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THOMAS BANGS THORPE: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

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

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B. A., Fresno State College, 1945
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June, 1953
MANUSCRIPT THESSES

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To my mother and father
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ABSTRACT

The humorists of the Old Southwest gave American letters its first consistently developed tradition of realism and local color. Their work, however, was done outside the bounds of genteel literature, and its influence on Mark Twain and the local colorists has only recently been brought to light through the research of Constance Rourke, Bernard DeVoto, and other American scholars.

By the spring of 1953, only Joseph Glover Baldwin and Thomas Bangs Thorpe among the five or so major figures of the group had not been made the subjects of full-length biographies. Biographical sketches of Thorpe have heretofore been short and of a general nature; comments on his work have taken account of only a small portion of what he wrote. In an attempt to show the nature of his writing and the backgrounds and influences from which it grew, this study recovers and sets forth the main events of his life and identifies a larger body of work than has to this time been credited to him.

New facts concerning his father's career have been discovered in the printed minutes of the Methodist church in America from 1814 to 1819. Information about his art training in New York between 1830 and 1834 has been brought together from his published work and from an unpublished biographical manuscript in the Griswold Collection of the Boston Public Library. Professor George Dutcher has kindly examined
the records at Wesleyan University which could not be photostated
and has outlined their contents for the light they throw on his
college career. The principal events of his life in the South have
been recovered from references to him in the New York Spirit of the
Times and in many Louisiana newspapers. New information about his
literary activities and ambitions has been added to the knowledge
about him through the location of several unpublished collections of
letters from him to his publishers and other people. Extant copies
of the newspapers he published and edited in Vidalia, New Orleans,
and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, have been examined. Events of his career
in New York from 1854 to his death in 1878 have been recovered from
references to him in newspapers and magazines, supplemented by infor­
mation from letters, published and unpublished, and from official
records in the national archives.

The result of the study has been not only the addition of new
facts concerning Thorpe's career and a fuller view of his life than
has heretofore existed but also a critical revaluation of his work.
Humorist and realist though he was, through the influence of William
Trotter Porter and the writers for the Spirit of the Times, he began
his writing in the romantic tradition, and his best work represents
a fusion of the romantic and the realistic traditions as they existed
in 1840. In his own time he was known as a reporter of the life and
customs of the South. One of his primary ambitions was the defin­i­
tion of the American character produced by the conditions of the
Western frontier.
INTRODUCTION

Bernard DeVoto demonstrated twenty years ago that Mark Twain's humor and his realism were not without antecedents in American literature, that his work in fact marked the climax of a rich and varied tradition. That tradition was mainly oral and was recorded in print, for the most part only in newspapers and sporting magazines and occasional volumes. It was little noticed— and often as not misunderstood—by readers of the time and literary historians until recently. There are at least two major reasons and possibly several minor ones for the neglect of the literature produced in that tradition. In the first place, it developed outside the genteel tradition and was deficient in what Matthew Arnold called high seriousness. Secondly, its writers spent much or all of their time in the South or West, and, furthermore, did not devote their lives primarily to literary pursuits. Thus isolated in the national scene and writing in a tradition which represented something of a literary aberration in the Age of Victoria, the humorists of the Old Southwest have only in recent years begun to receive recognition as the creators of our first truly national literature. Among the five or so important writers of frontier humor, Thomas Bangs Thorpe has been credited with the most notable single story, "The Big Bear of Arkansas," which Franklin Meine has called the first great piece of genuinely Western humor.
Thorpe's career, like that of many another young man who came South to seek his fortune in the 1830's, was a varied and active one. After studying art in New York and spending two years at Wesleyan University, he moved to the South and spent seven years painting for the planters of Louisiana's Feliciana parishes and writing for the national audience of William Trotter Porter's sporting magazine, the New York Spirit of the Times. In 1843 he began editing his own newspapers, first in Concordia Parish and later in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. When not one of his five newspapers fulfilled his expectations, he established a studio in Baton Rouge, where he painted, wrote, and campaigned for Zachary Taylor and the Whig party, which rewarded him by making him one of its candidates in the elections of 1852. When he was defeated with his party, he left Louisiana to spend the rest of his life in New York, except for a few years in New Orleans during the Civil War. In New York he wrote for the national magazines, principally Harper's, and served on the editorial staff of several other journals. From 1859 until it suspended publication in 1861, he was part owner of the New York Spirit of the Times.

