himself remained

8 Ibid., pp. 291-292.
a common man in spite of his uncommon attributes.

Davy would seem to have been the authentic backwoodsman, and the life of the individual may be taken as a description of the genus. Restless, assertive, unsocial, buoyantly optimistic and obsessed with the faith that better land lay further west, cultivating a bumptious wit that was a defense mechanism against the meanness of daily life, he was only an improvident child who fled instinctively from civilization. 9

Such statements regarding the authenticity and typicality of the individual have been made of most of the frontier heroes, but Davy Crockett, who was farmer as well as hunter and small-scale entrepreneur as well as politician, is perhaps the best representative of the protean character of the frontier.

The various contemporary accounts of the life of Crockett have been grouped into three classes by V. L. Parrington, who sees an exploitation of frontier waggery in the first books, such as the Sketches and Eccentricities, and expression of anti-Jackson spleen in such as the Tour to the North and Down East, and an attempt to attempt to capitalize on Crockett's dramatic death in the Exploits and Adventures in Texas. 10 It might well be added that the posthumous almanacs represent still another category, the conscious but unsystematic attempt to develop


10 Ibid., p. 173.
Crockett into a superhuman being for comic purposes. The mythical Davy, then, is to be found in the almanacs; the man, and the man as a rogue, in the early biographies and autobiography. The strains cannot be separated so simply, however, for the legend began with Edward Sylvester Ellis’ *Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee*, the first of the biographies, and the almanacs are not devoid of anecdotes touched with roguery.

Unquestionably Crockett had gained some local reputation as a spinner of tall tales, but it is highly improbable that he would have become an American legend had he never gone into politics. As a Jackson partisan and a representative of the brawling West, Crockett was the ideal target for jokes from the sophisticated Eastern politicians, and evidence of a humorous malice was not long forthcoming. "Soon after his election, several newspaper yarns showed Congressman Crockett behaving exactly like a jest-book frontiersman."11 It is equally obvious that the pro-Jackson elements could not tolerate anything that would mock the character of a party favorite. The race was on.

That in its later development if not in the beginning, the Davy Crockett myth was a deliberate fabrication scarcely admits of a doubt, nor that its immediate purpose was partisan. It did not

spring from the soil of the Tennessee canebrakes; it was created at Washington.\textsuperscript{12}

Crockett's subsequent break with Jackson made it necessary for the partisan papers on both sides of the political fence to reverse their positions, for the lanky frontiersman had achieved national prominence and could not be neglected.

Farrington has commented on the peculiar prominence Crockett achieved as a political football: "A simple-minded frontiersman, he went down to Jericho and fell among thieves, and when they were done with him they left him despoiled politically but invested with a fame that has grown to this day."\textsuperscript{13} It is certain that Davy knew of his fame, for he began to capitalize on it with his writings, and even the first two almanacs were copyrighted in his name.\textsuperscript{14} Whether or not he ever realized his political exploitation is uncertain, but the disillusionment with the life of a politician did hit him hard just before he left Tennessee. After losing an election by a wider margin than pleased him, Crockett called the voters together and addressed them. He recalls: "I concluded my

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Kain Currents}, The Romantic Revolution in America, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{14} Constance Rourke, "Davy Crockett: Forgotten Facts and Legends," \textit{Southwest Review}, XIX (January, 1934), 149.
speech by telling them that I was done with politics for the present, and that they might all go to hell, and I would go to Texas." The Colonel was tired of politics, but he was far from being tired of being an American legend, and the Exploits and Adventures in Texas, of which only a portion was finished by Crockett himself, and the first two almanacs prove that he was still eager to please his public.

If Crockett did not actually originate his own legend, he certainly encouraged it enough, for he seems to have acted the part of a professional comic backwoodsman. Even as early as his first trip to Washington he thought nothing of startling the patrons of the Raleigh, North Carolina, inn where he stopped enroute with the conventional boast of the backwoods brave.

I'm that same Davy Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half horse, half alligator, little touched with the snapping turtle--can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey locust--can whip my weight in wildcats,--and if any gentleman pleases, for a ten dollar bill, he may throw in a panther,--hug a bear too close for comfort--and whip any man opposed to Jackson.

Even when he arrived in Washington his frontier exuberance

was not greatly dimmed, for he found that "most persons believed everything which was said about the backwoods, and he thought he would tell a good story while he was at it."17

Soon after his break with Jackson, however, a new Crockett was inadvertently created by a newspaper which published the notice that the President had authorized Crockett to mount the Alleghenies and wring the tail off the comet as it passed the earth. Davy's reply was characteristic of the bluff huntsman: "I'll be damn'd if I had a commission, if I didn't wring his [Jackson's] tail off."18 Nevertheless, Crockett the cosmic giant was created, and the tales of his experiences with the forces of nature have continued to grow.

The final development of the fabulous Crockett was the work of the almanacs, published at first in Nashville and later in New York and Boston, with printings in other cities, between 1835 and 1856.19 In the almanacs Crockett acquired such accouterments as a pet bear named Death-Hug, a buffalo named Mississip, and a companion named after Ben Hardin, Congressman of Kentucky. These unusual characters travelled in anecdote all over the world, performing

17 Ibid., pp. 162-163.
18 Ibid., p. 127.
strange feats. Mariano Loreto has commented of the author of the second part of \textit{Lazarillo of Tormes} that he was "so far out of sympathy with the creator of Lazarillo, that he indulged in such nonsensical pranks as converting the hero into a tunny fish and making him roam the vasty deep in search of adventure."\textsuperscript{20} The creators of the prodigious Crockett of the almanacs are just as removed in point of view from the original creators of the homespun legend.

Although none of the six Davy Crocketts identified by Walter Blair can be rightfully called a rogue without overstretching the term, there are many elements smacking of roguery in the life of the original Crockett as recorded in the early biographical works. To begin with, Davy left home at any early age and spent two years wandering about, not with the general tide of the western movement, but where his fortunes took him. What is more, he did not roam alone as did such American rogues as Mines, but entered into a series of what were in effect apprenticeships, after the fashion of the European picaro. His first employer, an old Dutch cattleherder, proved too hard a master, and Crockett ran away from him. The next, a waggoner, proved more lenient, but less trustworthy, for he spent the money David had given him for safekeeping

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Lazarillo of Tormes}, p. 25.
and never had enough to pay any wages. These two incidents, of course, do not provide specific analogs for any of the European tales, but the pattern is the same—a poor boy taken advantage of by a series of masters until he leaves them to shift for himself.

After his return home, however, Crockett the picaro fails to materialize, and Crockett the honest if prankish citizen takes over. Among the tales there are a few anecdotes, and only a few, which show that Crockett partook of the rogue as did his neighbors on the old Southwest. His own revelation of his process for winning votes is, in effect, the frontier version of European political bribery.

When you see me electioneering, I goes fixed for the purpose. I've got a suit of deer leather clothes, with two big pockets; so I puts a bottle of whiskey in one, and a twist of tobacco in t'other, and starts out; then if I meets a friend, why I pulls out my bottle and gives him a drink—he'll be mighty apt, before he drinks to throw away his tobacco; so when he's done I pulls my twist out of t'other pocket and gives him a chew: I never likes to leave a man worse off than when I found him.21

This particular form of political chicanery was not actually roguery when viewed in relation to the mores of the West, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge had observed in his Modern Chivalry forty years before that the election usually went to the man with two kegs of whiskey.

Perhaps the most famous of all Crockett rogueries,

21 Ellis, Life and Adventures, p. 66.
the coonskin trick, also occurred in connection with providing the voters with liquid refreshment. The story exists with slight variations, but is told at its fullest in the *Exploits and Adventures in Texas*. Crockett, while out hunting, happened to run into a political rally sponsored by his opponents near the groggeries of Job Snelling. The audience seemed glad enough to listen to Crockett speak for a while, but began to lose interest as their throats got dry and wandered back to the other speaker. Davy was in a quandary, for he had not anticipated having to treat a crowd while hunting and so had no money; worse, Snelling, a "gander-shanked yankee," would give him no credit. Fortunately, however, the price of a quart was one coonskin, and Crockett quickly procured a fresh one from the woods nearby. Unfortunately, the first quart did not keep throats moist long, and the audience again began to wander away. Then Crockett saw that Snelling had carelessly thrown the coonskin under the bar and was able to fish it out unnoticed. The process certainly had more finess than Lazarillo's futile tapping of his blind master's wine bottle, and Davy observes of its effectiveness: "I wish I may be shot, if I didn't, before the day was over, get ten quarts for the same identical skin, and from a fellow too, who in those parts was considered as sharp as a steel trap, and as bright as a pewter button."[22] The

---

topper to the incident was provided by Snelling, who, discovering he had been tricked, charged the whiskey to Crockett’s opponent, too grandiose to question his bar bill.

Quite obviously the attitudes of the American protestant toward religion are far different from those of the European Catholic rogue, who saw the church both as a shelter from privation and as a subject for petty pilfering. The frontiersman, however, was not awed by the clergy nearly so much as his relatives on the east coast, as proved by tales of rowdies breaking up camp meetings and the records of religious apathy even among the relatively cultured. David Crockett shared in this attitude, refusing to go to church, for "he once heard the preacher state positively, that he had seen a single stalk with thirty-three heads of cabbage on it."^23 But Davy was not entirely devoid of the finer sentiments of religion. On the way to Texas he listened to a heart-stirring eulogy of God and nature by his preacher companion, and reported: "We were alone in the wilderness, but all things told me that God was there." It did not take long, however, for the convivial huntsman to regain his usual composure. As soon as the parson finished, Davy records, "I approached and pressed his hand, and thanked him, and says I, "Now

---

^23 Ellis, *Life and Adventures*, p. 133.
Crockett went down to Texas with a motley crew—a reformed gambler, a bee hunter, an Indian hunter, and an ex-pirate—and there he carved his niche in the house of fame by his heroic death, the climax of his picturesque life. Even the legendary Joe Margarac, who cast himself into the crucible to make better steel for new rolling mills, died no more nobly than Davy Crockett, who died fighting for that especial brand of freedom of which he had already become a symbol. The Crockett myth grew to fantastic proportions, and even the dry, factual accounts of the history books cannot obliterate entirely the picture of Davy the carefree hunter, pioneer, and backwoods politician.

If roguery appealed to the settlers of the old Southwest and if legends are the creation of the popular mind, it would seem peculiar that the stories of these three American folk heroes—Jackson, Houston, and Crockett—do not contain more elements of roguery than they do. Actually, however, a satisfactory explanation for the absence of the picaresque in their legends is not difficult to find. In the first place, all three held important political positions, so that their enemies preferred to describe them as villains rather than jovial rogues and their

24 Exploits and Adventures in Texas, p. 43.
friends preferred to accentuate their honesty rather than their sharp practices. Davy Crockett, the most rogue-like of the group, could well afford to be considered a prankster and a practical joker; he could ill afford to reveal himself as a cheat or a petty swindler, for that would have ruined him politically.

Moreover, the three were, in effect, symbols of the new democracy of the West, proud and assertive but sensitive to the fact that it lacked a polished culture. Jackson's supporters might enter the White House with muddy boots, but they compensated by an uneasy defense of their ideals. Simon Suggs, the foremost picaro in American literature, said "what's a man without his integrity?" And the admission of even petty malfeasance opened a man's integrity to question. As a result, America's politicians when they entered the land of myth tended to leave behind them their roguish pranks, and the more prominent the man politically, the less roguish he was; of the three, Davy Crockett, who never achieved any higher office than congressman, became not only the most extravagant legend but also the greatest rogue.

Perhaps never achieving the legendary stature of Crockett but nevertheless achieving mythical status in his own right was James Bowie, famed more for the knife that bears his name than for his personal exploits dependent on it. The Bowie legend, like the Crockett legend, did
not have to wait until the hero's death before it sprang into existence. While Jim was relatively young he found stories of his knife fights in wide circulation, and his brother Rezin actually felt it necessary to issue a formal denial of the rumors of knife duels in which the principals were tied by the wrists or sitting astraddle a log to which their trousers were nailed. Rezin was careful to observe that his brother had used the famous knife in no duels whatsoever, only in what he called "chance medleys."²⁵

Obviously the anecdotes of a man made famous by a deadly weapon would be bloodthirsty rather than humorous, and although Bowie was a hero rather than a villain, it was his prowess with the knife, not his comedy, that attracted attention.

Not often does a man, within the course of his own lifetime, grow into a legend, but James Bowie suddenly found himself one of history's most outstanding examples in that respect. He had become a legendary Colossus at the age of thirty-three. . . . Now his name was being borrowed by fictionists of the "penny dreadful" type, and journalists everywhere counted as a red-letter day that upon which they could print a new Bowie story or steal a slightly worn one from the exchanges.²⁶

And the appeal of the blond giant is not yet gone, for

²⁶ Ibid., p. 54.
only recently Paul Wellman’s fictionalized biography of Bowie, The Iron Mistress, made the best-seller lists.

Although the Bowie legends as a rule lack the comic point of view so common to tales of roguery, the rogue elements in the actual life of the man more than compensate for the lack of manufactured pranks. The real Bowie was possessed of that extravagance of character so typical of the frontier, with an innate recklessness which led him to perform such feats as riding wild alligators whereas others only mused about such deeds; and he seems, too, to have had his full share of the frontier incentive toward material success, in spite of the fact that he never acquired great wealth. James Bowie liked to make and spend money, not caring too much for the ethics of either process, and it is in the business of acquiring money that his rogue-like qualities reveal themselves.

The most prominent of Bowie’s early rogueries was his dealing in slaves. It was forbidden by law to import slaves into the United States, but it was also common knowledge throughout the lower region of the Mississippi that Jean Lafitte was selling Negroes at a dollar a pound—a fantastically low price—from his stronghold at Campeachy, just outside the territory of the United States. Bowie’s shrewd mind soon worked out a scheme whereby he and his brother Rezin could work the law to their advantage. Realizing that anyone who informed on smugglers
received a reward equal to half the auction price of the goods, the Bowies smuggled their slaves into Louisiana, turned informer on themselves, and bought the slaves at auction for what amounted to half price. Having a legal title to the slaves, they then were able to move them upriver and sell at a handsome profit. This roguery, however, did not prove as remunerative as the Bowies expected, for one entire shipment was captured by Indians in the process of being smuggled into the country, and the loss was sufficient to convince them that the risks involved could well outweigh any reward.

In his later years, Bowie had a considerable business as a land speculator in Texas. Mexican citizens and only Mexican citizens were allowed to buy eleven league tracts of land—almost 4,500 acres—for a ridiculously low price, usually between one and two hundred dollars. The sharp-witted American soon found a way to acquire land; he persuaded fifteen Mexicans to buy land and sell to him for only a slight increase in price. Then Bowie disposed of the land by offering it to Louisiana farmers and colonists in Texas at what seemed to them attractive prices. Apparently this bit of chicanery did not offend Bowie's Mexican friends, for he married the daughter of a

---

27 Ibid., pp. 24-25.
28 Ibid., p. 77.
well-to-do family and eventually became a Mexican citizen himself.

The usual Bowie legend presented the young hero as a frontier Robin Hood, winning back from an unscrupulous gambler made temporarily honest by the threat of Bowie's knife the fortune lost by some naive young boy. The opportunity for mild roguery in the anecdotes is limited to such as occurs in the following tale. Bowie was amazed to see a man he recognized as a horse thief and wife-deserter enter a Texas inn with a young girl and announce his intention to marry her. Realizing that innocent creature would not believe any accusations he made against her lover, Bowie was forced to think out a plan to prevent the marriage. He persuaded a pious-looking friend to masquerade as a priest and come to the inn. The priest offered, of course, to wed the couple, but insisted they confess first. When the horse thief went into the next room with his confessor, Bowie saw to it that the door remained sufficiently open to allow the girl to overhear her intended's account of theft and infidelity. The rogue element is slight, for Bowie is not seeking personal gain, but the clever device is typical of the true rogue.

Further down the social scale than Crockett or Bowie, but just as much the magnet of legends, was Mike Fink,

29 Ibid., pp. 72-74.
"king of the keelboatmen." The river was vital to the growth of the West, and the men who earned their bread at the arduous task of ferrying goods along the Mississippi stood as a race apart, crude and uncouth but glorying in their own strength. Their lives were symbolic of high adventure not only to their own kind but also to the plowboy along the bank who daily saw them pass, drifting downstream with the current, spending the time in song and dance, or laboriously working the keelboats back upstream. Many men of the river—Mike Wolfe, Bill Sedley, James Girty—were appropriated by the popular fancy and turned into mythical gods, but Mike Fink was the king of them all. He was "the Paul Bunyan of the boatmen, and to him were ascribed sooner or later most of the exploits that the young West loved to retell and exaggerate." 30

Perhaps Mike represents a limited group, is a composite picture of the boatmen rather than a composite picture of frontier democracy as was Crockett, but Constance Rourke seems to have judged him too harshly when she said: "Mike Fink embodied the traditional history of the hero, but he never acquired the nation-wide fame of Crockett, nor did he embody so many aspects of life on the frontier,

30 Leland D. Baldwin, The Keelboat Age on Western Waters, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1941, p. 110.
or slip—as Crockett did—into poetic legend."31 Walter Blair has counted at least thirty distinct Fink yarns—a sizable body—which were in contemporary circulation, and most of them exist with several variations. In addition, Fink, though not historically so important as Crockett, has not slipped entirely out of the popular mind. Irving Anthony could comment in 1929 that "Mike Fink is a legend and he still lives in the minds of the old river men."32 And Lucy Hazard could point out the fact that John G. Neihardt included Mike in his story of the Ashley-Henry expedition, The Splendid Wayfaring, and had even written a long "epic" poem, The Song of Three Friends, on the theme of Mike's adventures with his cronies Carpenter and Talbeau.33

Fink's life followed the nomadic pattern common to the picaro. He was born in Pittsburgh, spent the major portion of his life wandering up and down the Mississippi, and died far to the west up the Missouri. But a picaresque vagabondage is not his only claim to fame. "Mike was famous as a joker, and most of his jokes were tinged with

a lawlessness which the individualistic pioneers seemed to admire. Although one class of American rogues, led by Sut Lovingood, devoted themselves to playing pranks for the sheer hell of it, Mike Fink is no Sut Lovingood and his rogueries are more in keeping with the economically motivated tricks of the European picaros.

A rogue trick common to seamen at least since the days of Chaucer's sailor is pilfering from the cargo, particularly if that cargo is spirituous liquors, traditionally a weakness of nautical men. Mike Fink and his crew were known to have engaged in at least one such roguery. In 1819, they were taking excessive time on a downriver trip with a cargo of wine and brandy. An investigator reported that they had simply tied up to the bank and were having a celebration, procuring refreshment by tapping the casks in the hold and replacing the contents with water. The damage resulting to the wines especially proved costly to the shipper.

More comic, because suffused with the extravagance of the frontier, is the story of how Mike procured meat for his hungry crew. He rubbed snuff on the faces of six sheep in a flock grazing beside the river and sent a

---

34 Walter Blair and Franklin J. Meine, Mike Fink, King of the Mississippi Keelboatmen, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1933, p. 84.
35 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
crewman for the owner of the flock. When the latter arrived, he was amazed to find some of his animals acting in a most peculiar manner. Mike, keeping a straight face, announced that the sheep undoubtedly had the black murrain, which, he added, was killing thousands of head of livestock upriver. The only way to stop the disease from spreading was the kill the six "infected" sheep immediately, and the owner begged Mike to accommodate him. Unfortunately, Mike hated to destroy another man's property, but he was eventually persuaded when the owner agreed to give him a couple of gallons of peach brandy for the service. Mike shot the sheep and threw their carcasses into the river, but into an eddy where they swirled around and around, staying conveniently in one place so that the crew could rescue them after dark.36

Other legends of the boatman illustrated his tendency to play Puckish pranks, but there frequently seems to be an element of brutality and coarseness, perhaps of malice, that is missing from the escapades of other frontier jokesters. Shooting the heel protrusion off an unsuspecting Negro is the joke of a Murrel, not a Sut Lovingood. But, as has been observed before, the residents of the old Southwest were not so squeamish about violence and physical injury as their descendants, so that they quite possibly considered Mike's crude surgery merely the humor of a carefree rogue. Withal, however, the
entire career of Mike Fink is too marked with bloodshed and the rumors of mysterious dark deeds—especially the love affair which brought tragedy in the end to Fink, Carpenter, and Talbot—for the river god to be considered a true rogue. He was a man of violence; he lived violently and he died violently. The rogue must avoid such degradation or, as Chandler observes, he becomes a villain.

Jean Lafitte, the famous pirate, surprisingly enough shows but scant traces of the picaro in his character; he is, however, a legendary figure:

Jean Lafitte has been the hero, or villain, of a score of novels; some of the writers have portrayed him as a fearless, guiltless gentleman, a great lover, or a gay deceiver; others have made him a cowardly and bloodthirsty pirate. He has also become a figure in the folklore of America, and hundreds of legendary tales persist. Even today, men are digging for the vast treasure which he is said to have buried on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico.37

Lafitte, because of his redeeming features, especially his service in the battle of New Orleans, has a considerable appeal to the popular mind.

Regardless of his legendary stature, however, he could never be considered a rogue. True, there are anecdotes of jovial pranks by the pirate hero, but, as is true of those of Mike Fink, there is an ominous note about them, and the tone of comic detachment is missing. Even such a

---

harmless jest as Lafitte's offer of $50,000 for the head
of Governor Claiborne, who had offered $5,000 for Lafitte's,
is recorded without the cynical humor of David Hines's
similar exchange of offers with the Governor of South Car-
olina. The piratical poise of Lafitte never achieves the
air of the confident if hollow pretense of the true rogue.