Throughout his career as newspaper editor and writer, Thorpe wrote primarily about the South. His first compositions, written for the Spirit of the Times, were essays and humorous character sketches describing the appearance of the lower Mississippi and the ways of its people. During his own time he had some reputation as a reporter of the Old Southwest, and the two most influential anthol-
ogists of the mid-century, Griswold and Duyckinck, chose him as the representative of the new American literature descriptive of the frontier West and its inhabitants. For Harper's he did many articles describing the social and economic life of the South.

His most significant work was the realistic and humorous writing he did for Porter's Spirit of the Times. His sketches were a part of the search for the national character, and "The Big Bear of Arkansas" was the first picture of the American frontiersman arising from the romantic quest for the Western character but was tempered by the humorous and realistic tradition which Porter's magazine had done much to foster in the 1830's and 1840's. Among the writers of the humor of the Old Southwest, he must be ranked among the first four or five.

At the end of 1952, after the work of Constance Rourke, Bernard DeVoto, Walter Blair, and Franklin Meine had turned attention to the significance for American literature of the Southwestern humorists, only Joseph Glover Baldwin and Thorpe remained without biographies. It is the intention of this study to fill in the literary portrait of Thorpe. His diversified activities have been known only very sketchily, only so vaguely, in fact, that no meaningful picture of the man has emerged. Aside from "The Big Bear of Arkansas" and a few other pieces, his work has not been known to those writing about him, with the result that the author of one acknowledged masterpiece in the humor of the Old Southwest has remained something of a phenomenon not altogether accounted for. This study presents new information about the
kind of person he was, and the events of his life, and the background
and experiences from which his work grew. In the light of the infor-
mation that has been uncovered and the lesser writings of his that
have been located and studied, some new critical evaluations are
offered. Thorpe, more than any other of the writers of the Old South-
west, sought consciously to discover and define the character of the
American. Some twenty years ago Constance Rourke in her American
Humor advanced the thesis that the humorous mode of address was a
part of the national character and that the humorists had sought,
consciously or unconsciously, to create and define the image of the
American. Thorpe belongs to the group which worked consciously. He
accepted the romantic doctrine that life in the primitive wilderness
would bring out admirable, even heroic traits in ordinary men. How-
ever, his literary presuppositions were modified by his own observa-
tions and by the influence of Porter's journal, so that his best work
represents something of an amalgam of the romantic and the realistic
traditions. More than any other single writer of the group, his
writing demonstrates the validity of Miss Rourke's thesis.

The only reliable biography heretofore available has been the
sketch in the Dictionary of American Biography, which is so short and
so general in content that it serves only to tell in boldest outline
who Thorpe was. The new information offered in this study includes
facts about Thorpe's family background, his art training in New York,
and his career at college. For his residence in the South, the Baton
Rouge and New Orleans newspapers have yielded details about his life
hitherto unnoticed. Possibly most important, several collections of letters by and about Thorpe have been located which reveal much concerning his literary activities and ambitions. A larger body of writing than has to this time been identified as his has been examined for the light it throws on Thorpe as a writer. Finally, in its totality, this study has something to say about the currents and cross-currents at the middle of the last century, particularly as they were felt and recorded by a gifted painter and writer who was alert to the growing of a new nation and eager to discover the character of the American.
CHAPTER I

The Early Years

Thomas Bangs Thorpe finds his place in American literature among the humorists of the Old Southwest, along with Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson Jones Hooper, and George Washington Harris. Thorpe was both a painter and a writer, and his period of greatest productivity came in the hectic 1840's and 1850's, connecting him not only with the humorous and realistic writing of the Southwest, which was America's first realism of any scope, but also with the romantic quest for the character of the frontiersman. He was one of many minor figures, artists and editors, politicians and writers, who helped to provide the symbols and patterns of a national character.

Thorpe was born at Westfield, Massachusetts, March 1, 1815.¹ His father, Thomas Thorpe, was a young Methodist minister who for the year 1814-1815 was assigned to the Litchfield circuit, which covered the northeastern part of Litchfield county, Connecticut, and a part of southern Massachusetts extending northward to, and

¹Thorpe's father spelled the name without the e, and so did Thorpe himself on his early paintings, but he adopted the more elaborate spelling for his published work. This later spelling has been employed in this study for all members of the family.

perhaps including Westfield.\textsuperscript{3} It was the duty of the Reverend Thomas Thorpe to visit and preach to the various congregations in the district, and the family home might have been at any place within the area.

Thorpe's father had been an early convert to Methodism, for his obituary said of him that "when he was about sixteen years old he was awakened and converted under the preaching of the Methodists, and soon united himself with them in church fellowship."\textsuperscript{4} He had been born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and, after losing his father while he was still a child, had moved with his mother to Weston, Connecticut. In 1811, at the age of nineteen years, he had been licensed as a local preacher, and the next year had been admitted on trial into the travelling ministry, in the Granville circuit in New York. The following years brought a series of moves from one circuit to another.

In 1814 he received his appointment to the Litchfield circuit where he was preaching when his son was born. The presiding elder of the district at the time was Nathan Bange, who may well have officiated at the baptism of Thomas Bange Thorpe and quite probably gave him his middle name. Bange could have been Thorpe's mother's name, of course, but this is mere conjecture, for of her nothing is recorded in the church minutes.

\textsuperscript{3} Professor George M. Dutcher, retired, who is writing a history of Wesleyan University, has generously answered many questions concerning Thorpe's student life, his father's career, and the early history of Methodism in the United States.

\textsuperscript{4} Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America for the Year 1819 (New York: Joshua Soule and Thomas Mason, 1819), p. 25.
The following year Thomas Thorpe was admitted fully into the ministry of his church and was stationed at Rhinebeck, in New York. In 1816 he became a deacon and was stationed at Middletown, Connecticut. Here a substantial brick church had been built in 1805, and the congregation had grown to sufficient size and importance to be assigned a preacher full time. It may be assumed that the Reverend Thomas Thorpe, his wife, and their child lived in the town of Middletown for a year, and here Thorpe was to return in 1834 as a freshman at Wesleyan University.

In 1818 Thomas Thorpe was stationed at New Haven, and for the next year in the city of New York. He had been in ill health since before the birth of his son, and the minutes of the church conferences frequently recorded his inability to fulfill all of his duties. On Sunday, January 17, 1819, he died in New York, leaving his wife and a son not yet four years old. He had among his fellow ministers a reputation for having "strong natural powers of mind, which were much improved by regular and diligent application to study."  

From the time of his father's death in 1819 until he left for college in 1834, Thomas Bangs Thorpe lived with his mother in New York City, with the exception of a short period spent at Ballston Spa, New York. The nearest Methodist school was at White Plains.

5Ibid.

6The information is from an undated manuscript biography probably provided by Thorpe for Griswold's *Prose Writers of America* (1847), in the Griswold Collection of the Boston Public Library.
and it is probable that most if not all of Thorpe's primary education was received at the public schools of New York City. The system had been established in 1795 when the state legislature passed an act to maintain schools "in which the children of the inhabitants residing in the State shall be instructed in the English language or be taught English grammar, arithmetic, mathematics, and such branches of knowledge as are most useful and necessary to complete a good English education." In 1821, the year young Thomas Bangs Thorpe would have been six years old, Gideon Hawley had just completed a long term as Superintendent of Common Schools. During the period of his office, he had brought under the requirements of the act 6,000 districts in the state of New York which furnished elementary education to 300,000 little scholars.

The New York of Thorpe's school days was already growing into a metropolis. The population in 1820 totaled over 123,000 people for the metropolitan area, including 518 slaves. By 1830 (slavery had been abolished by then) the population had increased to over 178,000.

It was a city with more varied racial and religious groupings than any other

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7 *New York Spirit of the Times*, XI, 247 (July 24, 1841).


9 Ibid.

10 *Census for 1820*.

11 *Census for 1830*. 
on the Atlantic seaboard. When Dr. John W. Francis, the city's indefatigable antiquarian, published his account of New York and its institutions in 1832 in Brewer's Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, the city had 123 churches, including synagogues of Portuguese and German Jews, the Dutch Reformed Church and churches of the Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist and other faiths.12

The appearance of the city has been variously described according to the temperaments of its visitors, but was apparently not unpleasing in some respects. Hogs, of course, still ran the streets in 1825, but in fewer numbers than in most American cities. The streets were poorly paved, but Broadway, three miles long, was a broad avenue with smooth sidewalks before the many handsome stores.13 The New York City Hall was considered one of the most beautiful buildings in America, and the architects McComb, Stanton and Josiah Brady were busy from 1790 to 1820 designing fine homes for the wealthy merchants of the city.14 During this period Duncan Phyfe kept his shop and storeroom from which he sent out the chairs, sofas, and dining tables which are admired and copied

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today for their slender elegance. Thorpe's life with his widowed mother was probably far removed from the luxury of the homes of New York's State Street, but the city would have presented a varied and stimulating appearance to a bright young boy.