The American frontier community, like all primitive
societies, was very productive of legend, and though none
of the frontiersmen have reached the stature of the heroes
of ancient myth, it must be remembered that only a rela-
tively short time has elapsed since these men actually
walked the earth. Perhaps our society has reached at
least that level of sophistication which causes it to look
down its nose at its crude ancestors. Davy Crockett and
Mike Fink may never occupy a place as prominent as that
of Siegfried or Beowulf; but Jove, like Rome itself, was
not built in a day, and we cannot be sure our descendants
will not regard us as just as crude as the leather-stock-
inged pioneers.

But one thing seems certain, those who come after us
will not likely view these legendary figures as rogues.
The roguish elements are there, as they were in the soci-
ety which created the myths; the heroes led nomadic lives,
were proud of their quick wits, were inclined to waggery
and practical jokes, and, furthermore, were all motivated
by a desire for personal gain, the imposition of their
culture—although the idea is more appropriately expressed by Simon Suggs' "It is good to be shifty in a new country" or Mrs. Hines's homey "git money, David." In spite of this fact, the function of Crockett, Fink, Bowie, and the rest as symbols of political ideals or simply as representatives of a section of society precludes the admission of many rogue elements into their characters, as it perhaps did with those heroes of European myths whose origins must remain obscure to us. The folk hero must represent the legitimate aims of a society, not that errant disregard for convention which the society seeks to repress even while it secretly admires it.
When one turns from historical figures to literary figures in the old Southwest, he finds a shift in emphasis, for most of the literature of the area is humorous and the greater part of the humor of the frontier is concerned with the lower classes, the rough and racy individuals who were always ready for a hunt, a fight, or a frolic—not the upper classes who attract the attention of history. The men who set down on paper these myriad anecdotes, however, were educated men, primarily lawyers and newspapermen, who can be considered members of the better classes of society; and, as would be expected, they included among their characters some representatives of their own class. Sometimes the humorous stories were concerned primarily with gentlemen—the lawyers, as has been mentioned, exchanged anecdotes of their profession wherever court was held—and in these stories the planters and lawyers must play their own jokes, not simply record the actions of others.

On the other hand, the author frequently injects himself into the story of a backwoods hunter or prankster,
thus providing a framework in which he purports to retell the story as he heard it. In such an instance, the gentleman serves as a device for accentuating the chief character, his polite speech providing an effective contrast for the crude but colorful language of his hero. And the relationship between the two was quite natural, not a forced, unrealistic literary device. The well-bred Southerner who was unfamiliar with rod and gun was the exception rather than the rule; and in the woods the gentleman dilettante became the comrade of the illiterate hunter. As a matter of fact, in the canebrakes on the trail of deer or bear and around the campfire in pursuit of conviviality and tall talk, the shiftless woodsman frequently assumed command of his wealthier friends, and it was quite normal that the friendship should be preserved in a literature seeking to present a realistic picture of the backwoodsman.

The rogue elements among the upper classes must, however, be sought in the stories which center around the class, for the functions of the gentleman providing a contrasting setting for the backwoodsman precludes any focus on his actions and thus denies him the opportunity to commit roguery. The lower-class rogues of the frontier fall naturally into two categories, those who have economic motivation for their rogueries, as did the European picaros, and those who are inspired solely by a desire to raise
The few members of the upper class who indulge in roguery for financial gain are obviously to be classified with the picaros; in spite of their high birth; those who are given to practical jokes, however, must be separated from their lower-class counterparts. In the first place, though marked by extreme eccentricity, the jokes of Ned Brace and his compatriots, who were the gentlemen rogues of the old Southwest, seldom descend to the level of physical violence which characterizes the pranks of Sut Lovingood, demonstrating rather a sophisticated wit than an extravagant imagination. Sut's victims experience considerable physical discomfort; Ned's, considerable mental anguish. Furthermore, the victim of the upper-class joker is usually an undesirable person, a naive friend, or a country bumpkin; the victim of the lower-class prank may be anybody. Admittedly the difference between the practical jokes of the two classes is one of degree rather than kind, for the general distinctions of wit versus physical comedy and selected versus unselected victims is tenuous and subject to frequent violations. Nevertheless, the upper-class rogue deserves consideration apart from the joker of the lower class.

One of the characteristics of any rogue literature is its realism, and the realism of the frontier humor as a whole has never been questioned. That the anecdotes dealing with the gentleman of the old Southwest are no exception
to the general rule is readily apparent from even the briefest examination of historical materials. Despite the comic bias of the tales in which they appear, the lawyers, doctors, and planters appearing in the humor are genuine examples of the genus homo. As a matter of fact, it is sometimes difficult to draw the line between anecdotes of historical fact and anecdotes of purely fictional nature, for the brief comical sketches of Reuben Davis appear no more true to life than those of Joseph Glover Baldwin, and the stylized eulogies of famous lawyers found in the writings of both have less in them that is vital and human than the humorous records of either. The difference between historical truth and fiction may well consist of little more than the fact that the former utilizes real names and the latter imaginary ones. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet gave support to such a conclusion when he said of his Georgia Scenes:

They consist of nothing more than fanciful combinations of real incidents and characters; and throwing into those scenes, which would be otherwise dull and insipid, some personal incident or adventure of my own, real or imaginary, as it would best suit my purpose....Some of the scenes are as literally true as the frailties of my memory would allow them to be.¹

As a whole the practical jokes of the upper class are as believable as the characters who perpetrate them, for

¹ Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Georgia Scenes, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1859, pp. iii-iv.
they deal with commonplace happenings, such as discomfitting an unpopular person or taking advantage of the naivete of a rustic. As a result, the number of motifs in this division of frontier humor is limited, and once the basic situations are established additional anecdotes present only variations on the old themes. For this reason, defining the upper-class rogue is a relatively simple task, and the jokers who appear in one or two brief sketches are not necessarily one-sided characters. Although some of the characters are highly individualized—the elegant Ned Brace would never be mistaken for sports-loving Colonel Bob—they all run true to type, and the contemporary reader was able to fill in the description of one from his knowledge of others. That the authors were aware of the typical nature of such gentlemen is demonstrated by the fact that a good many of them identify their characters only as "a Southern planter" or "a traveller on a steamboat," especially when the anecdote is brief enough that the subject of the sketch does not require a name for use as a dialogue tag.

Making fun of an ignorant or naive person, one of the more common motifs, appears on at least three levels in the frontier tales. On the simplest level, the joker pretends ignorance for the sake of annoying his subject, just as Mark Twain's innocents annoyed their guides in the art galleries of Europe. The basic simplicity of such a jest
is well illustrated in a sketch by the anonymous "Spoondrift," entitled "Pertaters and Ternips." As the story goes, a young South Carolina doctor, widely known as a wag, approaches a cracker selling the two vegetables indicated by the title and asks whether he has any eggs, knowing, of course, that he has not. After this first encounter the doctor sends his friends one by one to ask the same question. The comedy of the situation is provided by the ever-increasing annoyance of the rustic, who finally gives up all efforts to sell and leaves the market place in dismay. 2

The second level finds the naive character attempting some new experience, commonly tasting a new food, and often as not the sketch does not require a rogue to instigate the action, for the bumpkin who eats his first ice cream or drinks his first "sody" provides comedy enough. The function of the rogue in such an incident is to compound the original comedy. In J. M. Field's "Swallowing an Oyster Alive," for example, the experience of a sucker eating his first oyster is neatly heightened and exaggerated by the roguish young gentleman who is standing by to offer advice. The prankster merely waits until the sucker has swallowed the first suspicious-looking oyster and

exclaims, "You're a dead man!...the creature is alive and will eat right through you...." The terrified victim is ready for any remedy, and the rogue has him drink a bottle of hot sauce to kill the monster. As is typical, the joke is not revealed and the sucker goes home vowing never to eat oysters again. He comments sadly as he leaves, "If that ister critter's dyin' agonies didn't stir a 'ruption in me equal to a small arthquake, then 'tain't no use sayin' it--it squirmed like a serpent, when that killin' stuff touched it...." 3

The final category of the general motif of ridiculing naivete tends less to physical comedy than do the other two, for in it the victim is of, or seeking to enter, the upper class. Frequently the prank only makes the naive person demonstrate his lack of one or more of the social graces, and the more sensitive the individual to criticism, the more comic the consequences. Baldwin tells of a bashful young man named Paul Beechim, who, proud of his Knoxville-acquired culture, is nevertheless ill at ease in the deep South. Phillip Cousins, the rogue in the story, has sensed this nervousness and has offered to help Beechim observe the proprieties of New Orleans society, for Beechim has admitted he is somewhat rusty in his

manners, having resided so long on a plantation. At first Cousins is careful to give good advice, but once Beechim relaxes his guard, the stage is set. At a formal dinner Cousins whispers that the water and lemon slice in the finger bowl are a sop for the pineapple they are being served, and Beechim proceeds to make a fool of himself. Baldwin's story, however, does not allow the rogue to escape scot free, for Beechim is acquitted by the court for a severe caning he gives his false friend.

Closely allied to the motif of taking advantage of naivete is that of deceiving an undesirable acquaintance for the purpose of getting rid of him. Bennet Barrows could rid his plantation of Yankees and other such undesirables by giving them hints no gentleman could misunderstand; the Southerner with a roguish turn of mind could persuade the victim that his present location was undesirable. Obviously the exact method of persuasion is determined by the type of pest and the immediate circumstances of the story, but there are two general devices: telling a monstrous lie to deceive a newcomer into believing the absurd and playing a practical joke on him to make him embarrass himself in public.

Typical of the former category is the ruse practiced

---

in Baldwin's "Samuel Hele, Esq.," in which Hele, the local misanthropist and "castigator of vice," is persuaded by his friends to help rid the community of an unpopular Yankee school mistress who has just arrived. Sam's method is simple; he merely tells with a straight face of the depravity that characterizes the South: "Why, Miss Woodey, a father here never thinks well of a child until the boy cheats him at cards; then he pats him on the head, and says 'Well done, Tommy, here's a V.; go buck it off on a horse race next Sunday, and we'll go snookes.'" The tale waxes more lurid as Sam continues and Miss Woodey, having heard of the outrages, especially the cruel branding of Negroes and the wholesale selling of Negro babies, leaves town the next day. Hele, ordinarily a sober, even sour, man, has acted the rogue well.

The motif of embarrassing a disliked person is well illustrated by an untitled story in The Spirit of the Times, which also shows that the gentlemen were not the only jokers. In this story, one C., a newcomer to the area, has been paying attentions to Miss Betty, who finds him not at all pleasing and resolves to rid herself of him. Her elaborate plan is worthy of Sut Lovingood, for its success depends largely on its grandiose conception. Having given a watermelon party to which all the neighbors

5 Ibid., p. 301.
are invited, Miss Betty has a group of the young men take C. to the river for a swim. While there, they discuss recent Indian unrest and past atrocities committed by the redskins, a topic which makes C. feel anything but comfortable. Suddenly another group of young men dressed as Indians makes an "attack" on the swimmers, and all but C. fall moaning to the ground. C., dressed only in his shirt, is chased by the supposed savages past the house where the ladies are assembled on the porch, but has the prudence to keep going. The anonymous author with typical frontier extravagance observes that the young man arrived at a place fifty miles away in time for breakfast. There is no doubt, however, that C., when he discovered what had happened, never returned; for the young ladies, like Parson Bullens' congregation, had "seen enough of him."  

Just how close is this motif to reality is shown by John S. Robb's "Hoss Allen's Apology," which probably belongs with the historical rather than the fictional anecdotes. Judge John "Hoss" Allen of Mississippi was on a speaking tour with Judge Edwards, his opponent in the gubernatorial race, and the two stopped overnight in a section of the state unknown to Edwards. The next morning Allen pretended to be sick and sent Edwards on his way to

---

6 The Spirit of the Times, XX, (January 18, 1851), 567.
fulfill their engagement alone, a fortunate occurrence Edwards felt. However, Allen had a friend who lived along the route direct Edwards into a swamp, where the unfortunate man was forced to spend the night tortured by clouds of mosquitoes. The next day a bedraggled Edwards finally reached the town to find Allen, miraculously recovered, addressing a crowd. Unfortunately Hoss did not recognize the swollen face and muddy clothes of his friend, or so he said later, and Edwards was hustled off by the crowd and told to stop heckling Judge Allen. When the difficulty was cleared up after the speech, Allen insisted on calling back the crowd and letting Edwards speak. He was careful, however, to introduce Edwards by recounting at some length the unfortunate accident of his friend, and Edwards could not make a satisfactory address to the voters who were still laughing at his stupidity.

Perhaps practical jokes played on drunks were actually a variation on the disliked person theme, but there seems to be at least some basic difference. In the first place, the drunken victim of the more violent prank is commonly the village reprobate and hardly of the same social status as the gentleman rogue, as was true of the disliked person; and, too, the general attitude of the

7 John S. Robb, Streaks of Squatter Life (in The Swamp Doctor's Adventures in the Southwest), T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1852, pp. 70-83.
prankster is usually free from personal animosity. Occasionally a gentleman of repute is subjected to some prank, but the tenor of the affair is mild. In a story entitled variously "Guilty But Drunk" and "Practical Jokes and Bad Liquor," a young lawyer slips spoons from the hotel where the group is assembled into the pockets of a judge who is well in his cups. This innocuous roguery convinces the judge that the liquor he drank led him to theft, and consequently he returns a verdict of "guilty but drunk" for a thief who has bought liquor at the same place. Actual physical discomfort hardly enters the anecdote at all.

To the lower classes, however, the gentleman rogue was seldom as kind, at time producing such severe discomfort as to cause the drunkard to give over his evil ways. Perhaps the moral effect justifies the cruelty of the joker. In a story called "A Cure for a Toper," the anonymous author tells of stopping with two friends at the Buncombe County hot springs in the North Carolina mountains. An old vagrant named Lee is in the habit of entering the bar and draining the dregs from glasses left on the tables, and the three decide to cure him of this habit. They partially fill a glass with Stouton's Bitters and leave it where Lee will see it. When the old man inquires

---

the name of the acrid-tasting liquor he has drunk, he is informed that it was fly poison. There follows one of those hilarious scenes common to frontier humor in which the victim imagines himself to be dying. The rogues suggest tallow candles and brown sugar as remedies. Needless to say, such a narrow escape from death by poison effects the reform of the old man.9

In a story entitled "Electricity as a Temperance Agent," William C. Richards records an even more violent cure. The author and his friends are gathered around a new electrical generator amusing themselves when Boozy, the village drunk, wanders in. They reply in answer to his questions that it is a machine to cure drunkenness, and offer to give him a treatment. Inspired by scientific curiosity, they become over-eager. Boozy began to tremble, and soon his whole frame was in violent motion; he gradually bent forward, his eyes and mouth dilated, the wires were doubled in his contracting arms, and he was actually being drawn off his feet, with his body stretching half across the old counter on which the instrument stood.10

Quite understandably Boozy emerged from his ordeal sober.

The motif of discomfiting a preacher is common in frontier humor, for preachers often proved too severe a

---

9 The Spirit of the Times, XXI (May 17, 1851), 151.

10 Polly Peablossom's Wedding, p. 57.
restraint on the conduct of hot-blooded young bucks, and so they came in for their share of practical jokes. In these stories especially, the restraint of the upper class results in considerable contrast between its jokes and those of the lower class. What is more, if there was suspicion that the parson was not a "genuine article" but one of the many pretenders who infested the frontier, there was nothing reprehensible in scaring him. Such an incident is recorded by George R. Burnham in his "Driving a Parson Ashore." A Virginia planter travelling on a Mississippi river steamer suspects the identity of a preacher who has put a damper on the spirits of the crowd, and launches into a frightening tale of a steamboat explosion. He attributes the catastrophe to the presence on board of a Jonah who pretended to be a preacher. Just then, they stopped at a woodyard, and the planter observes that it happened on this very spot. The preacher, or pseudo-preacher, disembarks. Typically, however, the joker had even less regard for the cloth than the planter in this anecdote. Actual historical records show a disregard for religion among at least part of the upper classes, and Longstreet's paragon of the upper-class rogue, Ned

---

Brace, shows a callous mischief-making impulse in his relations with religion.

The duel is a characteristic institution of the upper class, for the lower class seldom stood on the formality so essential to the code duello. Normally a tragic proceeding, the duel could become comical. The most common duel prank involves unloaded guns and an imaginary mortal wound as in the story of Billy Button the bartender. Ned Jones, the prankish member of the Jones family of Georgia, works the scheme on Major Ferguson Bangs, a querulous character in Pineville. The Major has a reputation as a duelist earned largely by his boasting that he is a man to be avoided when in a bad mood. Ned decides that he should call Bangs's bluff and allows himself to be drawn into an argument which results in a challenge. The Major, although uneasy, goes through with the affair and the unloaded pistols are brought into use. After an exchange of shots in which both "miss," Ned falls at the second round. Then follows a deathbed scene in which the Major, repenting his querulousness, suffers a great deal at the thought of having killed a friend. The story is climaxed by the midnight visit of his innkeeper's goat to Bangs's room. Thinking the devil has come for him, Bangs is terrified and as a result of the experience reforms.\(^{12}\) In

\(^{12}\) William T. Thompson, *Major Jones' Chronicles*
such a manner, the prankster makes the duel not only a harmless comedy but also an agency of reform.

The hunt was an even more characteristic theme than the duel in the humor of the upper class, for, as has already been mentioned, the old Southwest was a land where almost everyone hunted. The humor in these stories results from one of two causes, the extravagant lying or the prank played by one hunter on another. In general, the lower-class hunter makes a better yarn-spinner, but the gentleman huntsman is just as given to playing jokes on his companions as the illiterate. Commonly the prank consists of nothing more than unloading a gun, filling a powder horn with sand, adulterating or replacing the brandy in a flask, or similar harmless actions. On occasion, however, the "scares" involves a man disguised as an animal or the use of a well-manufactured snake.

In a typical story called "Hunting in Louisiana," "Colonel Bob" tells about a joke played on Bagshot by his friend Carrywine. Bagshot shoots at an enormous bear, doing no damage since Carrywine had removed the shot from his gun. The bear, extraordinarily aggressive, chases Bagshot while the others laugh uproariously. The poor man is not at all quieted by the fact that his friends refuse to lend him aid, for he is certain that his life is in

---

extreme danger. The joke is finally revealed when George, the colored man, emerges from the bear skin. Next day Bagshot, smarting from his adventure, refuses to shoot a deer only forty feet from him. The rogue Carrywine has employed both of the most common types of hunting pranks, the unloaded gun and the animal disguise.

A snake scare is a frequent occurrence in the hunting tales of the old Southwest, but because the whole territory was largely rural snake stories crop up even in the cities. The prevalence of such anecdotes is indicated by the title of one reprinted in the Spirit from the Nashville Gazette, "One of the Snake Stories." In this tale, the writer has an old Negro butchering a hog clean the intestines and soak it in water. This, of course, is the usual method of manufacturing a snake for the scare. The following night the rogue drops it across his sleeping roommate, who is deathly afraid of the reptiles. When the roommate wakes, his terror furnishes considerable comedy; but when he discovers the truth, it threatens to result in a severe beating to the author. The first victim is finally placated by the suggestion that they work the trick on someone else, and the two tie the artificial snake around the neck of another sleeper. To awaken him, the author gets under the bed and bumps it with his back until

13 The Spirit of the Times, XXI (March 15, 1851), 42-43.
the victim is sufficiently awake to become aware of the snake. The second victim provides an even greater laugh than the first, for he is unable to dislodge the securely fastened intestine.¹⁴

Practical jokes, though the forte of the upper-class rogue, do not by any means exhaust the capacity of the frontier gentleman for roguery. Any profit resulting from picaresque transactions, however, must be slight or the gentleman ceases to be a gentleman. The Southern colonel who persuades a neighbor that he has found a way to make candles out of mud and offers to sell him part of the rights—the neighbor is made credulous because of current news of the discovery of peat bogs in Ireland—must confess the truth after he and his friends have enjoyed the humor of the situation.¹⁵ Thus it must always be unless immediate necessity or revenge be the motives.

The gentleman of humor, like the other men in the old Southwest, were given to trading horses and livestock and seemingly felt justified in sharp practices, especially if the loser in the trade had first cheated them. Baldwin tells of a young man named Theophilus Smith, who was outwitted in a horse trade by a man named Kickerson. It seemed that Smith traded for a horse with "latent defects."

¹⁴ Ibid., XXI (March 29, 1851), 64.
¹⁵ Ibid., XX (January 25, 1851), 580.
At any rate, Smith later learned that Hickerson had got possession of an excellent mule and decided to revenge himself. He sent a friend to make a casual visit to Hickerson and pretend to recognize the mule. Diggs, the friend, then commented that the mule was given to fits at certain phases of the moon—seldom lasting for more than a week—in which, however, he kicked, reared, and was generally unmanageable. He further added that a smart man would trade the mule for a brand new sorrel horse Theophilus Smith has just acquired. Hickerson, eager to cheat again, hastened to trade, only to find that the sound-looking sorrel had its latent defects, having been especially selected to complete Smith's revenge. Obviously the story is a frontier version of the cheater-cheated motif.

Once in a while a gentleman found himself short of funds away from home and needed to resort to some form of roguery to pay his expenses. If the joke was extravagant enough, apparently the humor of the situation compensated for the moral defection. Longstreet tells of one such incident in his story "The Wax Works," which recounts the adventures of a group of young men who meet misfortune at the race track, for "Toward the close of the races, it was discovered that the joint funds of the whole fraternity were not sufficient to discharge the tavern-bills of any
two of them."17 A plan is advanced by Jack Clomes, the prankster of the group, and a fine example of the upper-class rogue. "Jack Clomes seemed to have been made for fun. It was his meat and his drink: and he could no more live without it, than he could live without his ordinary diet."18 The plan, as the title would suggest, is that the group hire a room and that each of them assume the character of some famous person whose statue was commonly found in a wax works. The admission fees of spectators come to see the dummies should be sufficient to enable them to discharge their bills. They plan to exhibit a corpse in the ante-room gratis, but one of the first visitors is a dumb man who recognizes his old friend Pleasant Halgrove as the corpse and weeps for the departed until Pleasant, enraged at the thought of having to expose his fraud, assault him. After this is settled, all would go well except that Jack, playing a murderer, cannot resist giving his victim's hair a sharp tug just as a big countryman is examining them. "'Gentlemen,' said Rory, in a tone of awful dignity and self-satisfaction, as he turned gravely to the bystanders, 'gentlemen, it's flesh and blood.'"19 When advised to feel the statues and prove to himself that

17 Georgia Scenes, p. 130.
18 Ibid., p. 179.
19 Ibid., p. 165.
they are wax, Rory sticks out his hand, only to have the 
irrepressible Jack bite his finger. In the wild free-for-
all that results the doorkeeper escapes, pays his own 
hotel bill, and rides off, leaving the others in as bad a 
situation as they were in the beginning.

A more successful sham performance, and one which is 
worthy of comparison with "The Royal Nonesuch" of Mark 
Twain's Duke and Dauphin, is "The Guyasticus," contributed 
to the Spirit under the pseudonym of Major Twing. The 
Major and his friend Cobb, enroute to New York, find them-
selves out of money in South Carolina. Cobb, the rogue in 
this instance, buys a large box in Columbia and takes it 
to the inn where they will stay. He then has circulars 
printed advertising "The Wonderful Guyasticus. Caught in 
the Wilds of Oregon, Near the Boundary of 54:40!"20 The 
small print describes the wonderful, striped, sky-blue 
monster who eats Indians alive and commits other similar 
atrocities.

The prelude to the Guyasticus exhibit is a master-
piece of frontier comedy for its extravagant execution. 
While the Major takes fees at the door, Cobb stays behind 
the curtain, moaning, roaring, and clanking a chain. As 
soon as the house seems filled, Cobb, looking harrassed, 
calls the Major to help him handle the monster. Then,

---

20 Spirit of the Times, XX (January 4, 1851), 548.
before the uneasy audience can regain its composure, Cobb bursts through the curtain in his shirtsleeves, apparently covered with blood, and screams, "Save yourselves, Gentlemen! Save your wives and children! The Guyasticus is loose!" This pronouncement stampedes the audience, and the two rogues ride off ostensibly in search of the monster, richer by sixty-six dollars and seventy-five cents. On occasion a streak of roguery stood the upper-class citizen of the frontier in good stead.

The humorous literature of the old Southwest defines fairly well the character of the gentleman rogue, but it presents only a few well-developed individuals. The figures who would seem potential subjects for rogue biographies appear only in one brief sketch or in widely scattered sketches. There are at least two, however, who are sufficiently developed to deserve individual treatment, Ned Brace and Madison Tensas. In addition, William Tappan Thompson's Major Jones books, reflecting as they do the humorous taste of the old Southwest, provide numerous examples of roguery among both upper and lower classes.

"The cruder taste of the time was for practical joking and for what is now called horse-play. Even people of refinement, in that day, would often find diversion in the roughest of pranks and would laugh unrestrainedly over a predicament that was both painful and unfortunate." But

21 Clarinda Pendleton Lamar, "William Tappan
Ned Jones, the joker, is only an incidental character and the Major represents essentially "a country bumpkin, whose incredulous simplicity makes him the butt of local wits."

Ned Brace is detailed in only two of the sketches in Georgia Scenes, "The Character of a Native Georgian" and "A Sage Conversation." The former, somewhat longer than the conventional humorous sketch, is devoted to a general description of Ned and his various escapades on a single trip to Savannah; the latter tells only of one night's stay in a backwoods cabin. Nevertheless, Ned emerges from these thirty pages as a highly individualized character.

This man seemed to live only to amuse himself with his fellow-beings, and he possessed the rare faculty of deriving some gratification of his favorite propensity from almost every person whom he met, no matter what his temper, standing, or disposition....The beau in the presence of his mistress, the fop, the pedant, the purse-proud, the ever fastidious and sensitive, were Ned's favourite game.22

Ned, however, is hardly a recognizable Southerner; he could be typical of the extravagant gallant in any city, and is far more closely related to the eighteenth century wit than to the frontier joker, although Longstreet's Addisonian style probably contributes significantly to this


22 Georgia Scenes, p. 32.
interpretation of his character. Nevertheless, the very terms *beau*, *fop*, and *pedant* seem to belong rather to the tradition of the *Spectator* than to that of frontier humor. And Ned, as the outstanding example of the upper-class joker, is a cogent argument for the influence of Addisonian humor on this aspect of the literature of the old Southwest.

All of the seven recorded pranks of Ned Brace exhibit his aptitude for completely bewildering his victims, and his victims are not always the naive folk so often beguiled by the upper-class rogue. His first prank on entering Savannah begins when he asks Baldwin, as Longstreet calls himself, not to recognize him at the inn, for he wants to make a joke. He enters the main room, acting very mysterious and refusing to give his name aloud, but scribbles it on a piece of paper for the clerk. Unfortunately, the handwriting is unintelligible, and as soon as he leaves the room, the clerk shows the paper to the company gathered around the fire, all of whom are curious about the peculiar stranger. Just then, Ned returns and snatches his paper back, leaving everybody mystified. Apparently Ned's only motive for this action is to torment the crowd.

At supper Ned displays another eccentricity. He helps himself to all the breads on the table—waffles, batter cakes, muffins, rolls, and cornbread—mixes them thoroughly
and shapes the mess into a turtle. Needless to say, this unusual procedure nearly ruins the appetites of the boarders. Perhaps there is a motive this time, for the innkeeper’s wife, after listening to an elegant apology in which Ned promises to eat properly although it will cause him considerable mental discomfort, offers the rare privilege of private meals in his room. The innkeeper himself is not so taken by charming speeches, for seeing his wife start out with Ned’s breakfast the following morning, he exclaims:

Well, d---n the man! He hasn’t been in the house more than two hours, except when he was asleep, and he has insulted half my boarders, made fools of the other half, turned the head of my bar-keeper, crazed all my servants, and run my wife right stark, staring, raving mad; a man who is a perfect clown in his manners, and who, I have no doubt, will, in the end, prove to be a horse-thief.  

Even before the landlord has made this pronouncement, Ned has played another of his peculiar pranks. While at a restaurant for an oyster supper, Ned sees a Frenchman enter—a foreigner may well be equated with the naive person or bumpkin in the mind of the backwoods rogue. Ned approaches the man as an old friend, “Mr. Sneezelfanter,” and when informed coldly that the gentleman’s name is Jacques Sancrie, he replies that he knows very well that his friend’s family is from Sandy Creek. The poor

---

23 Ibid., p. 44.
Frenchman is so nonplused by this new-found old friend Obadiah Snoddleburg and his gossip about an imaginary family that he leaves without eating his oysters, sending them instead to the Snoddleburg family.

The next day being Sunday, Ned goes to church, but only to display further his roguish nature; for by his behavior he demonstrates the lack of respect for religion which is characteristic of the rogues of the frontier as well as the picaros of Europe. He begins his act by popping into his seat so suddenly that some of the churchgoers snicker and others frown in disapproval. When the preacher suggests that all join in singing a hymn, Ned sings out "with one of the loudest, hoarsest, and most discordant voices that ever amazed a solemn assembly." Luckily for the congregation, Ned subsides at the minister's suggestion that those who cannot sing should not try. Throughout the sermon, however, Ned pretends with open mouth and staring eye to be intensely interested; the duller the sermon grows, the more interest he shows.

In a similar vein, showing the disrespect of the rogue, Ned falls in at the end of a funeral procession beside a very small man, who contrasts strongly with Ned's large frame. Ned next inquires whose funeral he is attending, and is informed that it is Mrs. Noah Bill's, which

24 Ibid., p. 45.
he translates into "Mrs. Noel's Bill" by the same process which suggested "Sandy Creek" on the previous evening. As a final gesture he protests paying such honor to a Negro and drops out of the procession, leaving the entire rear echelon in most unseemly laughter.

Just how far Ned commonly carried his extravagant antics is illustrated by his performance during the night fire alarm. As a starting prank, Ned exchanges one of his large boots for one of his companion's small ones and blocks the doorway trying to put it on, thus managing to delay the guests of the inn from helping to put out the fire. Next, he stops the bucket line into which he has been pressed and calmly drinks from a bucket, taking so long that he is told to get out. The fire captain, coming upon the scene, advises him to go ahead and drink but is forced, after the line is held up several minutes by Ned's apparently unquenchable thirst, to order him out again. Obviously this one anecdote illustrates that Ned's sense of humor was so distorted in its values that it had actually transcended mere humorous inclination and reached the status of extreme eccentricity.

The story entitled "A Sage Conversation" shows Ned in the more conventional role of the wit who takes advantage of naivete. Ned and the author stop overnight in a backwoods cabin occupied by three garrulous old women. During the course of the evening, the women get around to
the subject of marriage; and Ned, just as he is about to retire, comments about the marriage of two men, George Scott and Daniel Snow, who, he says, raised "a lovely parcel of children." As he expects, the ladies ponder over this unusual statement late into the night. The next morning Ned informs them with a straight face that the two men were widowers who already had children when they married and that "they had none afterward that I heard of." 25

That the character of Ned Brace owed much to earlier English humor is a fact that has long been recognized, and even such an early commentator on *Georgia Scenes* as Poe was able to point out resemblances between the humor of Longstreet and that of Addison. And Walter Blair observes: "Ned Brace...is a contemporary of Pindar Cockloft, an Addisonian humorist, a link between the humor of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—and the manner is unmistakably reminiscent." 26 All of Ned's jokes are exercises of wit, in the eighteenth century use of the word, but the English wit would certainly be abashed at the extreme disrespect, bordering even on rudeness, which characterizes Ned's escapades. It is this excess, then, which Ned inherits from the frontier rather than from his English

25 Ibid., p. 196.

26 Native American Humor, p. 77.
predecessors that makes him as his kind appear as rogue-like as they do.

Madison Tensas is associated with the upper-class rogue more because of his profession, medicine, than for his family, who, though respectable, seem to have been relatively poor. As a result of the peregrinations of his early years, Tensas's biography has many of the aspects of the European picaresque novel; but more than that, Odd Leaves is a record of medicine and medical practice a century ago, so true to life that the reader feels here is Gideon Lincecum's story from a humorous point of view. There are, of course, no actual parallels between the lives of Lincecum and Tensas; only the patterns are similar—the unsettled early years, the irregular training, the unusual treatments. Each book complements the other, and each attests the verity of the other as a picture of the backwoods physician.

The first chapter of Odd Leaves, which gives a summary of Tensas's life before he began medical practice, exhibits that rootlessness and irresponsibility characteristic of the true rogue in any era, in any land. Sent on an errand one afternoon, he runs away from home by hiding on a river steamer, and when discovered he is hired as third cook at the princely salary of eight dollars a month. By the time he is promoted to second cook, he has had time to look around and has decided that cooks never
become captains of steamboats but cabin boys do; so he hires out on a second boat as cabin boy. Anywhere but on the frontier his career would have been established, but the pioneer and the rogue always look for greener pastures; and on a casual visit to his brother Tensas accepts readily the suggestion that he stay at his brother's house and go to college. Unfortunately a "monetary crash" occurs and the young man finds himself in the cotton fields, hardly an appropriate situation for so well-travelled a gentleman. Deciding that anything would be better than farm work, Tensas agrees to apprentice himself to a printer, but stays over for a family wedding, and on arrival on the job a week late finds that the printer has hired another boy. The brother then suggests that he study medicine with a local doctor, and the career of the "Swamp Doctor" begins. He sums up his life: "I was scarcely sixteen, yet I was a student of medicine, and had been, almost a printer, a cotton-picker, plough boy, gin-driver, gentleman of leisure, cabin boy, cook, scullion, and run-away...." 27

Since Odd Leaves is merely a series of anecdotes, possibly without chronological arrangement, only glimpses of Tensas's formal medical training appear. One sketch presents his examination by a medical faculty and therefore

---

27 Odd Leaves, p. 35.
implies that he attended a medical school, but the others would seem to indicate that most of his knowledge was acquired by an apprenticeship to a doctor, which entailed both study in the office and assisting with various patients. In the later tales, however, there seem to be a number of students available as spectators or participants in mischief, a fact which might indicate that the medical school was in truth little more than an informal association involving both apprenticeship and regular study.

At any rate, the early stories show Madison with the mental ineptitude of Lazarillo receiving an education little superior to that of Gil Blas, who also practiced medicine by apprenticing himself to an established physician. The doctor, leaving on a call, points to his pharmacy and says "take it down and digest." Since Tensas takes the statement literally and the first drug on the list is arsenic, the career of a promising young physician seems near its end. His life is spared, however, for he goes to lunch, leaving an old Indian in the shop. Tubba, of course, drinks the entire supply of Fowler's solution and is unconscious when Tensas returns. What follows seems like one of Sut Lovingood's "accidents," for Tensas, unable to discover a doctor nearby, calls in the other students and a fight develops over the proper method of treatment. In the midst of the ensuing riot, Tubba awakes
and leaves; the arsenic solution was only the doctor's whiskey he had mislabled to prevent pilfering.

As is typical of the rogue, Tensas is not always successful in his endeavors, and though he is spared the cuffings that characterize the life of Lazarillo, he does suffer severe mental discomfort. In one instance, feeling that he needs a body for study in his room, he decides to steal a Negro baby from the morgue. He manages to get out on the street with his carefully wrapped cadaver, but there he meets a girl friend and is compelled to stop for conversation. Just then, the girl's father, who has forbidden Tensas to see her, arrives accompanied by his vicious dog and the town marshall. At the first onslaught of the dog, Tensas drops his bundle and the secret is out. He loses not only face but a girl friend as well.

The rogue always triumphs in the end, however, and Tensas's experience with the examinations for his degree prove no exception. There are seven professors, each of whom is allotted fifteen minutes for questioning, and in order to pass, the candidate must have the approval of at least five. The first questioner presents no challenge to the wit, for he is a vain, superannuated widower and Tensas opens his door to find the old gentleman adjusting his artificial calves under his stockings. The second, a vitalist, is led to attack the Liebigian, or chemical, school and Tensas passes by virtue of agreeing with the
professor's statements. The third is deaf and Tensas answers his questions with highly ludicrous remarks, actually whispered but accompanied by such vivid gesticulation that the professor has to remind him not to shout. The next two are easily disposed of; one is a friend who asks for the recipe for chicken soup and the other a chemist who is occupied with a pamphlet by his enemy the vitalist. Tensas can now afford to fail the other exams and does, but a fifteen-minute fainting spell and a bloody nose prevent his exposing his ignorance. Thus the "Swamp Doctor" acquired a medical degree.

A good many of Tensas's adventures as a doctor are recorded primarily for the comedy involved and consequently present only slight touches of roguery. His first attempt at curing a patient is pure comedy, for the doctor has left a note directing him to cup an old woman on the sternum, and not having acquired a medical vocabulary the young apprentice applies his cups in the obvious place, causing considerable discomfort.28 In another instance he cures a Negro woman's fits, after administering the materia media from acetic acid to zingiber, by the unmedical expedient of ordering her thrown into the bayou,

28 Although Franklin J. Neine does not believe that "H.C.L." who wrote "Cupping of the Sternum," and who is identified as Henry Clay Lewis, is to be identified with Madison Tensas, the title page of Odd Leaves states, "by the author of Cupping on the Sternum," sufficient evidence for considering the tale a selection from Tensas's life.
completing the cure with a liberal flagellation. And called to attend the fits of an old woman identified by her slave as a "bobbulushumary suspensioner," he discovers that she is only having delirium tremens as the result of her son's having accidentally blown up her whiskey barrel. This time he administers brandy laced with laudanum, labeled roguishly "Arkansas Fitifuge."

At least one incident illustrates how near the frontier doctor could be to the picaro, profiting from fraudulent practices. While still a student Tensas accompanies the doctor to treat a reported case of small pox, but when they arrive it proves to be the measles, and the doctor leaves his apprentice in charge. Tensas says of his initial experience as a doctor: "It being my first experience in that capacity, you may imagine that the patient did not suffer for want of attendance....In despite of the disease and doctor the case continued to improve." 29

The rumor of small pox, however, persists in the neighborhood, and the citizens clamor to be vaccinated. Tensas does a land office business, but the supply of vaccine runs out before the demand. Determined to satisfy his customers although perfectly aware no epidemic exists, Tensas casts around for a new source of serum and finds it in a saddle sore on a horse's back.

29 Odd Leaves, p. 60.
"The Mississippi Patent Plan for Pulling Teeth" tells rather of a roguish prank played on a naive patient than of a picaro's device to gain money. Tensas, still a student, charges a Kentuckian only a quarter for pulling a tooth and administering a dose of castor oil, on the condition that he be allowed to use the "Mississippi Patent Plan." The big backwoodsman is strapped into the dentist's chair; a vise is attached to his tooth; and to the vise, a pulley normally used for reducing dislocations; all is set for the extraction. Fortunately the pulley comes loose from the wall before the patient's head comes off his neck, and the recoil, which turns over the chair, knocks the tooth out. As luck would have it, Tensas discovers he has pulled the wrong tooth; but all is even when he finds the next day that the five dollar bill he has changed for the Kentuckian is counterfeit.

Tensas also engages in a couple of practical jokes, one of the kind expected of medical students and one typical of the frontiersman at his worst. The first concerns a widow with whom the students room, who has more than the average curiosity of a landlady about her boarders. Finding the contents of their drawers, pockets, and mail have been investigated, the young rogues decide to cure her of her bad habits. They slice the face from a hare-lipped, tusked Albino Negro cadaver and wrap it carefully, placing the package where the widow will certainly see it. Hiding
where they can witness the fun, the young doctors are
astounded when the widow bursts out laughing instead of
screaming at the horrible sight. They rush in remorseful-
ly prepared to deal with hysteria, followed by a curious
crowd. The joke, however, has backfired, for the widow
says to the spectators:

Excuse me, gentlemen, if I have caused you any
inconvenience by my unusual conduct. I was just
smiling aloud to think what fools these students
made of themselves when they tried to scare me
with a dead nigger's face, when I had slept with
a drunken husband for twenty years! 30

The other joke, though nothing "to raise the eyebrow
of a frontiersman, illustrates the crudeness and casual
disregard for suffering so frequently found in the prank-
ster of the old Southwest. On a drunken spree, Tensas
and a group of friends decide to disrupt the participants
in a camp meeting nearby. They soak a mule with turpen-
tine and tar, and pointing him in the right direction,
set him afire. The ensuing scene is hilariously funny--
an old Negro looks up and shouts, "De end of de world an'
de day of judgemen' hab pass, and here cums hell rite up
de lane!" 31

Such is the upper-class rogue of the old South. Given
to practical jokes and wild escapades that often involve
mental and physical cruelty to men and animals, with a

30 Ibid., p. 81.
31 Ibid., p. 64.
callous disregard for the rights and feelings of others and a contempt for naivete, the prankster in frontier humor was nevertheless restricted in the variety of his actions. He could not, for example, use his roguery as a method of acquiring money except in the few circumstances when the comedy of the situation was sufficient to overcome the reprobation usually attached to ill-gotten gains. Although the result of his joke might be violent, he had to eschew personal violence, and he, of course, was not allowed to steal or cheat, two of the prerogatives of the traditional rogue. More extravagant in his conception of humor and more crude in his execution, he nevertheless bore considerable resemblance to the English wit of a century before. Longstreet's debt to the Addisonian essay has already been mentioned briefly, and similar parallels exist with other of the frontier writers of humorous tales. Walter Blair comments of James Glover Baldwin, for example: "Even more than Longstreet, Baldwin, in his writing, is influenced by the older essay style; four-fifths of his book takes that form."32 These educated men of the old Southwest took their manner from the mother country, for America was still in the process of developing its own literature. But, as is usually the case, there was a cultural lag between the originator and the borrower of the

32 *Native American Humor*, p. 78.
tradition, and the upper-class wags of the frontier resemble the English wits of a century before rather than those contemporary with their creators. The frontier has only roughened Ned Brace a bit; it has not destroyed his basic approach to humor.
CHAPTER VI

Picaros of the Old Southwest

The humorous literature of the frontier a century ago, in order to deal effectively with the society it laughed at, had of necessity to present along with the other types a wide variety of rogues. Furthermore, since the opportunity to gain wealth and to escape from retribution were as obvious to the writers as to the other citizens of the area, it is only natural that many of these rogues of fiction should be concerned with theft and swindling, should be American equivalents of the European picaro. It cannot be said that the frontier picaro is identical with his European counterpart, however; for he is the product not so much of literary tradition as of personal observation, and the difference between his character and that of the European is obviously the result of his environment. Gil Blas would seem as out of place in the old Southwest as Simon Suggs would in medieval Europe.

If nowhere on the frontier is there an exact duplicate of the European rogue, if there is no Lazarillo accompanying his blind beggar, no Gil Blas on his way to
school falling among thieves, there is, nevertheless, a duplication of the old attitude toward society; for Simon Suggs' "It is good to be shifty in a new country" is but a limited expression of the unstated creed of the rogue that it is good to be shifty anywhere. Generally the American, at least in the broad outline of his life, has much in common with his European predecessor. He is essentially a rootless wanderer, who occasionally gives the appearance of settling down only to find the opportunities for swindling exhausted and another move in order. He is lacking in sympathy for his fellow men, regarding them only as potential victims for his cheats. He is completely materialistic in his outlook. Then, too, he is of the lower orders of society; either his origins are humble or he has lost prestige as a result of rogueries. But these are generalities. The American picaro remains distinctly American in spite of his basic similarities to the European, for the exact nature of the rogue and his rogueries is determined by the specific problems with which his environment confronts him.