City life for young Thomas Bangs Thorpe during this period was sufficiently confining to make a visit to the country an agreeable novelty. In a sketch of his boyhood days written for the Spirit of the Times in 1841, he recalled some of the delights of such an excursion.

Our old grandmother was our favorite, and after saluting us with the warmest embrace and expressing unbounded astonishment at the surprising manner we had grown the year last past, she would stuff our pockets with cookies and sweetmeats and then give us the important office while staying with her, of "taking care of the chickens." Thorpe's later writings do not contain many references to his childhood in New York, but what few there are express the recollections of a pleasant and happy time.

By about 1830, when Thorpe was fifteen years old and had finished his primary education, he had developed an interest in painting which he followed as vocation and avocation throughout his whole career. Not only did he continue to paint all his life, but he wrote many comments

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15 Ibid.

16 Spirit, XI, 247 (July 24, 1841).
on American artists and their pictures. Some of his essays appeared in such unlikely places as the country newspapers of central Louisiana in the 1840's, not as exercises in a vacuum but as part of his effort to see and explain what the artists and writers of the time were doing to embody forth the American scene and character.

Most of the painting being done in 1830 in New York, as elsewhere in America, was portraiture. Ladies and gentlemen, then as now, enjoyed seeing their own images and preserving their likenesses for posterity. If one were wealthy or famous, he could be painted by Warboys or Stuart or Copley or Trumbull; if one's means were modest, there were hosts of limners, resident and itinerant, who would do the job.

New York of the time had no art schools as they are known today, and other than portraits there were few models of native workmanship for imitation and inspiration. Most painters of ability who could afford it, studied in Europe around the turn of the century. In London the generous Benjamin West kept his studio and numbered among his students Copley, Stuart, the Peales, John Trumbull, Washington Allston, Samuel F. B. Morse, Leslie, Sully, and the indefatigable William Dunlap.17

Like hosts of other painters, Thorpe never went to Europe. Instead he studied in New York under John Quidor, a young and obscure painter little appreciated in his own day but one in whose work later critics

ware to see "an underground survival in the town that had once been New Amsterdam of the great old painters of the school of Rembrandt."

Other than training on an apprenticeship basis, New York's offering in art instruction was limited, but it was not non-existent as it was in most American cities of the times. The American Academy of Fine Arts had been organized in 1802 by a group of gentlemen who were not themselves artists but who were interested in art. Among them were Edward Livingston, Colonel William Smith, Dr. Joseph Brown, John B. Prevost, William Cutting, William M. Seton, Stephen Van Rensselaer, Robert L. Livingston, and Dr. Peter Irving. With $3000 raised by subscription, Robert Livingston, while he was United States Minister to France, purchased a collection of casts of antique statues, and Napoleon Bonaparte made the society a gift of a collection of engravings and books on the arts. The casts included representations of such famous works as the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus of the Capitol, the Laocoön, the Gladiator, the Grecian Cupid, Castor and Pollux, the Venus of the Bath and the Torso of Venus, and the busts of Homer, Demosthenes, Hesiod, Euripides, and several others. The City of New York appropriated a building on Chambers Street, and the wealthy Dr. Hosack provided money for the Academy to fit a hall for the exhibition of the statuary and pictures. Thus without leaving New York, Thorpe

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18. Ibid., p. 413.


20. Ibid., III, 126.

21. Ibid., II, 105, and III, 48-49.
could have seen engravings of pictures of the European masters and
copies of the sculptured work of classical antiquity.

For a while the Academy offered instruction in art, but this did
not last long. John Ruben Smith of London was keeper of the rooms,
and a part of the space was allotted to him so that he could supple-
ment his income by holding a private drawing school. Of Smith, Dunlap,
the historian of the Academy, observed, "This man had knowledge of his
profession; but was in his manners abrupt, pretending, at times dic-
tatorial, and at times disgustingly obsequious." As a drawing master,
Smith kept a little school for a while, but it finally foundered on
the American prejudice against nakedness. At one of the meetings of
the organizers of the Academy, Smith rose to complain that he could
not use his apartments because the parents of his pupils refused to
let them come to rooms which adjoined exhibitions of indecent pic-
tures.

All present stared at the speaker. He repeated, and con-
cluded by saying that if the pictures were not removed "he de-
clined the office of keeper." Silence ensued. At length a
director said, "Very well, Mr. Smith." Smith was confused--
again repeated--and stood hesitating. The words were repeated,
"Very well, Mr. Smith." "Then I resign the office." "Very well,
Mr. Smith." And Dr. Hosack rose and bowed as he repeated the
words. Smith was bowed out of the room and out of office.23

22 Ibid., III, 49.
23 Ibid., III, 49-50.
With the episode ended the drawing school of the Academy.

In protests against John Trumbull's unsympathetic attitude toward students who came to draw the Academy's statuary and against the dominance of the Academy's policies by non-artists, Samuel F. B. Morse and other young artists organized what was intended to be a drawing association for mutual instruction and help to art students. It was hoped that this group might eventually unite with the old Academy, but no arrangement could be worked out, and shortly a new academy, the National Academy of Design, was organized in New York. This institution, too, collected casts of statuary, but it emphasized the work of contemporaries, and its first exhibition showed the work of living artists only. Thorpe was later to write many critical essays on the Academy of Design, and it is quite probable that during his student days he attended the showings of the work of the young artists there.

The ordinary way for an artist to begin learning to paint during the time was to work for a while with a man who had some mastery of whatever branch of the craft he was interested in. John Quidor, for instance, who was to be Thorpe's teacher in a very few years, worked along with Henry Inman under John Wesley Jarvis in 1826. Jarvis was one of the best painters of the period, and his approach to portrait

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24 Ibid., III, 57.

work and his interest in the scene around him influenced Guidor and, through him, Thorpe.

Instead of poetizing on the art of the past as Washington Allston was doing or as Morse tried vainly to do, Jarvis was busy making the art of the present. The still insistent demand for likenesses supported him in his rough and lusty tastes.... Jarvis, though an Englishman by birth, ate, drank, and joked in the unrefined manner of an American backwoodsman.

John Wesley Jarvis, whose uncle was the founder of Methodism, was born in England in 1790. Shortly afterward his father emigrated to America, leaving the child with an uncle who kept him for five years. Then he was sent to the United States, to join his father in Philadelphia. After finishing grammar school, he studied painting and engraving in Philadelphia with some of the obscure portrait and sign painters of the town, and when his apprenticeship was over, he went to New York, where he made a living painting portraits and doing profiles on glass or bristol board, and, if called for, miniatures on ivory.

Some of the painters of the time made a living somewhat as traveling salesmen do today, moving from city to city and even working through the rural areas, picking up what business in portraits they could. Jarvis worked in Baltimore frequently and in other Southern cities, and of his first trip to New Orleans with his pupil Henry Inman, he told Dunlap he spent $3000 there in six months and brought $3000 more back with him, and did the same the next year. His method

26 Ibid., pp. 119-120.
was thoroughly practical and businesslike on his expeditions to the South. He used to receive six sitters a day, each sitting occupying an hour. After he had worked on the figure, the picture was handed to Henry Inman, who painted in the background and drapery. The technique enabled the two to finish six pictures each week.

Jarvis was also a sturdy trencherman, an admirable story-teller, a contriver of practical jokes, and a public scandal for what Dunlap called his "mysterious marriages." He was somewhat less than a devoted and conscientious father, as one of Dunlap's anecdotes illustrates admirably:

Being on a party of pleasure in the neighborhood of New York, his attention was attracted to a sturdy boy who was playing near him, perfectly unmindful and independent of Jarvis and his companions, their wine, their cigars, or their bursts of merriment. The painter admired the boy, and with his usual playful manner and laughing eyes, addressed the child, and at the same time called notice of the company to him. "What's your name, my man?" "My name's John, and I'm not your man." "That's a fine fellow--John? A very good name. It's my name too. Have you any other name?" "Yes, I have." "That's right! what is it?" "Wesley." "Wesley! John Wesley! that's my name too. Have you any more names?" "Yes, I have." "So much the better--the more the merrier. What's your other name?" "Jarvis." "That's odd enough--that's my name too. Who's your father?" "Jarvis the painter--and mother says he is a very bad man."29