As is the case with the upper-class practical joker, the picaro is generally found in isolated sketches throughout the body of frontier humor. Simon Suggs is the hero of a complete volume, and some of the others, especially those described by Baldwin, appear in long sketches; but most of them are the subject of anecdotes ranging in
length from two or three to a dozen pages. Unlike the gentleman, however, the rogues are difficult to consider merely as definitions of a type, for the rogue has thrown off the restrictions of polite society and is limited only by immediate circumstances, not by any regard for propriety. Because of this variety, perhaps, the picaro appears more individualized than the gentleman, and the Yellow Blossom from Jasper is etched even more indelibly in the reader's mind than Ned Brace, to whom Longstreet devotes considerably more space.

Nevertheless, the minor picaro of the old Southwest falls easily into broad classifications—the horse trader, the distiller, and the gambler; for the anecdotal material in which he appears tends to present variations of a series of familiar situations. The rogue who receives a more extended development, on the other hand, cuts across lines and categories, exhibiting the versatility of such a European rogue as Gil Blas, who was scholar, robber, doctor, serving man, and petty office-holder. The brief sketch obviously could not describe a full career of rascality, and yet the humorous writer could say much with few words. Consider, for example, this one-sentence biography by Samuel A. Hammett: "A certain scampish genius, known as Lefe Thompson, who was notoriously addicted to betting upon quarter races, playing old sledge and poker, and to little else, having borrowed money, and run pretty deeply
into debt, had now taken a new step, and run off altogether.¹

Once Lefe's life is summed up, even as briefly as it is, any reader realizes that here is a true picaro. The citizens of Lefe's home town, however, were not so wary. Uncle Billy, the constable, pursued Lefe, caught him, and proceeded to attach a yellow girl in Lefe's possession to be sold for the defaulted debts. Lefe, not wanting to part with the slave, suggested that Uncle Billy take a horse instead. The sharp-eyed old constable agreed, recognizing that the horse was worth more than the amount of the debt, and allowed Lefe to proceed on his way. Proud to have given the rogue his come-uppanee, Uncle Billy returned to town. There he found the joker in the deck; a letter from Lefe arrived, thanking him for returning the horse to his father, the rightful owner.²

Less the backwoodsman than Lefe, and yet representative of the various charlatans who roamed the frontier reading palms or feeling bumps on yokel heads, is the unnamed Wolverine mesmerizer celebrated by J. M. Field. This rascal, his bluff called by a crowd of gentlemen led by a huge man with a bowie knife, was given the opportunity

¹ Samuel A. Hammett, A Stray Yankee in Texas, Redfield, New York, 1859, p. 45.
² Ibid., pp. 43-53.
to prove the "re-mee-jil" values of his science or to ride out of town on a rail. He was taken to a hotel room occupied by a man bedridden with rheumatism. The Wolverine's procedure was certainly not one Mesmer would have approved, for he frightened the victim with his hocus-pocus and then screamed in his face, "Now cut dirt, d---n you!" When the terrified patient leaped from his bed, the mesmerizer chased him downstairs and around the block a few times. As a lucky coincidence the man turned out to be wanted for robbery in Buffalo. The Wolverine concluded his story: "I made him dress himself--cured of his rheumatism--run it right out of him; delivered him up, pocketed the reward, and established the science, by thunder!"3

The horse trader was an even more common sight on the frontier, usually swapping horses on a small scale, taking one animal, exchanging that for another, then another, and so on until he was in possession of a fine animal which he could sell and, using the money, begin over again. The most renowned tale of this genus is Longstreet's "The Horse Swap," which has two shrewd traders instead of the usual one and thus is a story of rogue cheat rogue rather than of honest man duped. Actually the two rogues

3 Joseph M. Field, The Drama in Pokerville (in Colonel Thorpe's Scenes in Arkansas), T. E. Peterson and Brothers, 1858, p. 133.
are as different as night and day. The Yellow Blossom from Jasper belongs to the ring-tailed roarer tradition, announcing himself with a flourish: "'I'm the boy,' continued he; 'perhaps a leetle, jist a leetle of the best man at a horse-swap that ever trod shoe-leather.'" Peter Ketch is more taciturn, refusing to work up any excitement over the trade, even pointing out quietly the defects of his horse.

The two rogues each show their horses, Blossom preferring to let his horse show off its paces, Peter preferring to show the stability of his fine looking animal. Peter quite honestly says that his horse is deaf and has his son Ned pound on a barrel and shoot a gun to demonstrate the deficiency, but the bystanders all accept this as a back-handed method of proving that his horse will not frighten as easily as Blossom's. Then when Blossom notices a peculiar look in the horse's eyes, Peter is equal to the circumstance. "'Oh yes, sir,' said Peter, 'just as blind as a bat. Blind horses always have clear eyes.'"

When Blossom waves his hand at the horse's face, it jumps, but Longstreet records that it was "rather as if something pricked him under the chin than as if fearing a blow."

The trade concluded, the Yellow Blossom cannot resist the

---

4 *Georgia Scenes*, p. 23.
temptation to crow over the fact that he has swapped a horse with a huge saddle sore on its back. Old Peter offers no comment, but Ned, unable to endure the ridicule of the crowd, points out that their horse is both blind and deaf. Peter's reproach is still in character.

"Neddy," said the old man, 'you oughtn't to try and make people discontented with their things. Stranger, don't mind what the little boy says. If you can only get Kit rid of them little failings, you'll find him all sorts of a horse....'"

In a day when even preachers might keep still-houses, it is surprising that only a few stories pictures moonshiners as rogues. Actually, however, the distiller was considered an essential member of the community by the rougher element and was probably not bothered to any great extent by pranksters, while watched very carefully by his customers, so that he had little opportunity to play pranks himself. Harden E. Taliaferro, on the other hand, pictured in Hamp Hudson a rogue whose adulteration of his product exceeded even that charged against grocery keepers by D. H. Hundley. Hamp, "the only man in that whole country who kept a 'still-house' running all the year," was an important functionary at all public gatherings, especially the annual militia muster. But one year,

6 Ibid., p. 31.
Hamp's dog "Famus" drowned in the mash and the local citizens decided to eschew spirits at the forthcoming muster, for they were certain Hamp had not let the accident interfere with his business. When Hamp appeared with his barrel and tin cup, he was publicly demounced. The scamp, however, partook of the taciturnity of old Peter and simply sat in the shade—for it was a hot day—clinking his cup occasionally. In the end he won out; heat and thirst combined to persuade his customers to drink, "Famus or no Famus."  

No survey of the frontier picaro would be complete without some mention of the petty thief, who, though in an American setting, engages in that age-old occupation of the rogue, pilfering from anyone rich enough to take no notice of the theft. An anonymous story entitled "Hooking at an Indian Treaty" details the adventures of two picaros who with their kind gathered at an Indian treaty ground to steal from the gifts and provisions supplied by the government and to sell whiskey and other verboten goods to the Indians. Bob and Bill had managed to steal about a thousand dollars worth of cloth, which they cached in the woods until the crowd dispersed. They returned separately to ascertain the safety of the loot, and upon

discovering it gone each assumed the other had removed it. When they met, mutual accusations led to a long and bloody fight, effectually ending the partnership. Bill on the way home stopped at a local tavern and there discovered the cloth, now in the possession of the tavern keeper, who had watched them steal it and decided to help himself. This third rogue was able to quell Bill's demands for restitution by pointing out the difficulty he would find in establishing his ownership. Again it was rogue cheat rogue.

The gamblers, almost a race to themselves, appear frequently in the anecdotes of the frontier. Commonly these stories, like the above, belong to the cheater cheated category, a motif which seems to have been highly favored in American humor. Once in a while, one of the rogues in a story can be roughly equated with the naive victim, and the deflation of his ego serves as a source for comedy. T. W. Lane's "The Thimble Game," for example, recounts the adventures of a country boy named Peter who takes his father's cotton to Augusta for sale. Locally his reputation as a shrewd trader is great, for he once traded horses with a Yankee and "after half an hour's haggling found himself the undisputed owner of both horses and ten dollars boot...." To the "gimblet man," or

---

8 Spirit of the Times, XXI (June 21, 1851), 202.
cotton buyer, however, Peter is another yokel to be fleeced, and the method is the old thimble game with a hundred dollar bill rolled up for a pea. Peter's father, who having the game explained to him, goes to recoup his son's losses, is hardly even a shrewd character, although like the elder Suggs he regards himself as a hard man to fool.

Much more quick-witted was Elijah Shaddock, the gambling river pilot, when he outwitted a gambler on his boat. The gambler had lost fifty or sixty dollars to Lige in a poker game, but decided that Lige was "small potatoes" and offered to bet double or nothing he could turn up a jack on first try. Lige, however, demanded that they play a few hands of old sledge first, and the gambler had no choice but to comply and lose more money. At last Lige agreed to the bet, only to discover that the gambler turned the whole deck over at once. The gambler, anticipating an argument, began to insist that he had complied with the letter if not the spirit of the bet. Lige listened in silence and then pointed out casually that there were no jacks in the deck. He had removed them during the game of old sledge.10

Frequently, as George Devol discovered, a man would be cheated by his partner; and such was the adventure of

"a long, lank specimen of humanity, bearing the name of Bennet, who made it his business to relieve such verdant young men as came his way of their money, by inducing them to play poker, seven-up, and such other interesting games as pleased them most, respectively." Bennet induced an acquaintance named Cole to help him get Smith, who had just sold some land, into a poker, for he knew Smith would not play with him alone. The understanding was that Cole would win a little and then drop out, leaving the other two to "lock horns." Cole, of course, could keep his winnings for his services. The game proceeded according to plan. Finally, Bennet dealt a good hand to Cole and helped him by betting twelve hundred dollars to entice Smith to bet heavily. Cole left with his winnings, but Bennet soon found that Smith had only a few dollars left. The next day Cole refused to restore Bennet his lost money, reminding him that it was won honestly in a poker game and that Bennet certainly could not complain that he had not followed instructions.

These three stories all follow one pattern— one rogue swindles another—in spite of the fact that the methods involved vary considerably. What is more, the reader is in sympathy with the winner, not the loser, in each incident. Peter is a bumpkin with an excessive pride in his

11 Polly Peablossom's Wedding, p. 44.
own shrewdness, and the gambler man, after all, is justified by the frontier tendency to take advantage of naivete or pride. Lige Shaddock is a likeable old duffer pitted against a professional gambler, and Cole is only an acquaintance of the gambler Bennet, who specializes in cheating youngsters. The sketches, like all true rogue stories, maintain an objectivity untouched by sentimentality, which would insist that Peter's family is poor and cannot afford to lose the money, or that even a gambler can expect his friend to be fair with him under the old "honor among thieves" platitude.

The American picaro was not limited to the socially unacceptable occupations—distiller, gambler, horse-trader—for an occasional sketch portrays him in a more reputable role, and a good many of the anecdotes of the bar are devoted to lawyers who are far more rogue than gentleman. The brief nature of these tales leaves much to be desired in the way of characterization, but the nature of the action indicates clearly that they belong in the category of the picaresque. Baldwin's little sketch "Sharp Financeering," for example, recounts the experience of Mr. Ripley, a traveller from North Carolina, with a Mississippi financeer named Thompson. Ripley, afraid to travel with a large sum of money, buys a bill of exchange on a Raleigh bank from Thompson, who collects the usual five percent fee on Ripley's twelve hundred dollars. On
reaching Raleigh, Ripley finds that a package he has
carried for Thompson to the Raleigh bank contains his
money, minus the commission, of course. Thompson is at
least a part-time rogue, but Baldwin's delineation of him
is so slight that the reader hardly feels him significant
as a character.

Equally as shadowy a figure is the unnamed scene-
painter from a small dramatic company, who is the central
character in Joseph M. Field's "The 'Gagging Scheme'; Or,
West's Great Picture." As a matter of fact, the man is
difficult to classify, for he is just as much prankster
as picaro. The company finds itself in debt in a small
town which seems indifferent to the drama and which is
dominated by a group, led by Elder Slack, who are openly
hostile to Thespis. There seems no hope until the painter
remembers that Benjamin West's "Death on a Pale Horse" is
to be exhibited locally and decides to anticipate the pro-
gram with a picture of his own which is to be billed as
West's. His "Death on a Pale Horse" is based on the Seven
Deadly Sins, and the afternoon audience is surprised to
see Elder Slack's strong resemblance to Malice. The even-
ing audience is even more surprised, for Malice now wears
a black suit exactly like the Elder's; but the actors have

12 Flush Times, pp. 151-152.
paid their debts and departed.\(^\text{13}\)

Robb's "Western Wanderings of a Typo" is the picareque account of a young painter, but it is more than that; for it is the unique example in frontier humor of a sentimental rogue story. The basic incongruity in the character of John, the hero of this unusual tale, does much to destroy his effectiveness as a rogue, although the shift from picaro to sentimental hero does not occur until late in the story. What is more, the happy ending is the result of a very obvious coincidence.

In the beginning, John, the typo, possesses a rogue philosophy similar to that of David Hines; and his expression of it, though lacking the homely compactness, is reminiscent of the advice of Mrs. Hines. "'The West, aye,' thought John, 'that mighty cornfield—that region of pork and plenty—land of the migrating sucker—haven of hope and country of adventure....'"\(^\text{14}\) John, an orphan in the friendless city of New York, has decided to migrate with the suckers. Although he has no money and no way to get any, he decides that he can rely on a ready wit to provide.

The first problem is going across on the ferry, but John resolves to masquerade as an "attache" of the press and so get free passage. Before this deceit is necessary,

\(^{13}\) The Drama in Pekerville, pp. 116-126.

\(^{14}\) Streaks of Squatter Life, p. 13.
however, the young hopeful strikes up a conversation with an elderly gentleman who is also a passenger. The reader is not too amazed to discover that the kindly friend, hearing of John's plight, offers to pay the passage; but credulity is somewhat strained when he volunteers an all-expense trip to Wheeling, just for the company of such an intelligent young man. John accepts with alacrity, and becomes such an engaging parasite that when they part at Wheeling, his friend lends him money to go to Cincinnati and offers his hospitality if John ever comes to Cleveland where he lives.

Robb, casually mentioning that John spent two months in Cincinnati, sends his wanderer to Indiana, where he arrives in a small town on the day of a public dinner sponsored by local politicians. Priming himself for future contingencies by drinking the dregs from glasses left in a bar, John demands a shine from the bootblack and enters the banquet hall along with the subscribers. Once inside, aware that the diners think he is a senator "incog," John partakes liberally of food and drink, and even volunteers a speech. As luck will have it, he denounces the wrong party and is requested to leave. What is more, as he departs with drunken dignity, the chicken and doughnuts he has concealed in his hat fall to the floor and he refuses to pick them up, eschewing all "spoils of the enemy." But fortune smiles again, for an enraged
editor hurls them after him, enabling John to recover his spoils in privacy.

By the time of his next exploit, the wandering adventurer has managed to hoard a hundred and fifty dollars and feels himself "one holding one hundred and fifty considerations entitling him to respect." When he enters town of B— his elegant demand for a private room starts whispers about his status, and once more the consensus of opinion is that he must be in politics. The citizens are therefore disappointed when he purchases the editorship of the local one-horse newspaper, promising the politician-owner to "pour it into the inimy in slashergaff style"—the "inimy" being the residents of a nearby town. Here luck is against him, for the subscribers will not pay for the paper and, in addition, arrange a duel for him and the editor of the rival paper. John, however, has had enough; he visits the rival editor, makes friends, pies all the type in his office, beats the politician, and departs, leaving his subscription list to pay his debts.

Up to this point, John has been exclusively a rogue, rootless and irresponsible. Now he shifts character with amazing rapidity; and his reformation, symbolized in a touching scene when he gives sixteen of his last seventeen dollars to a widow who has sheltered him for the night,

15 Ibid., p. 28.
produces results that would have amazed Horatio Alger. He goes to Cleveland where he finds his adopted father and mother—another surprise for the unsuspecting reader—doing nicely in business. What is more, he finds his old travelling companion, a well-to-do lawyer, who would like a son to take into the firm. The old gentleman, greatest surprise of all, has a beautiful daughter. At this point Robb ends his story, confident that John will not require any further authorial assistance.

In spite of the almost ludicrous artificiality of its plot, "The Western Wanderings of a Typo" is a valid portrait of the American picaro. The characteristics of the wandering parasite, the fraudulent elegance, and the tendency to extravagant action so ably defined in the first portions of the story serve to set John so apart from the conventional, moral, industrious hero of the success story that they underline the cliche of the "young man makes good" plot. In addition, the very method of development, a series of anecdotes strung together on a very sketchily filled-in background, increases the similarity of "The Western Wanderings" to the European picaresque novel.

The fact that the lawyer in the old Southwest is occasionally represented as a picaro is not an indication of a general condemnation of the profession. Far from it, the good-natured ribbing of lawyers was often the work of lawyers themselves. Three out of the four to be discussed
here were products of J. G. Baldwin, whose *Flush Times* presents the riotous days in Alabama and Mississippi, primarily focusing on the legal profession. Furthermore, it has already been observed that the lawyers, gathering wherever court was in session, exchanged humorous tales of the bar, stories which often illustrated roguish tendencies in themselves and their colleagues. It is only natural then that the humor of the frontier, in part the product of lawyers, should include sketches of legal picaros.

Least attractive of Baldwin's rogue lawyers is John Stout, Esq., who pretends to be a friend of Mark Sullivan, in jail for murder, so that he can get into the jail and persuade Mark to hire him. Mark, willing to clutch at any straw, accepts his new-found old friend and listens to Stout's pretentious gabble about a million-dollar suit in which Stout pretends to have been associated with S.S. Prentiss and George Yerger, two of the leading solicitors of the day. Mark listens, that is, until Stout, not caring that he has lost a tremendous fee in his imaginary suit, offers to take his friend's case for only two hundred dollars. In case any reader needs the additional information, Baldwin has sketched in John Stout's background to illustrate what a disreputable rogue he was:

John's standard of morality was not exalted, nor were his attainments in the profession great; having confined himself mostly to a class of cases and of clients better suited to give
notoriety than enviable reputation to the practitioner....He had no settled abode, but was a sort of Galms Tartar of the Law, and roamed over the country generally, stirring up contention and breeding dirty lawsuits, fishing up fraudulent papers, and hunting up complaisant witnesses to very apocryphal facts.16

Far more attractive than Stout as a literary figure, if just as reproachable morally, is Baldwin's famous liar, "Ovid Bolus, Esq., Attorney at Law and Solicitor in Chicanery." Walter Blair has pointed out Baldwin's failure to give a sample of Bolus's lying as one of the faults in his approach to his material, which is that of the essayist rather than the writer of fiction.17 The same is true of his presentation of Bolus the rogue, for the entire picture is sketched in with generalities, and the reader is never informed exactly what happened in the one incident Baldwin sees fit to comment on specifically, the swindling of Ben. Nevertheless, the portrait produced in the story is one of a full-fledged rogue, perhaps not a picaro in the strict sense but a conscienceless cheat living at the expense of society.

Bolus is represented primarily as a liar, and lying, perhaps, is not enough to justify the term rogue. Yet it cannot be doubted that his ability as a liar contributed to his effectiveness as a swindler.

16 Flush Times, pp. 304-305.
17 Native American Humor, p. 78.
Some men are liars from interest...some are liars from vanity...some are liars from a sort of necessity...some are enticed away by the allurements of pleasure, or seduced by evil example and education. Bolus was none of these: he belonged to a higher department of the fine arts, and to a higher class of professors of this art of Belles-Lettres. Bolus was a natural liar, just as some horses are natural pacers, and some dogs natural setters. What he did in that walk, was from the irresistible promptings of instinct, and a disinterested love of art.\(^\text{18}\)

Bolus was also a rootless drifter. "He had been born in more places than Homer." He had wandered the face of the earth—or so his stories asserted. Whether or not he had travelled widely is as uncertain as one of his stories, but he was not born in Alabama and now that he has exhausted his credit he will not remain there. Baldwin observes that there seems to be only one extenuation for his swindling Ben and that is that "Bolus was on the lift for Texas, and the desire was natural to qualify himself for citizenship."\(^\text{19}\) At the time of the sketch, then, Bolus was ready to go or had already gone on his way.

Although not in the technical sense a parasite, Bolus had those parasitical qualities which a bad debtor usually displays and coupled with them a generous nature:

He was as free with his own money—if he ever had any of his own—as with yours. If he never paid borrowed money, he never asked payment of others. If you wished him to lend you any, he would give you a handful without counting it; if you handed

\(^{18}\) \text{Flush Times}, \ pp. \ 2-3.  

\(^{19}\) \text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 11.
him any, you were losing time counting it, for you never saw any of it again.

In addition, "He would as soon treat a regiment or charter the grocery for the day, as any other way...," with the result that "His bills at the groceries were as long as John Q. Adams' abolition petition, or, if pasted together, would have matched the great Chartist memorial."\(^{20}\)

Baldwin also indicates the roguish nature of Bolus's business dealings. "He bought goods and chattels, lands and tenements, like any other man; but he got them under a state of poetic illusion, and paid for them in an imaginary way. Even the titles he gave were not of the earthly sort—they were sometimes clouded."\(^{21}\) The reader, however, is presented with no specific evidence of any such chicanery. Only the vague account of the cheating of Ben and the hearsay of another equally shady transaction present any idea of the rogue's methods. Baldwin says of the latter, "...this I know from a client, to whom Ovid sold a tract of land after having sold it twice before: I cannot say, though, that his forgetting to mention this circumstance made any difference, for Bolus originally had no title."\(^{22}\)

\(^{20}\) Ibid., pp. 7-8, passim.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., pp. 4-5.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 5.
Last but far from least Bolus is a conscienceless rascal with a touch of the miles gloriosus.