Jarvis was primarily a portrait painter, but his pupil and Thorpe's teacher, John Quidor, turned to a different kind of work. Perhaps because he practiced a kind of painting not then much in demand, he

28 Ibid., II, 219.

29 Ibid., II, 210-211.
remained, in spite of his skill, an obscure figure all his life.

Burroughs, in his history of American painting, finds both Quidor's genre and his technique worthy of high commendation:

The first of the painters to turn inward upon his own inspiration for his art was one of the most individual of artists. Scarcely known during his lifetime, his work is still generally ignored. Dunlap in 1834, nearly fifty years before Quidor's death, seems to have written his epitaph: "His picture of Rip Van Winkle has merit of no ordinary kind. His principal employment in New York has been painting designs for fire engines." But the vital fact is that John Quidor, born in 1800, found in Washington Irving's books a source of phantasy which transmuted jolly stories into highly intensified and poetic genre. There is no trace in his work of Jarvis or Inman, who were his teachers in 1826. At a time when sentiment was becoming increasingly essential to sensitive painters, he was caricaturing and relishing in a Flemish spirit the uncouth, vivid Ichabod Crane. Technically he was far ahead of his time, painting in rough, misty, glittering touches, something like Monticelli's in effect.... Quidor evolved his compositions out of an idea, not from an observation of nature.30

In the light of Thorpe's later work, particularly his literary efforts, there are at least two things about Quidor worth noting. First, his independence of the demands of the prevailing tastes sets him apart. He was willing to paint designs for fire engines to support himself so he could do the kind of work he wanted to. Next, his eye for the comic and his discovery of Irving as a source of inspiration were both to be echoed in his pupil.

Sometime about 1830, Thorpe and his friend Charles Loring Elliott began their study under Quidor. Writing his pamphlet on Elliott in 1868, Thorpe recalled that Elliott was not quite eighteen years old.

when the two first met at Quidor's studio. "It subsequently appeared that, inspired by the same motive, we must have simultaneously started from different points in the city to find the painting room of John Quidor, the only avowed figure painter then in New York."\(^{31}\)

Thorpe was interested in Quidor's work with figures because he himself had chosen historical painting as his profession.\(^ {32}\) Benjamin West, Washington Allston, and John Trumbull had painted historical scenes before Thorpe's time, and they all had high reputations in America. Their work was considered a noble and dignified art, particularly acceptable in the young and growing Republic, ready to establish the traditions of its heroes and its history. Thorpe's desire to do historical painting was a lofty and somewhat impractical ambition for a boy of fifteen whose family apparently had rather limited resources.

His study under Quidor for his chosen profession was typical of the art training of the time. As Thorpe later recalled, Quidor's room was a bare, unornamented place, with dilapidated furniture, and the one point of interest, properly, was a rudely constructed easel near one of the north windows. The picture on it was of Irving's Ichabod Crane. "It was the first oil painting of any merit we had ever seen," Thorpe said afterward.\(^ {33}\) If this is not merely a compliment to Quidor, it suggests that Thorpe had not made many visits to the galleries of the


\(^{33}\) *Reminiscences of Charles L. Elliott*, p. 3.
American Academy of Fine Arts or the National Academy of Design, then
both open in New York. It also indicates that Thorpe did not visit in
the homes of wealthy New Yorkers, such as Philip Hone, who were even
then forming notable collections of paintings by European and American
artists.  

Thorpe recalled his study under Quidor as a not very closely
supervised apprenticeship:

It is illustrative of the progress of art in New York
to notice how its masters instructed pupils forty years ago.
In all the time we were with Quidor, many months, I do not
remember of his giving us anything but easel room and one or
two very common engravings to copy. He would absent himself
from his studio for days and weeks together....

Thorpe's training, as he remembered it, provided little more than
merely a place to work and engravings to copy. In spite of this, how-
ever, his first picture of note was to reveal the guiding hand of John
Quidor in its literary fantasy.

Of the other art resources of the city in 1830, Thorpe says:

There were no art galleries, no splendid stores for the
sale of pictures and fine engravings in those days, and our art
resources were consequently limited to attending Levy's weekly
sales of original paintings of the old masters....

Either Thorpe had forgotten the two academies by 1868, or he had not
used them in his days as an art student. Probably they really offered
little to the young student.

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34 Allen Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone (New York: Dodd,
Mead and Company, 1927), I, xviii.

35 Reminiscences of Charles L. Elliott, p. 4.

36 Ibid.
After a period of such study and work, Thorpe and Elliott decided to sell some of their own pictures at one of Levy's auctions. The bidders answered, Thorpe recalled, and offered 75¢ for whatever it was the young men exhibited. Afterwards, with admirable practicality, Levy suggested that they darken their pictures with varnish to make them look old. The buyers' tastes were formed, it seems, on the drawing and composition which were typical of the work of the old masters, and the coloring which was the work of time and preservatives.

After about a year and half, Elliott, who was badly in need of money, decided to visit three prominent New York art centers and seek the advice of their masters. Thorpe accompanied him, but of his own circumstances and ambitions at the time, he says nothing. "In pursuit of this idea we called at Dr. Hosack's residence...; the parlor floors were covered with rich matting, relieved from sameness by magnificent rags of every conceivable color and rich design." The doctor's reception of the young men was kind, and he gave them advice and a note asking permission for them to visit the "governor's room" where there was the best collection of pictures in the city.

The two young men also visited the studios of Samuel L. Waldo and William Jewett, who had long worked amiably together as portrait painters. Waldo, an old man at the time, Thorpe says (he was born in 1783 and was

37Ibid.
38Ibid., p. 5.
39Ibid.
therefore no more than fifty), gave Elliott the finest advice he had yet received:

"You paint well enough to deserve business. I would advise you to go down to Fulton market (the butchers are the most liberal and independent, and finest looking of any class of our citizens) and select one you see whose face pleases you, introduce yourself and tell him your business.... Ninety nine chances in a hundred he will meet your wishes in a friendly spirit and grant your request. If the picture is a success, you will be well paid for your trouble, and secure a friend who will get you commissions."

Thus Thorpe's friend was launched in his career as a portrait painter.

But Thorpe did not do portraits, and the earliest work of his of which there is any record reflects his continued interest in historical painting and also, more important, the teaching of John Quidor.

The first picture to receive any great attention was *The Bold Dragoon*, painted about 1832, when Thorpe was seventeen years old.

In a biographical notice printed in the New York Spirit of the Times November 7, 1840, William Trotter Porter wrote of the event:

The first and only picture he ever exhibited, was one in the American Academy, some eight or ten years ago, called "The Bold Dragoon," from Washington Irving's story of that name, Colonel Trumbull, as we learn from a friend, was so well pleased with it, that he had one of his own pictures removed, to place it in the best possible light, observing that he had "never seen anything that tells the whole story more completely." This picture was... purchased by Judge Irving, in whose family we believe it now.

The sketch which served as inspiration for Thorpe's picture is

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in the *Tales of a Traveller*, which Irving composed in Europe and published as a volume in August, 1824. The tale is told, in Irving's framework, by an Irish captain about his grandfather, a bold dragoon who fought in Flanders with the army which swore so terribly. The dragoon spends the night at a Dutch inn. Although he speaks no Dutch, he makes himself a great favorite with the Mynheers and the maids. After much eating and drinking, he goes to bed. As the night wears on, he finds his bed too hot for him, and so he gets up and strolls about the house. When he returns after a bit, he is greeted with the fantastic sight of the furniture dancing. He joins the dance and wakes the house. The landlord is puzzled by his story, but the landlady's daughter supports the explanation of the bold dragoon, and they all retire.\(^{45}\)

Irving's biographer says, "Indeed, never was a book of Irving's so damned as was *Tales of a Traveller*. No tithe or hair of its slapdash went free."\(^{46}\) Among other things, it was attacked for its indecencies. The *London Magazine* "...found 'The Bold Dragoon' offensive to the chastity of the Georgian home," and the *United States Literary Gazette* discovered obscenity in "...the innuendoes in the 'Bold Dragoon.'"\(^{47}\)

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\(^{46}\) Williams, *The Life of Washington Irving*, p. 278.