Bolus had long since settled all disputes with his conscience. He and it were on very good terms—at least, if there was no affection between the couple, there was no fuss in the family....My own opinion is, that he was as destitute of the article as an ostrich.

Although his own accounts bragged of his derring-do, relating adventures on land and sea, Bolus was far from being a true ring-tailed roarer. "He took reasonably good care of his person. He avoided all unnecessary exposures, chiefly from a patriotic desire, probably, of continuing his good offices to his country. His recklessness was, for the most part, lingual."

Such then is Ovid Bolus, lawyer, raconteur, and rascal. For all the sketchiness of his background, in spite of the fact that he is never seen in action, he emerges from Baldwin's book as one of the most engaging rogues produced in the old Southwest. Though more closely related to Baron Munchausen than to Lazarillo of Tomes, he is a genuine contribution to the literature of roguery which grew up on the American frontier.

The reader is introduced to Ovid Bolus long after his career in roguery has begun and misses perhaps the opportunity to trace his development back to the original

---

23 Ibid., p. 15.
24 Ibid., p. 13.
causes for his moral defection. Such is not the case with Thomas Jefferson Jenkens, whom W. T. Thompson portrays arriving in Pineville an industrious and upright young lawyer; for Jenkens' motivation is clear. At first the young lawyer stays close to the office, reading his books and in general giving the appearance of diligence. No one comes to employ him, however, so after a time he becomes one of the whittlers sitting on the bench in front of Hartley's store. It is there, idling away the hours, that he conceives a plan which will get him some legal business and which turns him into a rogue.

One day as Si Perkins, his wife, and two friends are trading in the store Jeff decides the time is ripe for action. When Si goes across town to see about a borrowed harness and the others are occupied inside, the newly-made rascal takes their pony cart to the rear of the building and puts it inside the warehouse. There he loads a few items and departs, locking cart and pony inside. After a considerable search, Si and his party discover the cart and start out of the building, only to be discovered by one of Hartley's clerks, who thinks they are stealing from the store. In the succeeding argument, Si hires the young lawyer, who has no difficulty in proving before a local magistrate that Hartley's possession of the cart indicates his guilt as a thief. As soon as the first case is bound over, Jeff persuades Hartley to hire him in what he calls
a separate case and proves, also by possession, that Si and his friends are guilty of attempted theft. Nothing comes of the whole affair, for Jenkens persuades both parties—after he has collected a fee from each—that there must be a mistake somewhere.

Thompson also sketches in brief another adventure of the quick-witted young man, showing his eventual success in life. Jenkens falls in love with a young orphan and persuades the court that her guardian has swindled her out of her fortune. When he recovers it, he marries her and is in a position to live happily the rest of his life. In fact, his reputation is so great that he manages to get elected to the legislature, even though a member of the minority party.25 Jenkens' career in roguery, though only slightly presented, centering as it does on his first step into the world of the picaro, is a valid and entertaining portrayal of the knavish aspects of the bar in the old Southwest.

Far more complete a rogue portrait is Baldwin's "Simon Suggs, Jr.," the story of a picaro who becomes a lawyer. There is no need to make elaborate deductions as to the causes of the young man's roguery, for he is the son of Simon Suggs, the greatest of the frontier picaros,

---

and both heredity and environment have conditioned him well for the job. Even in his school days he is reputed as a budding rogue, gaining some distinction as a sharp trader, petty gambler, and prankster. But his school days terminate abruptly, as the result of his devising a "booby trap" in a handkerchief full of gun powder the teacher is taking home. After this, "The characteristic prudence of the elder Suggs suggested the expediency of Simon's leaving for a time a part of the country where character was held in so little esteem." Young Simon's apprenticeship has begun.

His first stop is as assistant in an unlicensed "doggery," where he acquires the necessary skills of measuring at shooting matches or pitching coins and of "arranging the papers." Thence he migrates to Columbus and acquires "an increased store of goods and experience," including a beautiful little racing mare. On his return, he finds his father envious of the horse and agrees to a game of seven-up, in which he will wager his mare against his father's horse. It is a close game: "The old gentleman had the advantage of experience—the young of genius...." At the crucial point the elder Suggs bends over to take a pinch of snuff and incidentally to peek at the bottom of the cards being dealt, but some prankster has substituted cayenne pepper for his snuff, and before he can stop sneezing

26 Flush Times, p. 127.
young Simon has turned a jack and won the hand. The old picaro admits defeat and congratulates his son. Baldwin says he told young Simon "that he was wasting his genius in a retail business of 'shykeenry' when nature had designed him for the bar." This is not the only hint the young man got, for "many sagacious men predicted that the law would yet elevate Simon to a prominent place in the public view." 27

His apprenticeship over and the rigid examination of the elder Suggs—the game of seven-up—passed, the young man is a full-fledged picaro, but decides to continue his present course by engaging in such pleasant enterprises as horse-racing and faro-dealing. These, however, do not turn out to be rewarding, and Simon, having won a law license at faro, makes up his mind to become a lawyer.

Simon was not long in deciding upon a location. The spirited manner in which the State of Arkansas had repudiated a public debt of some five hundred thousand dollars gave him a favorable opinion of that people as a community of litigants, while the accounts which came teeming from that bright land, of murders and felonies innumerable, suggested the value of the criminal practice. 28

Simon's experiences as a lawyer involve all sorts of roguish tricks. He prejudices juries before the trial, since they at that time have not received an "improper

27 Ibid., p. 130.
28 Ibid., pp. 132-133.
bias from the testimony." He hires a dozen of the most worthless members of the population to follow a cashier from an Alabama bank and so ruins his reputation that when his suit to recover from his defaulters finally comes to court he is notified that a warrant is being issued against him for perjury. Further, Simon does such tricks as drawing up a writ in a capital case that "bound the defendant, under a heavy penalty, 'not to appear at court and answer the charge!'" And he smuggles a prisoner out of jail by having him reported dead of small pox, dressing the man in his wife's clothes. He puts her in the coffin, but she, of course, refuses to be buried when the funeral procession arrives at the cemetery. 29 All these worthy endeavors, needless to say, gain for the young lawyer a considerable reputation. And the citizens elect him solicitor for Hackensack, the Arkansas town he graces with his presence.

Simon, in the meantime, has become a man of property, by much the same means that Jenkens used; that is, he has married money. He noticed that his landlady had a good-sized estate, consisting of a plantation, some twenty Negroes, and some town property, and persuaded her of her husband's infidelity. Then he arranged some evidence: "having ingeniously deceived the unsuspecting husband

29 Ibid., pp. 137-139.
into some suspicious appearances, which were duly observed by a witness or two provided for the purpose, he soon prevailed upon his fair hostess to file a bill of divorce...."30 As a concluding irony to this incident, Simon, when he had been married long enough for his purpose, divorced his wife for infidelity, "magnanimously giving her one of the Negroes, a horse, saddle and bridle."31 As the sketch concludes, Simon has moved to Choctaw territory, married a chief's daughter, and become claims agent for the tribe.

Although Baldwin's essay style cripples some of his characters by depriving them of the right to act out their own stories, the fault is not so obvious in "Simon Suggs, Jr.," in spite of the fact that young Simon has nowhere the life that his father displays. On the other hand, the European picaresque novel often compresses its action into brief space, thus providing the same effect as the essay style. Traditionally it is enough that the rogue's actions be summarized, any deficiency in total length being more than compensated for by the recounting of innumerable adventures and the addition of stories interpolated by the various incidental characters. Simon Suggs, Jr., for all that he is distinctly American, distinctly a resident of the old Southwest, has earned by his variety and flexibility of wit a place in the literature of roguery as that

31 Ibid., p. 140.
literature is defined by European tradition. His story, too, is the most fully developed account of the rogue lawyer in the humor of the frontier.

It is somehow appropriate that the supreme rogue in the old Southwest, the epitome of American picaros, should be not a lawyer, doctor, or even planter, but a crude backwoodsman whose whole life is a contradiction of the romantic pioneer of fiction from James Fenimore Cooper to the present day. And Simon Suggs, the creation of Johnson Jones Hooper, is just such a contradiction. He is ignorant, shiftless, vulgar, and thoroughly dishonest, caring not for God nor man except as they can be used to fill his pockets. And yet Simon is a man with a charm of his own. "Without a virtue in the world, except his good humor and his self-possession, there is something in his vices, his indolence, his swagger, his rogueries, which, in spite of the worthlessness of the man and the dishonesty of his practices, detains and amuses us."\(^3^2\)

One of the excellencies of Simon Suggs as a literary character is the fact that his story is developed in full. Here is no summary of roguish pranks nor first-person monologue recounting a picaresque life. Simon walks through the Adventures as a living character, acting out each scene and expressing his opinions in his own language.

\(^3^2\) Henry O. Watterson, Oddities in Southern Life and Character, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston, 1883, p. 39.
What is more, his language is as delightful as his philosophy, for it is exemplary of the best that can be done with frontier dialect. There is little that seems artificial and contrived, and if it lacks the eloquent simile of the speech of Sut Lovingood, Simon's earthy talk is well adapted to expressing the thoughts of his agile mind. On the practical level, at least, it is a useful tool for his roguery, for Simon can make his victim believe he is what he is not and still refrain from telling an actual lie.

Simon is a determined rogue even from the days of his youth. From a boyhood of fighting his mother's roosters and racing his father's plough horses, he soon progresses to playing "old sledge" and pitching dollars. It is at this point that we meet Simon for the first time and his mind is already made up. When his father catches him playing cards—"The simple Mr. Suggs had only a vague idea of the paste board abomination called cards"—the old man wastes his remonstrance:

"It ain't no use, daddy," said Simon.
"Why so, Simon?"
"Jist bekase it ain't. I'm gwine to play cards as long as I live. When I go off to myself, I'm gwine to make my livin' by it. So what's the use of beatin' me about it?"

In spite of his determination to be a gambler,

33 Johnson Jones Hooper, Simon Suggs' Adventures, Cameron and Ferguson, Glasgow, n. d., p. 18.
however, Simon Suggs' biography does not present another George Devol, for only twice does the reader see him engaged in a game of chance. The first time is the occasion of the elder Suggs' discovery of Simon and the Negro Bill playing cards, and the actual incident involves only Simon's ability to turn the jack. His father, despairing of Simon's virtue and desirous of teaching him a lesson, offers to give him the pony Bunch if he can perform the seemingly impossible feat, provided Simon will give him his bag of silver if he cannot, the word bet of course being odious to the old hard-shelled preacher. With the shrewdness typical of the bumpkin in such stories as that of the "gimlet"-man, the old man carefully removes the face cards from the deck and puts them on the bottom, intending to keep Simon from cutting deeply. Of course, all is to no avail; and Simon, with both the pony and his bag of silver, sets out on his adventures.

The second glimpse of Simon as a gambler occurs when the rascal, now full grown, goes to Montgomery to "whip the tiger a fair fight." The faro bank is to Simon, as it was to George Devol, the height of temptation and the symbol of nemesis. "It is the weak point--the Achilles' heel, as one might say, of his character."34 Simon, like Devol, always tries and always loses, but he is not one

34 Ibid., p. 41.
to curse his fate and sulk over bad luck. He begins by betting a hundred dollars—a great deal of money for so impecunious a rogue as Simon—and "lets it ride" although he obviously realizes that it is impossible to win on every card. Simon's game, however, is not the desperate gamble of the needy man but resembles rather the casual entertainment of the wealthy. When he loses, he does it with the same emotion with which he wins, a casual shrug intended to convey bored indifference to matters pecuniary.

After all, betting at faro requires no quick wit, only the strength to wager, and is thus really unworthy of such an accomplished rascal as Simon Suggs. Land speculation, on the other hand, requires brains, especially if the speculator uses Simon's tactics. "Any fool, he reasoned, could speculate if he had the money. But to buy, to sell, to make profits without a cent in one's pocket, this required judgement, discernment, ingenuity—in short, genius." And Simon's speculation typically involves neither buying nor selling, only making a profit. In his early venture Simon overhears the occupants of a room next to his in an inn outside of Montgomery, and is able to gather that they are in a hurry to register a valuable mill shoal before someone beats them to it; Simon, however,

35 Ibid., p. 32.
is not able to determine the exact location. The next morning Simon overtakes the gentleman who is to register the land, going along on an almost foundered horse. Simon pretends he is hurrying into Montgomery also, a fact which makes the man uneasy, and although Simon does not say it he does not deny that he is going to register a tract of land. From this point, Simon, expert psychologist that he is, lets the other's fears work in his favor, and before long Simon has found out the exact location of the tract by a sort of negative persuasion in which he merely does not deny that his is the exact section the man describes. Since Simon only wants the land for a cabin, or so he pretends, the other persuades him to relinquish his claim for a hundred and fifty dollars and to trade his fresh horse for the jaded one—worth a good fifty dollars more than Simon's—and twenty dollars boot. It has been a pleasant morning's ride for Simon, who concludes the chapter with a bit of typical Suggs philosophy:

Now some fellars, after makin' sich a little decent rise, would milk the cow dry by pushin' on to Doublejoy's, startin' a runner the nigh way to Montgomery, by the Augusty ferry, and enterin' land in somebody else's name before Jones gits thar. But honesty's the best policy. Hon­esty's the bright spot in any man's character! Fair play's a jewel, but honesty beats it all to pieces!...What's a man without his integrity?36

Simon's other land speculation is even more profitable

36 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
and just as fine an example of his appraisal of human na-
ture. At the time of the removal of the Creek Indians,
"Mad Bird," an old widow, has become so fond of Simon
that she agrees to sell her lands to him for two hundred
dollars and three blankets, in spite of the fact that
other buyers offer her a thousand. As luck will have it,
Simon has no money and the other buyers refuse to lend
him any, even when he offers half-interest in the land.
Simon then says he will ride to see "an old friend of mine
not twenty miles from here that's got three or four hamper
basketfull of Mexicans, and I guess I can git a bushel or
so, jist to ease the pain, twell a fellar can git the
chance to have the tooth drawed."37 The next day, just as
the ten o'clock deadline comes, he gallops up with a pair
of heavy-laden saddle bags. Now the other buyers are
eager to lend him money for a half-interest in the widow's
land, and Simon allows one to persuade him to accept five
hundred dollars in addition to the purchase price. The
deal concluded, Simon comments, patting the saddle bags:
"I'll throw out these here rocks and old iron, for it's
mighty tiresome to a horse...."

Twice on his trip to whip the tiger, Simon finds it
convenient to assume the identity of another, and his tech-
nique as a masquerader is similar to that he used to find

37 Ibid., p. 72.
the section and number of the mill shoal. If people will mistake him for someone else, Simon is far too polite to disillusion them. On the stage to Montgomery a citizen eager to get a state charter as a bank director assumes Simon is the legislator from Tallapoosa, a fact which Simon denies. However, "'What keen people you candidates are, to find out folks,' said Simon. 'But mind, I haint said yet I was a member. I told wife when I started, I warn't goin' to tell nobod--hello! I liked to a ketcht myself, didn't I?'"38 The sucker is hooked, and Simon finds him quite willing to make a personal loan and anxious to treat at every stop.

Simon's masquerade as General Witherspoon, the wealthy hog drover from Kentucky, allows him much more room for character interpretation. His recklessness at the faro bank starts whispers that he must be the old General, uncle to one of the dandies present, who is due to arrive on his first visit in fifteen years. Miss Jeanette Tandy has commented, "Simon does not rush into deceit....But if mistakes come he knows how to make the best of them."39 This time he is prepared to help the mistake along. After winning fifteen hundred dollars on one card, he exclaims:

38 Ibid., p. 42.
"That's better—just the least grain in the world better—than drivin' hogs from Kentucky and sellin' 'em at four cents a pound!" This pronouncement convinces the prospective nephew, but Simon makes the young man prove in front of the crowd that he is Simon's nephew, observing that the world is full of imposters who might want to borrow money. The rest is easy. Simon is "determined to sustain any reputation for liberality which General Witherspoon might, perchance, possess"; and he does it magnificently. In his toast to the assembled friends of his nephew, Simon concludes, "'but here's wishing of luck to you all'—and then wickedly seeming to blunder in his little speech—'and if I forgot you, I'll be d---d if you'll ever forgit me!'" In departing, he has underlined his aphorism about imposters by borrowing two hundred dollars from "Jeems" and his young friends—to tide him over on his trip to Greensboro.

Suggs' military career is a brief but colorful episode set in the actual life of the American frontier. During the Creek war in the spring of 1836, the citizens of Tallapoosa become unduly alarmed and assemble at a local doggery to defend themselves from supposed attack. Simon is elected captain of the "Tallapoosa Volantares."

---

41 Ibid., p. 62.
42 Ibid., p. 63.
"afterwards known as the 'FORTY THIEVES'—a name in the highest degree inappropriate, in as much as the company, from the very best evidence we have been able to procure, never had upon its roll, at any time, a greater number of names than thirty-nine."\(^{43}\) Simon, quite assured that there is no danger, acts his part admirably, even leading at night a charge against an enemy who turns out to be the widow Haycock rummaging in her cart for tobacco. To demonstrate the authority of his new position, the captain courtmartials the widow and sentences her to be "baggonetted to death," but proves that he is a kind man by allowing her to pay a fine, although he comments by way of suggesting the remedy, "ef I was to let her off with a fine, I might be layin' myself liable to be tried for my own life." Simon and his company hold their fort long after the supposed danger has passed, playing cards and levying "contributions" from passing wagons. The vagabond soldiers of Europe reduced to begging with artificial wounds obviously are "nowhere" when compared with Captain Suggs and his troop of rascals.

Common in the rogue stories of the continent are the adventures of a picaro with some worthy churchman. Usually the picaro is only a parasite, pilfering from the goods of the priest to compensate for clerical niggardliness; and usually the tale is an expose of corruption and

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 83.
greed within the church, the picaro acting as the medium of satire. On the American frontier, however, there was a better object for satire—good-natured though it is—in the camp meetings and hypocritical zeal of some evangelistic preachers. One of Simon Suggs' escapades in this tradition is perhaps the finest of its type. Simon, however, is not a parasite; he does not pilfer from the preacher but earns the money he steals.

Informed by his wife that they are out of food, Simon sets out to scare up a little money to buy the necessary provisions. He wanders by a camp meeting led by the industrious Bela Bugg, which is now approaching its climax. Hooper graphically presents Simon's attitude toward this kind of religion: "Amid all this confusion, Simon stood unmoved. He viewed the whole affair as a grand deception—a sort of 'opposition line' running against his own, and looked on with a sort of professional jealousy." Soon, to the astonishment and delight of the crowd, Simon gives in and begins to vault and shout "Glorece." When he calms down, he tells as his "conversion" story a wild tale of wrestling with "the biggest, longest, rip-roarenest, blackest, scaliest...Alligator!" Such a fine example of the converted rogue is obviously an asset at a camp meeting, and it is not long before Simon is exhorting beside

---

\[44\] Ibid., p. 112.
the minister, but in his own inimitable way. "'Yes!' said Simon, by way of assisting his friend; 'It's a game that all can win at! Ante up! Ante up, boys—friends, I mean—don't back out!'"  

Finally Simon decides he will become a preacher, and the happy Bela Bugg aids him in taking up a collection—to be held in trust by Bugg—for the purpose of building a church. Then Bugg makes his big mistake; he allows Simon to take the money into the swamp to pray over it.

Finally, it must be observed that even Simon Suggs occasionally met a rogue in the old Southwest. Simon, however, is no callow bumpkin waiting to be fleeced by the first sharper who comes along. When he learns that a group of whites at an Indian ball game have conspired with the team of one town to stage a mock uprising, to frighten the Tallapoosa group away and then seize the stake by force, Simon manages to devise a plan to protect his friends. At the signal for the uprising, the Tallapoosa Volontares, strategically located, gallop off with most of the Indian horses; and Simon makes off with the bag which holds the wager, forsaking his pony for the chief's excellent steed. So perfectly is the coup executed that only a few Indians find mounts, and the chase is a token only, given up when one of the Volontares shoots their

chief.

But Simon is equal to the wiles of more sophisticated rascals than the rough countrymen at the ball game. Hired by the "Wetumpky Tradin' Kumpiny" to buy Negroes with bills issued by the corporation—thus disposing of their bad money—Simon receives advance payment of two thousand dollars, also in worthless bills. Arriving at the auction, Simon buys two slaves from a gentleman hired by the company to make a public demonstration of accepting the bills at face value. After paying his tavern score and losing a few hundred gambling, Simon sells the Negroes for a thousand dollars, accepting a slight loss because this time the transaction is made with good money. It turns out that no one else will accept his company's money, so Simon returns the unused bills. When his employers demand the thousand dollars also, Simon informs them that he bought the Negroes with the salary they had paid him and thus he owes them nothing.

Although ostensibly a mock campaign biography—"Captain Simon Suggs thinks it 'more than probable' he shall 'come before the people of Tallapoosa' in the course of a year or two...."—the Adventures soon loses sight of any political motive suggested by the introduction and becomes a rogue story for its own sake. The episodic nature of the story, the vagabond character of the Captain, and the complete triumph of wit over the vicissitudes of fortune
all mark the book as picaresque. Furthermore, the personality of Simon Suggs is closely akin to that of Lazarillo and Gil Blas. True, the reader gets only a glimpse of him as a boy—the picaro is usually a young man—because of a twenty-year hiatus in the biography. True, he is more than Lazarillo in blue denim pants, worn frock coat, and slouch hat. But his attitudes are clearly those of the true rogue of any nation or any age:

His whole ethical system lies snugly in his favorite aphorism—"IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY"—which means that it is right and proper that one should live as merrily and as comfortably as possible at the expense of others; and of the practicability of this, in particular instances, the Captain's whole life has been a long series of the most convincing illustrations. 46

The Adventures of Simon Suggs, as Walter Blair remarks, "is a notable American contribution to the literature of roguery as defined by Frank W. Chandler." 47

The humorous literature of the old Southwest, then, contains a good many examples of the rogue who can best be classified generally under the heading picaro, as that term is exemplified in European literature. All of them come from, or have sunk to, the lower levels of society; their stories are episodic, revolving around one adventure in some cases or a series of adventures connected by little

46 Ibid., p. 9.

47 Native American Humor, p. 86.
or no narrative thread in others. And all of them are devoted wholeheartedly to wresting a living from society by the use of their wits rather than their hands. Their attitudes toward society are marked by a disregard for convention, and their stories by a cynical detachment that makes them oblivious to the misfortune of their victims. But, as the result of their environment, these men are different from their European predecessors. They may become apprentices and parasites on rare occasions; usually they go about their occupations independent of protector or master. In addition, their chosen fields of action are distinctly American. They are gamblers and river pilots, distillers and horse-traders, and not infrequently they are lawyers. But these are surface characteristics which serve to identify the source of these tales as the American frontier of a century ago. Underneath them run the folk motifs—rogue cheat rogue and rogue cheat clown—which have characterized anecdotes of rascality since the dawn of literature, since the time before the Spanish _siglo d'oro_, before the invention of the word _picaro_. 
CHAPTER VII

The Frontier Pucks

Of all the characters in frontier humor, the lower-class pranksters are the most difficult to classify, for they are as miscellaneous as their pranks and as varied as the land that produced them. Furthermore, the Ned Braces of the old Southwest can claim some kinship with the English wits; the Simon Suggs with the picaros of Spain; but the Sut Lovingoods are without analog in the literature of human beings, owing fealty if anywhere to the fairies, leprechauns, and trolls of European folk myth, those mischievous beings who practice their pranks on any humans unfortunate enough to encounter them.

True enough, there are in European literature human beings who earned their fame as mischief makers, rogues such as Tyl Bußnspiegel or Hans Clifferts—"Often he played pranks out of sheer love of mischief"1—but there is an essential difference between these wags and the frontier Puck, a difference indicated by Enid Welsford's

---

classification of them as "The Laughter-making Parasites or Buffoons." The Europeans made their living at chicanery; for their entertainment value they were hired as jesters, serving-men, even as sacristans. There was, however, no aristocracy, no jaded clergy seeking amusement in the old Southwest. The Europeans were professionals, the backwoodsmen amateurs of mischief.

The analogy between these rural imps and the supernatural sprites of Europe may be more complete than appears on the surface; for although they sour no milk and blow out no candles, the frontier Pucks are even more adept at breeding discomfort, strife, and general discontent among their fellows than the leprechauns of Ireland. Miss Welsford has noticed the relationship between the profitless pranks of Eulenspiegel and those of fairies: "There is something elvish about him, and it is not surprising that he was credited with magical powers and that some of his pranks and knavish tricks come to be attributed to the monastic demon-cook, Friar Rush, and to that 'merry Wanderer of the night,' that 'lob of Spirits' Robin Goodfellow."² How much more closely allied are the pranksters of the frontier whose mischief is motivated by no desire for gain, who seem to inhabit a world of their own in which there is no need to earn a living, only the

² Ibid., pp. 47-48.
necessity to amuse themselves.

By far the least roguish of the frontier Pucks, in fact hardly deserving the appellation rogue, are the myriad liars and tall-tale spinners of humorous literature. Their lies, like those of the best known, Ovid Bolus, are a product of a disinterested love of art, for the truth is too small for them. They lie for the entertainment of their fellow men and of themselves, and some of them seem hardly to exist for anything else. Harden Taliaferro's Uncle Davey Lane is an unemployed gunsmith, Thorpe's Mike Hooter and "Big Bear" are at best rather desultory farmers, and Chunky and Jim, possibly creations of James W. Wofford, seem to do little else but hunt, fish, and spin yarns. They are in general a shiftless bunch, not actually parasites, for all of them might lay claim to some vocation; but for the purposes of humorous literature they seem to exist in a world where food and drink are at every man's campfire or hearth, and where men have found a paradise of outdoor sports, a world where even physical pain has lost its sting and become the minion of comedy.

Important too is the fact that the influence of the tall-tale spinners is felt in the narrative technique of all frontier humor whether rogue tale or not, and that influence caused the transposition of the oral humor into
literary form. Obviously, to be convincing as a character the liar has to spin out his yarn in his own way, using his own language. And his language is that associated with the ring-tailed roarer of the frontier. It is oratorical, extravagant, and appropriately inappropriate in its figures, characterized by a flamboyant excess rather than a nicety of phrase. The other frontier comic characters, such ones as Sut Lovingood, did not borrow the impossible incident from the liar, but they did make use of this enrichment of the earthy talk of the pioneer. Furthermore, the tale teller, crude and unlettered as he was, seldom wrote his own story, and therefore he was of necessity introduced to the reader by a relatively polished author. This procedure established a framework within which the ludicrous tale of the backwoodsman was presented. The transference to Sut Lovingood is obvious. Commonly Harris, or George, as Sut calls him, meets his friend and the two exchange a few words which serve as an introduction to the yarn. Once introduced, Sut takes over and tells his own story, concluding by addressing George or other bystanders. The frame, then, serves the reader as a transitional step from the world of reality to the world of Sut's tale.

3 See Walter Blair, Native American Humor, pp. 70 ff. for a discussion of the effects of oral humor on frontier literature.
Occasionally the frontier Puck is presented in such a manner that the reader does not feel him as a character in the story. Thompson's story, "Boss Ankles," centering as it does on the character of Ankles, who is victim rather than prankster, does not even name the rogue or rogues responsible. Ankles, having fallen asleep enroute home from a sociable day at the grocery, awakes to find someone has stolen his bundle, shoes, and—worst of all—his jug. He retraces his steps to the store where he finds the assembled company apparently sympathetic, but in reality they are waiting an opportunity to abuse him. The chance comes when one of them hands Ankles a firecracker, explaining that it is a patent cigar lighter. From this point on, the melee becomes general, with the poor victim thinking someone is shooting at him and the others pretending to side with him as they throw firecrackers behind his back. Finally there is a great flash—the thief had not stolen a pocketful of gunpowder Ankles was taking home—and the fun is over, leaving the unfortunate victim burned almost to death.⁴ The pranksters, although they take up a collection the next day, have shown little more consideration for a human than Madison Tensas did for a mule. The motif of the story is recognizable—the rogue taking advantage of ignorance—but the comedy now deals

⁴ Major Jones' Chronicles, pp. 39-58.
with physical rather than mental discomfort. Ned Brace worries his victims almost out of their minds; these men burn theirs almost to death.

Besides stories of unidentified rogues, there are others in which the characters are not quite roguish enough to be grouped with the true frontier pranksters. Two such are Taliaferro's Johnson Snow and Sol Hanks. Johnson, an old pot-bellied drunkard, falls asleep in church one evening and on awaking thinks from the noise around him that he is in a fight. Before long he has driven everyone from the church by his threats, for he never actually fights with anyone. Sol Hanks, on the other hand, finds his temptation in church; for behind the door in Timothy Spencer's house where the meeting is held, he spies a barrel of apple brandy. To the next meeting he brings a quill which he uses to drink from the barrel when no one is looking. Before long he collapses on the floor, and the congregation, not realizing his trouble, believes the power of Grace has felled him and for quite a while they pray and sing around him, urging him to shout out his confession and get rid of the load of sin. Finally, Taliaferro concludes: "Sol got up, rubbed his eyes a little, stepped out, and went home, but he never shouted."

---

5 Fisher's River Scenes, pp. 28-49.
6 Ibid., pp. 206-211.
In addition to these anonymous and occasional rogues, there are many pranksters in frontier humor who, though only slightly presented, can be considered full-time operators. In "Doing a Sheriff," Burke tells of an old rascal named Uncle Josey, who has playfully ridden his horse into court. This innocent amusement so enrages the judge that he orders Sheriff Jess Runion to put the old man in jail. Surprisingly, he goes quietly out of court, but when the sheriff tries to put him in a cell he balks. It seems he is afraid of the dark and the possible dangers lurking in the unlighted cell terrify him. Runion, entering first to dispel the old man's fears, hears the door clang behind him and the key turn in the lock. Both of these actions identify Uncle Josey as a typical lower-class prankster, the entirely unmotivated nonsense of the former and the swift ruse, dependent on the rapid appraisal of circumstances, which characterizes the latter.

Once in a great while the lower-class joker engages in a prank more typical of the upper class, practicing a deception of wit. Tom Placide, on a boat going down to New Orleans where he hopes to find work as a comedian, meets an ignorant Hoosier who wants to persuade him to "go partners" in a gambling venture. While talking, the two notice a pine box designed as a case for a bass fiddle, and the Hoosier inquires what it is. Tom whispers that it is in reality the coffin of a woman and her two children
--the contents explaining its strange shape--being shipped by a doctor, who plans to dissect the bodies. The Hoosier persuaded, Tom lets the other passengers in on the joke, and all of them begin in an obvious manner to avoid the box. Shortly, the Hoosier, who can stand it no longer, complains to the captain of the smell, only to have the true contents of the casket shown to him.7 The joke is worthy of Ned Brace but hardly appropriate to the race of Sut Lovingood.

Almost the exact opposite of Tom Placide is Longstreet's Ransy Sniffle, who has no finesse, no sharpness of wit, and little imagination. Longstreet, in fact, was purposely depicting a one-sided character in Ransy, although the clay eater was well adapted to his forte. "There was nothing on this earth which delighted Ransy so much as a fight. He never seemed alive except when he was witnessing, fomenting, or talking about a fight."8 For Longstreet's purpose, Ransy served only to sow the seeds of dissention between Billy Stallings and Bob Durham, but he satisfies the requirements for a mischief-making imp. Even his physical description makes him seem elvish: "in his earlier days he had fed copiously upon red clay and

7 The Drama in Pokerville, pp. 197-200.
8 Georgia Scenes, p. 55.
blackberries. The diet had given to Ransy a complexion that a corpse would have disdained to own, and an abdominal rotundity that was quite unprepossessing. Long spells of the fever and ague, too, in Ransy's youth, had conspired with clay and blackberries to throw him quite out of the order of nature.  

For all his limited field of action, the worthless fight-spawner is an excellent example of one aspect of the frontier prankster.

Far more typical is young Hibbs, the hero of Madison Tensas's "A Tight Race Considerin'," who is an exemplar of the mischievous boy character made famous by Mark Twain's Tom Sawyer. Hibbs is a precocious youngster, given to visiting a jug he keeps hidden in the woods, but he has acquired at the time of the story a love of racing so strong that it colors his every thought. Here is a description of a dinner: "...when mam, makin' me religious, told me one night to say grace, I jes shut my eyes, looked pious, and yelled out, 'D--n it, go!' and in 'bout five minutes arter, came near kickin' dad's stumak off, under the table, thinkin' I was spurrin' my critter in a tight place." He decides to make a racehorse of his mother's mare "Colt" and one Saturday night he persuades the Negro Bill to help him race her against the preacher's mount,

---

9 Ibid., p. 54.
an old racehorse. Such amusement, forbidden though it is, is innocent enough, but in the old Southwest strange things happen. The horses also become enthusiastic about racing, and when it is time for church next day they are missing. "We found them cleer off in the field, tryin' to get in the pastur' to run the last night's race over, old Blaze, the reverlushumary mule, bein' along to act as judge." Then, on the way to church, the horses run away and before long Hibbs' mother and the preacher get the fever and begin to spur their mounts along. To lighten the load they both strip off as much clothing as modesty will allow. As a conclusion, Mrs. Hibbs is thrown through the church window when Colt stops abruptly and she lands completely nude among the congregation, her last garment having caught on a nail as she flew in. Obviously young Hibbs is not to blame for the accident, for at most he has only conditioned the horse to racing; but Sut Lovingood produced even more disastrous results by just as slight an action. The very presence of such a spirit, however, insured hilarious calamity to the backwoods citizens.

Once in a while the frontier joker made use of a mechanical aid to his prank, artificial snakes being perhaps the most common. But there are other devices, too,

---

11 Ibid., p. 50.
such as the simple "gimmick" used by Cabe Newham in "A Millerite Miracle." Cabe merely throws one end of a rope over a high limb at an outdoor meeting place of the Millerites. Just as the meeting is reaching the emotional climax, Cabe fastens the rope to the belt of a Negro named Sam, who is one of the most devout worshippers present. When Cabe begins to hoist, the assembled crowd is convinced that Sam is ascending into heaven, and one eager sister grabs him by his wooly hair so she may go, too. Unfortunately, just as the pair have ascended a few feet, the rope breaks and they are dropped unceremoniously on top of their comrades. The leader of the group, nursing a bloody nose produced by Sam's head, orders him home, crying "Leave, you cussed baboon! You are so ugly I know'd they wouldn't let you in."¹²

More frequently, the rascal has no time to prepare his prank in advance and thus is forced to rely on the material at hand; but sudden quirks of fortune often provide him an opportunity to demonstrate his quickness of wit. Daddy Biggs, typical of the class of frontiersmen who seem to do nothing but hunt, fish, and spin yarns, is provided with an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his adaptability in Hooper's story "Daddy Biggs' Scrape At

¹² W. T. Porter, ed., A Quarter Race in Kentucky (in Major Thorpe's Scenes in Arkansas), T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1858, pp. 60-63.
Cockerell's Bend." Biggs, like many of his kind, has certain ingrained prejudices, and he expresses them as a prologue to his tale. "D--n it, boys, it makes me mad to think how them Chatohospa fellows and the town folks do "trude on we roover people,..." he says.\(^{13}\)

It is in his attempt to discomfit these undesirables that Biggs has his big scrape. Swimming up to the camp of a group of them to steal their day's catch, the old man finds himself unable to escape, for his pants have caught on one of the hooks of their heavy trot lines. His attempts to get free awaken the campers, who hurry to the river thinking they have caught a huge catfish. Biggs, however, refuses to be pulled in, and one of them, able to see only a huge shape in the water, suggests that they gig the fish and catch it that way. "Gig the Devil!" roars Biggs, and the sleepy fishermen run, assuming they have old Nick himself on the line. One falls into the water, an accident which delays him until Biggs can scramble out and pick up the gig. Equipped with this makeshift pitchfork, Biggs decides to play his part to the end, accompanying the pronouncement that he has come to take the camper to hell with a jab in the poor fellow's posterior. As would be expected, the old hunter soon finds himself alone and in possession of the enemy's camp. He completes

\(^{13}\) *Simon Suggs' Adventures*, p. 178.
the show by throwing a keg of gunpowder on the fire, confident that the explosion will prevent anyone's returning before he can make his escape. It has been a successful night.

"Boys," he then added, "I got them feller's fish and a two-gallon jug o' sperrits, and I throwed their guns in the roover, besides givin' 'em the all-gortiest scare they ever had; and they aint been back since, which I hope they never will, for it's ouddacious the way them roover folks is 'posed upon."¹⁴

Jake Bagley, the prankster in Field's "The Drama in Pokerville," gets the opportunity to demonstrate three pranks; but in spite of this fact he is not as well-rounded as Daddy Biggs, for he is only a minor character in the tale of a love affair between an actor and a small-town girl. Bagley's first office is to persuade to cook for the "Great Small Affairs Dinner" to prepare an opposum instead of a pig for the banquet. Small as the offense may seem, it has amazing results, especially when some of the more finicky guests are told that they have partaken of the litter of an old sow which "eat a nigger baby with the small pox, that's all." His second appearance illustrates the same tendency to engage in nonsense that made Uncle Josey ride his horse into court. Coming upon Mr. Waters unconscious upon the floor of a deserted barroom, Bagley seizes upon the opportunity to play a prank. He splashes

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 183.
the prostrate man's head with red paint, whips out his pistol, and fires a shot. When the crowd comes surging in, there he stands proclaiming that he has blown Waters' brains out and will do the same for anyone who molests him. Fortunately no one shoots him before Doctor Slunk arrives and, having examined the supposed corpse, revives him with a bucket of water.

More functional in the plot is Bagley's third joke, a mock duel which he arranges between the doctor and Mr. Fitzgerald, the young actor, both suitors for the hand of Miss Fanny. The doctor knows that neither gun will contain a bullet, but he is supposed to pretend to be mortally wounded and thus frighten Fitzgerald into leaving town. The general outline of the scheme is, of course, common both to fiction and to historical record in the old Southwest. This time, however, the plot fails, for the duel takes place in a cow pasture and the doctor hesitates in choosing a spot to fall upon, thus giving himself away. 15 Jake Bagley, then, remains for the purpose of fiction little more than comic relief in a sentimental love tale. He shows the knavish mind of the frontier prankster, but his place in the story is unimportant.

As a whole, these miscellaneous pranksters of the old Southwest have certain traits in common. They are coarse

15 The Drama in Pokerville, p. 84.
in manner and speech, but delightfully eloquent in the absurdity of their tales. They tend, as do the upper-class jokers, to engage in mischief for its own sake, their pranks often verging on the ridiculous; but their field of action is in physical rather than mental comedy. The gentleman rogues are restricted by social convention to certain areas of operation, but the lower-class rascals are hindered, if at all, only by ill-enforced laws, frequently escaping the consequences of one action by the commission of further roguery. Furthermore, they have no material advancement as the end of their roguery, for Daddy Biggs was stealing fish rather to discomfort the city folk than to supply his own larder. They are, in a sense, Pucks of the backwoods, flitting from place to place and playing their pranks.

If the common pranksters are Pucks, Sut Lovingood is a Puck run wild on moonshine whiskey, for his stories are characterized by an extravagance of word and action that is appropriate only to him. Physically Sut is unusual; he is "a queer looking, long legged, short bodied, small headed, white haired, bug eyed, funny sort of genius." Mentally he is even more distinctive. He likes dancing, drinking, yarn-spinning, "raisin ove the devil pussoney, an' permiskusly discumfurtin the wimen very powerful, an' skeerin ove folks generly a heap."¹⁶ "Just as revealing

¹⁶ George W. Harris, Sut Lovingood. Yarns Spun
are his dislikes: Yankee peddlers, Yankee lawyers, Yankee scissor-grinders—any kind of Yankees, sheriffs, most preachers, learned men who use big words or flowing language, tavern keepers who serve bad food, and reformers. It is obvious then that Sut is devoted to enjoying himself in his own unconventional way and only dislikes those people who tend to take the joy out of his own life or the lives of others. Though he is a mischievous elf, he is a good spirit; for he plagues with his worst pranks those who according to his views deserve castigation.

Sut is a shrewd judge of character, including his own, and in his "Sermon, Touching Ye Catfishe Tavern" he sums himself up as well as anyone could. He considers that there are five important facts about him:

Fustly, that I haint got nara soul, nuffin but a whiskey proof gizzard, sorter like the wust half ove a par ove saddil bags. Seconly, that I se too durn'd a fool tu cum even under millitary lor. Thudly, that I hes the longes' par ove laigs ever hung tu eny cackus... Foufly, that I kin chamber more cork-screw, kill-devil whiskey, an' stay on aind than anything 'spection only a broad bottom'd cham. Fivety, an' lasly, kin git intu more durn'd misfortnit skeery scrapes than enybody, an' then run outen them faster, by golly, nor enybody.18

Quite naturally, the philosophical observations of

by a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool, Dick and Fitzgerald, New York, 1867, p. 48.

17 Native American Humor, p. 97.
18 Sut Lovingood's Yarns, p. 172.
such a rogue should be both Epicurean and earthy, and the expression of Sut’s tenets is certainly both. Consider his pronouncement of the station of humans in the cosmos:

Men were made a-purpos jis’ tu eat, drink, an’ fur stayin awake in the yearly part ove the nites: and wimen were made tu cook the vittels, mix the sperits, an’ help the men du the stayin awake. That’s all, an’ nuthin more, onless hits fur the wimen tu raise the devil atwix meals an’ knit socks atwix drams, an’ the men tu play short kerds, swap bosses wif fools, an’ fite fur exercise at odd spells.19

Sut also has interesting observations on the customs of his people, showing a shrewd perception and evaluation of mores: "Quiltins, managed in a morril an’ sensible way, truly am good things--good fur free drinkin’, good fur free eatin’, good fur free huggin’, good fur free dancin’, good fur free fitin’, an’ goodest ove all fur poperlatin a country fas’."20

Along with this homely philosophy, Sut includes much good advice for rogues. Elaborate planning, he says, is no good.

All pends, et las’ on what yu dus an’ how yu kerries yursef at the moment owe ackshun. Sar-cumstances turn about pow’ful fas’, an’ all yu kin du is tu think jis’ es they turn, an’ ef yu du this, I’m durn’d ef yu don’t git out sumhow.21

There are some circumstances, however, for which there

19 Ibid., p. 88.
20 Ibid., p. 139
21 Ibid., p. 67.
seems no relief, and Sut has as a last resort a time-tested remedy. "When I' se in trubbil, skeer ur tormint, I dus but wun thing, an' that's onresistabil, onekeeled, an' durn'd fas' runnin, an' I jis' keeps at hit till I gits cumfort." 22

It is worthy of note that Sut Lovingood suffers from no guilt complexes, no matter how severe the results of his escapades. Mrs. Yardley is trampled by a horse, Stilyards is almost killed, and Sut goes on his way confident that he is not at fault. "Pain hardly exists, save as something humorous; it has no reality. And conscience has no part in Sut's life...." 23 Always there is a scapegoat; the horse that bolts with Stilyards is the real cause of the ensuing devastation, and Sut ignores the fact that he had any hand in the matter at all.

Accompanying this lack of conscience is a lack of sympathy for anything, man or beast. When Daddy Lovingood, taking the horse's place at the plow, is stung by yellow jackets, Sut is not even sorry for him. As a matter of fact, he follows the old man to the creek, still pretending his father is a horse and ignoring his obvious suffering: "Sez I, 'Dad, ef yu's dun washin' yersef, an' he

22 Ibid., p. 71.

drunk enuff, less go back tu our plowin, hit will soon be pow'ful hot.\textsuperscript{24} And he comments, not unjustly, at the beginning of another tale, "I'se a durnder fool nor any-body outside a Assalum, ur Kongriss, 'septin ove my own dad, fur he actid hoss, an' I haint tried that yet."\textsuperscript{25} As a matter of fact, there seems to be little love, in the accepted sense, between any of the Lovingood family; for Mrs. Lovingood takes advantage of the fact that her husband, teaching the dog to fight by dressing in a bull's hide, is unable to retaliate because his pupil has him by the nose to beat him with a bean pole. Sut's lack of sympathy, of course, extends beyond the members of his family. His friend Hen Bailey drinks turpentine by mistake and then swallows a live lizard which has hidden in the handle of the water gourd to which he races for relief. Sut, afraid his companion is dying, asks for the fifty cents Hen owes him. Also, he attempts a cure by the very illogical method of tying a mole inside Hen's trousers. Actually, if there were sympathy for the victim there would be no comedy, and no one knows this better than Sut, who enjoys telling of his own discomfort as much as anyone else's.

Frequently, Sut's pranks are spur-of-the-moment affairs, and he has no time to plan, seizing whatever

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 26.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 30.
\end{footnotes}
opportunities present themselves. At Bart Davis' dance, for example, Sut realizes that an itinerant preacher who is to spend the night bodes no good for the festivities. The preacher comments that Bart is "very hospitable," and Sut sees a chance to dispose of the unwanted guest when Bart takes him outside to inquire the meaning of the term. Bart, assured by his friend that the preacher has called him a "pitiful hoss," goes in and starts a fight with the visitor, who by now has stopped the music and launched into a sermon. Soon a small riot is in progress, or, as Sut puts it, "the fitin now got tu be general on mos' parts ove the field...." A fight at a mountain dance is no unusual occurrence, however, and Mrs. Davis, a noncombatant, ignores the fight, even though her son is hurt. "Peg boun up the boy name Obed's wounds, bruises, an' petrifyin sores, an' then went on wif supper cookin, like all were quiet on the Pertomack." 26

Engaged in a fight, Sut sets fire to a box of matches and sticks it in his opponent's pocket, which happens to be full of gunpowder—coincidence is always on Sut's side. When the flaming fellow races to the river and leaps in, Sut, who has followed, demonstrates the fantastic ability of his inspired imagination:

I seed a lot of fellers a fishin onder the bank,

26 Ibid., pp. 190-191.
so I thought I'd help him on a leetle faster, an' I hollered, "ketch the murderer, five hundred dollars and a big hoss reward. He's kill'd an 'oman an' nine children, an' I speck a dog, an' like tu whipped another plum tu deth!" 

Usually, however, there are props at hand, and Sut's agile mind enables him to make full use of them. In "Sicily Burns' Wedding," the bull, Old Sock, is eating from a basket and it is an easy task to slip the handle over the bull's horns. Sut knows well that he will back in an effort to get free, although he cannot actually foresee the consequences that result when the bull, maddened by bees from a hive he has overturned, backs through the house. He finds a spooky horse at "Mrs. Yardley's Quiltin'" and ties the line on which the finished quilts hang to the horse's saddle, being careful to insert a hoe handle in the rope so the quilts will not fall off. One good whack with a fence paling and another riotous episode has begun.

In "The Widow McCloud's Mare" Sut's improvisation reaches its crudest level, but Sut feels justified for Stilyards has insulted him by offering a gill of whiskey for help in getting the Widow's property to town. Sut begins by mounting the shyster on the widow's skittery mare, strapping her clock to his back and tying her hound dog to the mare's neck. This time no fence paling is necessary. "The sharp pint ove Stilyards' tailbone, an' the

27 Ibid., p. 155.
clock laigs wer a makin lively surgistshins tu a devil intu her as big es a yearlin. The end of the ensuing wild ride finds all sorts of props around, for the dog has been dismembered and the mare has run over an old couple carrying honey and meal home. What is more, Sut finds Stilyards unconscious. "I now tuck the meal bag, put in the remnant ov the dorg, an' sich ov the honey as I cud scoop up, an' draw'd hit over Stilyards's head, tied hit tite roun his naik, in hopes it mout help fetch him tu sooner...." Woe be to him who invites the ire of this mountain sprite!

In the three tales which make up the Wat Mastin's story—"Rare Ripe Garden Seed," "Contempt of Court," and "Trapping a Sheriff"—Sut has time to help plan a revenge. In the first story, Wat is cuckolded by Sheriff Dolpin, the only real evidence of the fact being a note from him to Mary Mastin which Sut finds. The second story presents Wirt Staples, Wat's cousin, who has just changed "doggeries" and finds the new liquor much more powerful than his accustomed brand. He runs wild, screaming insults in the courthouse window at the judge and generally disturbing the peace. He escapes from the sheriff, who comes to

28 Ibid., p. 40.
29 Ibid., p. 46.
30 Ibid., pp. 227-276.
arrest him, by remarking that he knows certain facts his
cousin Wat would like to find out; but before he leaves
he beats Doltin up badly, using a ham of venison as a
weapon. Sut appears only incidentally in this story, with
an anecdote, entirely unrelated to the major theme, of
how he kicked a dandy, only to find that this fop was no
sissy and "a pow'ful quick mosshun'd man wif shootin' irons."

In the final story, Sut becomes directly involved
when Doltin, in bed from his beating, sends for him and
offers ten dollars for the note. Sut refuses and Doltin
makes the mistake of threatening to arrest him if he
does not comply. The affair must now come to a climax and
Sut, Wat, Wirt, and Wirt's wife Susan conceive a plan to
lure Doltin into a trap, forging a note from Mary Kastin
by way of bait. The clandestine meeting is a bit of
comedy suitable for the Restoration stage. Doltin meets
Susan Staples, disguised as Mary, is confronted by Wat and
Wirt in turn, and finds himself accused of offering Susan
a shawl to encourage further acquaintance. Just as he is
wriggling out of the predicament, Sut appears with the
note. At this point the comedy descends to a physical
level. The three men strip Doltin to his shirt and tie a
half bushel of turpentine-soaked tow to him. Sut adds a
pair of tomcats fastened to his shirt with fishhooks and
offers some genial advice as they set fire to the tow:
"Bulge squar fur the briars, they won't feller in thar."
The prank, however, violent as it is, has the desired
effect; for Sut comments: "George, them ar tom-cats mus' a scratched intu his conshuns afore they died, fur he jined church jes' es soon [as] he got abil tu walk thar." 31

In spite of his precaution against making plans for a prank, Sut likes to make elaborate preparations where possible. Even his version of the artificial snake trick is more fantastic than the conventional one, for he uses a piece of gut nine feet long and adds a large black thorn and a pair of fancy rowelled spurs to convince his sleeping victim that he has been bitten. For the simple task of harassing a lecturer, Sut and his friends are not content to have Bake Boyd, hired as a prompter, read "in sum furrin tung, sortor like Cherokee, wif a sprinkil ove Irish." They must also have a cannon loaded with clay and Joe Jackson in the loft over the speaker's head "a holden ontu a half barril full ove warter outen a puddle, whar a misfortinat dead sow hed been floatin fur ten days." 32

Sut's most extravagant use of mechanical aids to a prank occurs in "Old Skissum's Middle Boy" when Sut undertakes to cure the boy of his laziness. The family leaves for a night meeting and Sut is alone with the boy, who is asleep in a chair. Sut begins by lashing the victim to his chair, blackening his face with charcoal, fastening

31 Ibid., p. 274.
32 Ibid., p. 63.
hand vises to his ears, and tying a gridiron to one ankle and a pair of tongs to the other. As if this were not enough he pours red pepper down the boy's back, puts a pint of June bugs down his shirt, and attaches a basketful of firecrackers to his hair, wrists, and the chair. To top the list he puts a rat down the sleeper's trousers with its tail firmly tied to his suspender button. When the rat begins to eat his way out—"he wer a workin towards the back-bone"—Sut lights the firecrackers and sits back to watch the fun. Compared with such a wildly devilish prank Puck's trick of putting the ass's head on Bottom seems but the product of an inferior imagination. Sut's joke does not achieve its purpose, however, for by the time things quiet down—the family has come home and thinking the unrecognizable boy an intruder, turned the affair into a free-for-all—the middle Skissum has made a pillow of the remains of his chair and gone to sleep again.

Sut Lovingood, like other rogues, European and American, had his adventures with the clergy, but his bear no resemblance to the parasitic operations of Lazarillo or the practiced deceit of Simon Suggs. Sut sees only an opportunity for revenge of for a joke; but there is no desire for gain. Sut's affair with Parson Bullen begins when Bullen finds Sut "conversin' wif a frien' ove mine,

33 Ibid., pp. 66-74.
into the buckil berry thicket..." and larrups him with a stick until he promises to be converted at the next meeting. Furthermore, the parson arouses Sut's ire by telling the girl's parents after he has promised he will not. Sut attends the meeting and sits on the mourner's bench directly under the pulpit; then Bullen begins his sermon and coincidentally provides Sut with an appropriate buildup—"an' arter a while he got on tu the idear ove Hell-sarpints an' he dwelt on it sum. " Just at this point Sut opens his bag and lets seven or eight "pot-boiled lizards" run up the preacher's leg. In his attempts to get rid of his unwelcome visitors the worthy parson disrobes, causing no small consternation among the congregation.34

The prank at the Negro night meeting requires a little more preparation. Inside the church Sut conceals several beef bladders full of "carburated hydrogen" and outside in the bay where the conversion will take place "about a dozen ho'nets nestes, big sous wuns, an' stopped 'em up full ove disapinted, bewildered, vengeful, savidge, on-circumsized ball ho'nets, sharpm in thar stings rody...."35 When the Negro preacher begins to elaborate on his text—"Yu shall smell sweet-smellin varbe, an' eat honey vittils dar, fur thare no stink, nur bitter, whar you'z cwine, in

34 Ibid., pp. 48-57.
35 Ibid., p. 158.
Genevan."—Sut pulls his cork and proves to the congregation that they are not in "Genevan." The meeting moves outside with alacrity where the congregation settles in the hay. Once again the preacher's text is Sut's cue:

"Thar shall be weepin an' railin an' chompin ove teef, bad, an' then [sic] wif no teef, shall smash thar rums to­gether like ontu wolf traps." Sut comments afterward:

"Jis' pullin a string wer my hole skeer in all that cum­bustikashun, hurtin an' trubbil; yet as usual every body sez I'se tu blame fur the hole ove hit."38

The epitome of Sut's disrespect is "Frustrating a Funeral," which is also one of his most elaborate pranks. Old Hunnicutt's Negro Caesar has died from drinking and Hunnicutt has put him in a coffin with a hinged lid so that the other slaves can view Seize's face while he lectures on temperance. The night before the funeral, as the Negroes are holding the traditional wake, Sut, who has been hired by a doctor to steal the corpse, decides that it will be easier to steal it now than to dig it up later. When he sneaks into the room where the coffin is, he finds that an old Negro named Major, drunk from the refreshments in the other room, has gone to sleep on the bed. Sut

36 Ibid., p. 161.
37 Ibid., p. 165.
38 Ibid., p. 171.
begins operations by exchanging Maje for Seize, painting Maje's face and fastening a bull's horns on his head.

"Durn my lungs ef I didn't cum ni ontu takin a runnin skeer myself...." Sut comments. He stands Seize's body up in a corner with a pitchfork in its hand, paints the face with lightning bug ends, pins a live snake to its upper lip, and inserts a live frog in its mouth, both liberally smeared with lightning bugs. The result is a masterpiece. "Now, rite thar boys, in that corner, stood the dolefullest skeer makin mersheen, mortal man ever seed outen a ghost camp."^{39}

When the preacher enters, he sees Maje, then turning to run sees Seize's corpse, from behind which Sut calls in a mournful voice that he has come to take the preacher to hell. The terrified man faints, but as Sut puts it, "He soon cum to a-runnin." Sut now carries the corpse out to the corncrib where the doctor is to get it, but Hunnicutt, coming to investigate the noise made by the preacher crossing his corn patch, sees it and runs away, too, dropping his shot gun, which Sut fires after him. Next, Sut moves the corpse to the doctor's room, confident that the noise of the shot has frightened him away. The doctor should learn his lesson also, so Sut hides under the bed against which the corpse leans and when the young man

^{39}Ibid., p. 213.
enters announces that he is the devil come to get the doctor. The doctor excuses himself, saying that he will return as soon as he gets his pillbox, but "In thuty-one days from that date, he wer tendin a grist-mill in California." 40

By the time Sut returns to the wake, it is morning and he tells the mourners to get Seize into the ground in a hurry, for the Devil is around, having carried off Maje and Hunnicutt already. The Negroes comply, but the jolting of the casket as the procession moves along wakes Maje, who struggles to get out of the coffin, crying "Whoosh! dis am de debil!" When the others see his horned head and painted face they drop the casket and flee; then Maje, seeing that he is in front of Wright's doggery, enters and frightens Wright away, concluding the farce by becoming terrified of his own reflection in the mirror.

Stripping all of Sut's pranks to a bare outline pares away the comedy, leaving only a framework of nonsensical action which often is so crude as to be revolting. Walter Blair has commented on this fact:

Incidentally, most of the happenings about which Sut tells never could be amusing unless they were removed by several steps from reality.... His is a world in which the religious life of the Smoky Mountains is grotesquely warped until all its comedy is emphasized, a cosmos wherein the squalor in which the Lovingoods live--squalor without

---

40 Ibid., p. 217.
alleviation, without shame—somehow becomes very jolly. It is a world in which the crowds at a campmeeting, a frolic, or a quarter race are revealed in postures and garbs as amusing as those of the early and lively figures that throng a canvas by Peter Breughel.41

In truth, Sut has created a world of his own in which the coarse and grotesque are made funny; but he alone is not responsible for the conception of his universe. Many of his compatriots, the Pucks of the frontier, also inhabit the fringes of this world, and in their stories they invite the reader to drop for a moment the squeamishness and literal meaning of the world of reality, to step for a moment into the comic world of the backwoods where even pain is but a subject for laughter.

These lower-class jokers of the frontier bear many resemblances to the conventional rogue, but the differences between the two are even more important than the similarity. The frontiersmen do not attempt to make a living by their roggeries, for the world they seem to inhabit is one where poverty has no meaning. They play their pranks out of sheer love of mischief, asking no reward but the pleasure of witnessing the discomfort that results. Once in a while the rogues of Europe engage in profitless pranks, but the real predecessors of these Pucks of the old Southwest seem to be the legions of elves and

41 Native American Humor, p. 99.
and fairies that appear in the folklore of Europe.

Perhaps there is a reason for this similarity between the race of Sut Lovingood and the little people of Europe. The frontier folk, though superstitious in many ways, had no elves or goblins, no supernatural imps in their myths; for the fairies of Europe were not transplanted and naturalized and corresponding demigods of the Indians lacked prestige, belonging as they did to the folklore of what the pioneer considered an inferior race. Perhaps Sut Lovingood and his kind fill the gap in American mythology left by the absence of fairies. They do, in truth, belong to folklore, being creations of the popular mind. As a matter of fact, the only unusual thing about this American folklore is that it is comic. Perhaps lacking high seriousness the mythology of the frontier Puck is doomed to remain a minor mythology. Certainly as an expression of the common man and his ideals, it is genuine. Furthermore, the prankish attitude of Sut, Ransy Sniffle, and the others marks them at once as rogues. They are not picaros in the European sense, for their anecdotal biographies do not show the hero making his way through life at the expense of society, but in the broader outline these crude practical jokers are an undeniable subclass of the genus rogue.

---

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

Simon Suggs, Sut Lovingood, Ned Brace—these are the prime examples of the rogue on the American frontier, and each of them typifies a species of the American rogue: the true picaro, the frontier Puck, and the gentleman prankster. Although the gentleman prankster seems closely related to the traditions of Addisonian humor in which many nineteenth-century authors were educated, there is little evidence of the direct influence of any literary tradition on the rogue of the other two categories, and the resemblance of the gentleman to the eighteenth-century wit is general rather than specific. The origins for these three types of rogues, then, must be sought in the minds of the society that produced them. In addition, it is impossible to estimate just how much the folk tradition of Western Europe determined the folk tradition of the American frontiersman, but some influence cannot be denied. The motifs of American humor are age-old motifs reproduced and developed to fit the contemporary setting of the frontier. And yet, in spite of the basic resemblances, it is impossible to decide exactly what portions of this American
folklore are to be regarded as inherited from Europe and what portions are a spontaneous outgrowth of the folk mind. Since, therefore, the influence of European literary and folk traditions remains at best nebulous, it is necessary to seek elsewhere the source of the American rogue. And a source is not difficult to find, for all the elements necessary to producing a distinctive rogue can be found in the frontier of a century ago.

The day of the old Southwest was a turbulent day, brawling, crude, primitive; and the literature that mirrored that day, the frontier humor, partook of the same qualities. The muddy boots of Jackson's followers tramping through the White House shocked the sensibilities of Eastern folk; these were men who belonged in the cane-brakes, around campfires, and in log cabins, not in the drawing rooms of polite society. Sut Lovingood's Yarns and Simon Suggs' Adventures, too, were out of place in the parlor, hardly suitable companions for Ivanhoe and Godey's Lady's Book. It must be remembered, however, that Simon and Sut themselves were not polite society, representing as they did the very bottom of the social strata of the old South. And the fact that frontier humor was far more concerned with the lower class than with the upper gives to the frontier hero a basic resemblance to the rogue of Europe, for the rogue literature of Europe dealt with the lower orders of society, with rootless vagabonds and
beggars, thieves and picaros, who were just as much out of place in the drawing room as the frontiersman. Osten­sibly, the picaro of Europe has little in common with the Piney Woods settler, but the distinctions are at best superficial, applying to garb and social setting rather than psychological make-up. It is attitudes, after all, not clothes or even specific methods of roguery, that define the rogue; and the wandering settlers of the old Southwest were possessed by the drive to succeed, the ob­ligation to get rich with as little effort as possible, which has always characterized the rogue.

Furthermore, even among the upper classes can be found the basic ingredients of the rogue tale. The lawyers gathered wherever court was held, indulged in horseplay and retold the comic anecdotes of their profession, which often as not detailed the triumph of wit over law and order, a primary motif of the picaresque tale. What is more, when these lawyers wrote their stories—and they are responsible for a large portion of frontier humor—they recorded as comic presentations of themselves such true rogues as the super liar Ovid Bolus and the unscrupu­lous Simon Suggs, Jr. Such was the exuberance of the day that even the preachers occasionally engaged in pranks. Such was the drive for material success that an honest planter greased the corn he offered to traveller’s horses in order to save a few cents. Such was the freedom of
action that Gideon Lincecum could change professions from sawmill operator to physician without bothering to undergo formal medical training.

George E. Woodberry has said of the humor of the frontier, "It was as if all the world had gone on a picaresque journey...." And in truth it was, for the restlessness that drove some men to the frontier seemed also to keep them from putting down roots, to wash them ever westward on the crest of the tide that was making a nation. This peregrination was not restricted to one class or group, for Gideon Lincecum, widely known as a physician and scientist, wandered further than Davy Crockett, the footloose hunter, exhibiting a more protean change of occupation. It was a day of movement and of change, when the whole population was drifting from east to west, seeking new land and new opportunity; and the unsettled heroes of frontier fiction but reflect the character of the people.

Furthermore, the fluidity of the frontier made it ideal for the flowering of roguery, for the picaro could change his locale frequently, seeking new fields of endeavor. When David Hines or Ovid Bolus had exhausted the possibilities for swindling in one area, they could move on, confident that they could escape detection among the many Davy Crocketts and Gideon Lincecums who symbolized the democratic quest for opportunity.

Such then was the old Southwest, a place appropriate
to the engendering of Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood, and emphasizing the roguish tendencies in all men, whether they existed in fact or fiction. There was a great incentive to success coupled with a great opportunity for wealth; there was only a minimum of law enforcement and a maximum opportunity for escape from punishment. These advantages, together with the almost primitive zeal for living typical of the frontier residents, produced the river boatmen, the ring-tailed roarer, and the rogue. But the day of the old Southwest could not last, was going even as Longstreet, Baldwin, and the others recorded it. By the time of the Civil War the region was settled, law and order had become effective, and the old Southwest had become a part of the South. The Southwest, the land of adventure, had moved onward, reaching for the Pacific Ocean.

When the old Southwest ceased to exist as a frontier, the vitality of its literature declined and the earthiness of frontier humor was suppressed by the propriety of the East. There was still comedy in the uneducated man, still literary interest in the settler of isolated backwoods regions; but no longer were these two blended so well as they had been in frontier humor. Walter Blair has observed of this circumstance: "In a sense...American humor split after the Civil War, with the professional funny men continuing the tradition of amusing expression, and another
group, the local color writers, continuing the tradition of local portrayal."¹ To see what the comedy had become, one has but to compare the rich expression of Sut Lovin-good with the contrived effects of Petroleum Nasby's speech. To realize the effects of the local colorists' approach to sectional materials, which was characterized by a nostalgic sentimentalism, one has but to compare Mary Murfree's "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" with Harris's "Bart Davis's Dance." The language of the area has been distorted by literary comedy until it is little more than a burlesque of speech. The rugged vitality of the mountaineer has been sapped by the infusion of a literary conception which approximates the romantic idea of the noble savage.

Nevertheless, both literary comedy and local color are a direct outgrowth of frontier humor, retaining identifying traces of the older literature. The literary comedians used the familiar devices of mixed metaphor, anti-climax, the incongruous catalog, and others they had learned from the frontier. Furthermore, they focused on the lower classes, sensing the humor inherent in the shrewd but uneducated man. There were even traces of rogucry in the new comedy. Artemus Ward, perhaps the most

¹ Native American Humor, p. 126.
famous of the literary comedians, was ostensibly a wandering showman whose philosophy included the rougish proposition: "You scratch my back & I'll scratch your back." But the focus was on language not character, and Ward the rogue is partially lost in the straining to produce comedy from his burlesque of uneducated speech. The same is true of the characters of literary comedy in general: they tended to lose their individuality and certainly their sectional quality, becoming variations of a generalized type of uneducated American, who served rather to comment on contemporary life than to reflect accurately any segment of it.

The local colorists, on the other hand, had aims remarkably like those expressed by such recorders of the frontier as Longstreet and Baldwin, for they desired to reproduce accurately the manners and customs of a particular section of America, most often an isolated rural area. In New England, local color portrayal followed the tradition of Down East humor; in the South and West it followed the humor of the frontier. It is only too obvious that something was added to the methods of humorous portrayal, notably the methods of such writers as Irving and Dickens. The debt of Bret Harte to Dickens, for example, is apparent to the reader. And yet, as Walter Blair suggests, "It was significant...that Harte himself, so far as he was conscious of an art shaping his art, was able
to point only to American humor." In addition, many of the characters created by the local colorists were basically rogues; Harte's gamblers, miners, and ne'er-do-wells reflect the rogues of the old Southwest. But here again the change in approach to the materials produces a change in the characters, for Harte's rogues are vitiated by the sentimental propensities of the author.

At least one author, however, continued to create comedy and even rogues in the likeness of frontier humor, for though the crudeness of the frontier is largely removed from the works of Mark Twain, the basic influence of its literature is beyond question, as studies by Minnie Brashear, Bernard DeVoto, and Gladys Bellamy have sufficiently proved. Mark Twain was born in the year 1835, the same year that Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* introduced to America the comedy of the old Southwest; and he grew up in Missouri, learning the legends and tales at an early age. Some of them he doubtless heard first in oral form; others he must have read or even set in type in his newspaper apprenticeship. As he travelled westward, he but followed the footsteps of frontier humor, living with its traditions until he had gained considerable reputation as a writer. So complete was the assimilation of frontier materials that Twain once recounted a version of Davy

---

Crockett's coonskin story as an autobiographical experience, and the echoes of frontier humor are so frequent in his works that F. O. Matthiessen, commenting on the Crockett Almanacs, thought it worthwhile to observe that "their jokes and stories show how much that we have connected with Mark Twain really belonged not to any one man but to the frontier." Furthermore, not only the materials but also the methods of the older humor are readily apparent. And Walter Blair says of Mark Twain's technique: "The picaresque method—the method with emphasis upon anecdotal narrative—developed in Southwestern humor was the art which he could best appreciate and employ."

The rogue elements in the writings of Mark Twain are so numerous as to merit separate study, but some of Twain's characters come to mind immediately when the word rogue is mentioned. Colonel Sellers of The Gilded Age is a reincarnation of the frontier speculator, with his fluid talk and grandiose plans, although unlike the conventional rogue he is weaker in execution than in vision. Even the Honorable Patrice Oreille, the wealthy "Frenchman," from Cork who furnished nails at three thousand dollars a keg for the building of the courthouse, seems to have borrowed some of his character from the frontier rather than the

---

3 The American Renaissance, p. 638.
4 Native American Humor, p. 158.
East. Tom Sawyer, too, is an excellent example of the young rogue in Mark Twain's writings. Tom belongs unquestionably to the category of the frontier Puck, and is outstanding as an example of the extravagant planner. The kinship between Tom and Sut Lovingood, however, illustrates well what was happening to the frontier character. Tom is far less violent than Sut and less crude; he has had his face washed and his spirit subdued until he is suitable for the drawing room.

In the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain made his closest approach to rogue literature as such. In its bare outline, the story is obviously picaresque: a young boy runs away from home in the company of an escaped slave, and the two travel down the Mississippi, living off whatever the land and their wits provide. Though Huck and Jim are hardly to be classed with the typical picaro who cheats and steals his way through life, the Duke and the Dauphin, who join them on the raft, are as arrant sharpers as any in frontier literature. Furthermore, these two rogues owe their existence to the frontier rather than to European tradition, as their escapades clearly show. The episode in which they take advantage of a camp meeting is quite similar to Hooper's portrayal of Simon Suggs in similar circumstances, and if not based on the earlier scene at least has a common origin with it. The "Royal Nonesuch," too, in which the pair beguile their
audience with a false theatrical performance, is in the tradition which created the "Guyasticus."^5

With the exception of the works of Mark Twain, then, the rogue of the old Southwest had disappeared by the 1870's, at least temporarily from American literature. Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood were left behind, highly out of place in a nation that was becoming increasingly industrialized. As population shifted into the big cities and industrial areas, the old myths of the backwoods were no longer a legitimate expression of the folk; a new folk tradition, a new humor, and a new type of rogue were needed and they were soon found. Actually there had been no dearth of rogue literature in the East since the Civil War. Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy*, published in 1870, anticipated both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* in its presentation of the mischievous youth. Julian Hawthorne also explored the field of roguery in his *Confessions of a Convict*, and there were many others who followed him with the examination of the criminal mind. Most significant, however, is E. W. Hornung's *Raffles*, which definitely turned the attention of the writers of rogue fiction to a new character, the polished thief preying only upon the wealthy, who was to have an

---

^5 Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn and the two vagabonds are discussed in Chandler's *The Literature of Robbery*. 
even greater attraction for the popular mind than the frontier rogue. Thus it was that the rogue changed his character from backwoodsman to sophisticate, keeping pace with the evolution of American society.

There were, of course, some vestigial remains of the American rogue, for he was hard to eradicate from frontier literature. O. Henry's *The Gentle Grafter* presents in Jeff Peters and his friend Andy Tucker a pair of rascals who in language and manner seem to reflect a great deal of the frontier tradition. The two operate in the South, Southwest, and Mexico, an area that compared in its ruggedness and vitality with the old Southwest. Also, these vagabonds engage in much the same sort of sharping that the frontiersmen did; they masquerade as medicine men, sell interest in mines they do not own, and work the thimble-rig game. The language of their stories smacks of the talk of Simon and Sut; among the malapropisms so widely used by the literary comedians, Jeff and Andy make generous use of comic figures of speech, incongruous catalogs, and a great deal of anti-climax. The figures of speech are no longer closely related to the soil—a hotel is "built like something between a roof-garden and a sectional bookcase"—but they follow the frontier pattern for comedy. The catalogs remain much the same—Andy's "Great Cupid Combination" package consists of "a Chilean diamond engagement ring, a wedding ring, a potato-masher,
a bottle of soothing syrup and Dorothy Vernon—all for fifty cents."⁶

In addition to the traces of the frontier rogues in such writers as Mark Twain and O. Henry, there was around the turn of the century at least a residue of interest in the Southern poor-white from which class the majority of rogues had come. The poor-white had not improved his lot since the war, and his ranks had been swelled by numerous farmers, once fairly well-to-do, who had sunk under the crop lien and credit farming system which dominated the South. These people, hamstrung by a self-perpetuating poverty plus a chronic mental and physical malnutrition, exhibited characteristics of sloth and degeneracy far beyond those William Byrd attributed to his lubberlanders. And these people were not a small isolated group, but a considerable portion of the rural population of the entire South. Writers of American fiction, led by Ellen Glasgow, turned their attention to the poor farmer; and by the late 1920's and early 1930's there was a steady stream of literature concerning the various aspects of his plight. But the new approach to the rural Southerner, centering as it did on his economic and moral disease, treated him as a tragic rather than a comic figure.

In spite of the obviously different approach to the materials, however, there is a basic similarity between this writing and the humor of the old Southwest. Shields McIlwaine comments:

The significant fact about this vogue of the thirties is that it marks the introduction of the naturalistic conception of the poor-white. Yet, like all literary departures it was not unanticipated. For example, in frankness of description, the old South humor, the Abolitionist fiction, and the stories of Alice French in the late nineteenth century pointed toward the complete license of William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell.7

As a matter of fact, the humor of the frontier is one of the shaping influences on American realism and naturalism. While most American literature was observing a Victorian propriety in its choice of subject and its literary method, the fiction of the old Southwest was attempting a realistic portrayal of life and times, so realistic, in fact, that several of the authors were embarrassed by what they had written. The language of these tales was that of rough, uneducated folk, and the realistic profanity of the frontier humor was enough to disqualify it as parlor literature. The subject matter of the frontier, too, was often too realistic for polite literature, for the frank treatment of sex often found seems to belong rather to the

7 Shields McIlwaine, The Southern Poor White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 1936, p. 174.
present than to the nineteenth century. The three yarns of Sut Lovingood about Wat Mastin and Sheriff Doltin are concerned primarily with bastardy, infidelity, and a husband's revenge. Surprising, too, is the fact that neither Harris nor his characters attach any moral stigma either to Mary Mastin or the sheriff, content to deal with the event in a purely objective manner.

This realistic attitude of the frontier humorists was transmitted to the modern writers of realism, although frequently it passed first through the hands of the local colorists, who were trying for an accurate portrayal of many of the aspect of American life. An obvious chain of progress is that which links Hamlin Garland to frontier humor through the medium of Edward Eggleston's writing. Walter Blair has observed that while Bret Harte openly avowed his debt to an earlier humor, "No such specific acknowledgement of a relationship to American humor is made by Edward Eggleston; but the link between his writings and earlier comic writings is, if anything, clearer than the relationship in Harte." 8 Much of his subject matter--corn shuckings, frolics, and electioneering trips--his literary method, which exploited the crudities of Western life for a sophisticated audience, and a good many actual

characters and incidents comprise his debt to the older tradition. The step from Eggleston to Garland is but a short one, for the realism of the two is much the same. Garland has only added his pessimistic point of view. It is the added point of view, however, which gives Garland's studies of the Middle-Western farmer so strong a resemblance to the later studies of the Southern poor-white, which showed the share-cropper as a tragic rather than comic figure. It is, then, quite demonstrable, at least in specific cases, that the older literature of the frontier, with its frank treatment of the unpleasant aspects of life actually paved the way for realistic writing in America, especially for that fiction concerned with backwoods rural folk.

There is, however, another manner in which frontier humor has possibly influenced that segment of American realism which deals with the Southern poor-white. There was, during the decade of greatest literary concern for the South, a sharp increase in interest in Southern folk tradition, and this interest found expression in the fiction of the day. Arthur Palmer Hudson has commented on one aspect of this expression: "A study of the use of folksong in fiction descriptive of the Southern scene shows that between 1923 and 1932 thirty one writers (among them James Boyd, DuBose Heyward, Elizabeth Nadox Roberts, Thomas Wolfe) utilized over two hundred folksongs in more
than two score novels and short stories."⁹ Quite ob-
viously the folksongs were not the only portion of South-
ern folklore to catch the eye of the novelists, for they
simply reflect what must have been a general interest in
the traditions of the area, growing out of a genuine in-
terest in the people. Frontier humor had been an essen-
tial element of the folk tradition, expressing as it did
the ideals of the people. Furthermore, although much of
the humor was recorded in literature—more humor than any
other form of folklore, perhaps—the humorous tradition
did not petrify and die out on the level of oral trans-
mision. Even today the visitor to isolated districts in
the South, Sut Lovingood's own Smoky Mountains, for ex-
ample, will find the tall tale an important ingredient of
the hunt or the fishing trip. And the materials have
changed little in a century, for there are still big bears,
still comic tales of suffering, still crude practical
jokes in those areas where civilization has not completely
destroyed the primitive splendor of the backwoods.

But if the humorous tradition influenced the modern
realistic portrayal of the South, where then is the comedy,
where the rogues that were a part of that tradition? The
answer is clear to anyone who knows this new literature

⁹ Arthur Palmer Hudson, "Folklore," Literary His-
tory of the United States, ed. Robert E. Spiller, et al.,
of the South. Crude physical comedy and roguish characters do appear as an important ingredient of the fiction of the poor-white. Even such a writer as Paul Green, who during the thirties was primarily concerned with sociological problems of poor-whites and Negroes, has drawn the rogue on occasion. As a matter of fact, Green's *The Laughing Pioneer*, written in 1932, is the story of Danny Lawton, a clear-cut rogue, "who," Shields McIlwaine observes, "marks the re-emergence of the picaresque poor-white, absent from fiction since Simon Suggs wandered Alabama."¹⁰ Much more obvious is the influence of frontier humor on Erskine Caldwell and William Faulkner, the two writers who have gained the most fame for their literary exploitation of the rural South. Strangely enough, both of them accentuate the aspects of degradation and degeneration to such an extreme that they and their followers have earned such apppellations as the "School of Cruelty" and the "Southern Gothic School." And yet despite the tragic overtones of violence, insanity, and perversion, the writings of these two are remarkably close to the older literature, which was exclusively comic.

It is impossible to state the extent to which Erskine Caldwell is aware of the literature of the old Southwest; perhaps he knows none of it. His approach to the Southern

¹⁰ The Southern Poor White, p. 212.
poor-white was originally through the sociological problems evoked by poverty and degeneracy, and should therefore represent a contemporary rather than a historical appraisal. It may be, then, that he has found the basis for his humor in the people. Regardless of his source, elements of frontier humor and roguery do appear in his books. Jeter Lester and TyTy Walden are hardly to be considered rogues although they both share the picaro's disregard for person and property, but such characters as Sheriff Jeff McCurtain in Trouble in July, who goes fishing whenever trouble is brewing, certainly are roguish enough. Furthermore, both Jeter and TyTy partake at least in part of the characteristics of Sut Lovingood and his class. They display a casual objectivity toward human suffering, even in such instances as the death of the grandmother in Tobacco Road, that is but an extension of Sut's attitude toward his father's torture by yellow jackets. Then too, Jeter's and TyTy's attitudes toward sex seem but an extension of a frontier characteristic. Many writers have commented on Sut's preoccupation with the animal functions of man, and such remarks as Sut's comments on widows and his description of Sicily Burns show that Sut was inclined to make comedy out of sex just as Caldwell does. And Sut was not alone. Mike Hooton, the famous bear hunter and tall-tale spinner, related with obvious relish how a young man reached under his daughter's
dress trying to catch what they supposed to be a snake.
The young man reached around at first "like he didn't like it and then like he did," and Mike comments with pride that Sal blushed but "stood it like a horse."[ll] Caldwell could well have historical precedent for what is considered one of the most modern of his mannerisms.

Looking for the humor of the frontier in the works of William Faulkner is searching for the obvious; for the people of Faulkner's novels are direct descendants of the citizens of the old Southwest, and the characteristics of their grandparents are but thinly overlaid with the veneer of the twentieth century. A good many of Faulkner's short stories have as their basis the hunting yarns of the frontier and some of them even exhibit familiar motifs. "The Bear," for example, is related to the myth of the unhuntable bear in such tall tales as "The Big Bear of Arkansas," with the exaggeration toned down enough to be believable. Even in Faulkner's novels, the elements of frontier humor and roguery are ever-present. The Snopes family as a whole seems to meet the basic requirements for the type of vagrant sharper so common in the earlier days, and many of Faulkner's characters seem entirely roguish. The Hamlet illustrates many comic situations in the frontier tradition, among them the tale of the young idiot who

elope with a cow and that of a woman who wants a churn so badly that she sells her only cow to buy it. Furthermore, Pat Stamps in the same novel is a reincarnation of the old-fashioned horse trader. His trick of pumping up a horse with a bicycle pump, by means of a valve inserted under one shoulder, and then selling the animal back to the original owner is worthy of the imagination of Simon Suggs.

It seems highly probable that before too long the literature of the Southern poor-white will exhaust itself, at least that portion of it which treats his degeneracy and sloth on a physical level. For the trend of contemporary Southern fiction is toward a psychological examination of decadent aristocracy. The last of Byrd's lubberlanders are disappearing from fiction and the humor of the frontier which treated them as comic characters is dying. And yet the humor will still have value for its attempts to portray realistically a segment of American life. The rogues and picares are essential to that humor, for their existence is supported by historical fact, and they represent graphically the drive for material success that motivated the typical frontiersman. In this respect, representing the pioneer as anything but a heroic champion of democracy, the rogue tales of the frontier may serve their most useful purpose. It is easy to forget that Daniel Boone and his kind were not primarily
concerned with the exploration of a continent for the purpose of establishing a brotherhood of men, and the tales of Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood act as a constant reminder that the frontiersmen, too, were men with personal failings and a strong desire for personal gain. It would be inaccurate, of course, to suggest that the society of the frontier was not democratic, was not influential in shaping American ideals; but to consider the individual frontiersman possessed of a long-range view of the common good is just as inaccurate. The hunters and trappers, boatmen and tradesmen of the old Southwest, although they are to be admired for their courage and strength, are all essentially vagabonds. They are the folk whose lives gave aptitude to Simon Suggs' favorite saw: "It is good to be shifty in a new country."
I. Original Materials


Burnham, George R. and Durivage, Francis A., *Stray Subjects Arrested and Bound Over by the Old'um and the Young'um* (in The Big Bear's Adventures and Travels), T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1858.


---

1 T. B. Peterson in the 1850's attempted a uniform edition of frontier humor, binding two previous volumes in one and adding a new title. Generally the volumes included are identical with original editions published either by Peterson or Carey and Hart. Wherever available, Peterson's volumes have been used as standard editions, listed under original author or editor, with Peterson's title given in parentheses.
Crockett, David, Colonel Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas, R. Kenney, London, 1837.

Life of David Crockett (contains Sketches and Eccentricities, A Tour of the North and Down East, and Exploits in Texas), Lovell, Coryell and Company, New York, n. d.


Devol, George H., Forty Years a Gambler on the Mississippi, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1926.


Ellis, Edward Sylvester, The Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee, E. Denning, Cincinnati, 1833.

Field, Joseph M., The Drama in Pokerville (in Major Thorpe's Scenes in Arkansas), T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1858.


Foote, Henry S., The Bench and Bar of the South and Southwest, Soule, Thomas and Wentworth, St. Louis, 1876.


Fulkerson, H. S., Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi, Vicksburg Printing and Publishing Company, Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1885.


The Reformed Gambler, T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1858.


Hall, James, Legends of the West; Sketches Illustrative of the Habits, Occupations, Privations,
Adventures and Sports of the Pioneers of the West, Robert Clarke and Company, Cincinnati, 1835.

Sketches of History, Life and Manners in the West, Harrison Hall, Philadelphia, 1835, 2 vols.


Harris, George W., Sut Lovingood Travels with Old Abe Lincoln, ed. Edd W. Parks, Black Cat Press, Chicago, 1937.

Sut Lovingood, Yarns Spun by a Nat'ral Born Burn'd Fool, Dick and Fitzgerald, New York, 1867.


Hooper, Johnson Jones, Simon Suggs' Adventures, Cameron and Ferguson, Glasgow, n. d.


Ludlow, Noah H., Dramatic Life as I Found It, S. I. Jares and Company, St. Louis, 1880.


Robb, John S. Sparks, *Streaks of Squatter Life and Far West Scenes* (in *The Swamp Doctor's Adventures in the Southwest*), T. B. Peterson and Brothers, Philadelphia, 1858.


Thompson, William T., Major Jones' Chronicles of Pineville (in Major Jones' Scenes in Georgia), T. E. Peterson, Philadelphia, n. d.

---

Major Jones' Travels, J. S. Ogilvie, New York, 1880.


Whitehead, Charles E., Wild Sports in the South, or the Campfires of the Everglades, Derby and Jackson,

II. Secondary Materials

Adams, Lucy L., see Hazard, Lucy L.


Baldwin, Leland D., The Keelboat Age on Western Waters, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1941.


[Several other entries follow]


McIlwaine, Shields, *The Southern Poor White from Lubberland to Tobacco Road*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 1938.


Parks, Edd Winfield, *Segments of Southern Thought*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1938.


VITA

Frank Tryon Meriwether was born on July 13, 1925, in Asheville, North Carolina. He received his primary and secondary education there, being graduated from high school in 1941. He then attended Oak Ridge Military Academy for one year and Davidson College for a semester before entering the armed forces. During the war he served with the Seabees in the Aleutian Islands and Hawaii. After the war he resumed his education at the University of North Carolina, receiving the B. A. degree there in 1948. He received his M. A. degree from Louisiana State University in the summer of 1949.

Since that time he has taught at Louisiana State University as a graduate assistant and as an instructor in the English department. He is at present an assistant professor at Southwestern Louisiana Institute. In 1946 he married Doris Harkey of Charlotte, North Carolina. He has two children.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Frank T. Heriwether

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: The Rogue in the Life and Humor of the Old South West

Approved:

Major Professor and Chairman

Acting Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination: July 25, 1952

M. M. Caffee