\(^{47}\) *Ibid.*
Irving's sketch, in spite of the fact that it offended Victorian sensibilities, offered the subject for a lively and humorous fantasy. In choosing it, Thorpe showed not only that he knew and enjoyed Irving, but that he was also strongly influenced by John Gidier. In addition to his pictures of Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane Gidier also went to Irving for the subject of *Peter Stuyvesant Entering Wall Street Gate*, and to Cooper for his drawing of Matty Bumppo defending his hut, based on *The Pioneers*.\(^4\) If, in the history of American painting, Gidier is remembered as perhaps the first to work from his imagination outward,\(^4\) he is also significant as one of the few good American artists of the 1830's to turn frequently to American literature for his inspiration. And he encouraged others to do the same. Henry Inman, student with Gidier under Jarvis, Asher B. Durand and Charles L. Elliott, Thorpe's fellow pupil under Gidier, all painted scenes from Irving, but none did so many as Gidier.\(^5\) All of his work is imaginative, some of the scenes represent local American types, and most of them are humorous. And Thorpe was later to depend on the humorous, the local, and the imaginative for some of his best achievements, both literary and artistic.\(^5\)

\(^4\)The World of Washington Irving, p. 413.

\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 412.

Thus it was that one of the influences from American literature acting on the seventeen-year-old Thorpe, partly through the example of Quidor, was that of Washington Irving. Irving himself could draw, and he filled his diary with humorous pencil sketches.52 Indeed, when he was in Rome on his first journey to Europe, his talent led Washington Allston to try to persuade him to study painting.53 "His writing was pictorial and sympathetic to men of the brush," says Van Wyck Brooks, "and his pen name 'Geoffrey Crayon' was chosen with reason."54 And, in addition, his characters had another quality even more important than adaptability to the painter's art. His odd and peculiar types like Ichabod Crane and Rip Van Winkle were sometimes local American characters. Humor and an interest in odd characters were to become a part of the literary tradition of dealing with the grotesques of the national frontier. Twenty years later the publisher of Joseph G. Baldwin's Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi was to compare the style of the book to that of Knickerbocker, saying it showed the "polish and elegance" of Irving with a deeper and fresher humor.55 This polish and elegance was not only a matter of literary style, but was a part of the author's way of looking at his material, a kind of easy urbanity in the


54 The World of Washington Irving, p. 169.
55 Spirit, XXIV, 54 (March 11, 1854).
mode of address to the subject matter. It is not possible to say that
Thorp absorbed this attitude from Irving, for he was only seventeen
at the time he painted his picture of the Bold Dragoon, but seven
years later; when he came to write his first sketch, he was to approach
his frontier character as an urbane observer recording an odd type
for the amusement of his readers.

For the present, however, Thorpe at seventeen had a picture ex-
hibited at the American Academy of Fine Arts. He had had praise from
John Trumbull, president of the Academy and most famous of American
historical painters. And he had found a purchaser for his picture,
Judge Irving of the Court of Common Pleas, brother to the distinguished
author inspiring the sketch. Such encouragement along with his love of
painting would make him want to go on with his study, and he was ambitious
to continue his training beyond what Quidor and New York had to offer him.
This, of course, meant a trip to Europe. He had hopes, for a while at
least, that the money would be forthcoming from some source but apparently
neither his mother nor his friends could or would afford to support him
in residence abroad. As a result, he gave up art training and enrolled
as a student at the newly opened Wesleyan University. Griswold's biography
in the Prose Writers of America says,56 with the conventional avoidance
of any mention of financial matters, "Circumstances led to the abandonment
of his pencil." The manuscript from which the sketch was made, probably
prepared by Thorpe himself, is more explicit. "Disappointed in his am-
bition of visiting Europe he abandoned his pencil as a pursuit, and spent

56 p. 546.
the two or three following years in the Wesleyan University Middletown, Conn., where he improved his mind by reading and study. If Thorpe’s never-ending interest in art and his failure to achieve any real recognition for his painting are any indications at all, his inability to go abroad must have been a disappointment. The education at Wesleyan was not his first choice.

In the fall of 1834, at the age of nineteen, Thorpe left the wealthy and bustling city of New York to live as a student in the quiet little village of Middletown and attend the newly established college there. The choice of Wesleyan is evidence that he and his mother had continued in the church of his father. He could have attended Columbia University in New York City, and other universities offered more in the way of distinguished faculties and large libraries than the puny and struggling Wesleyan. Harvard, at Cambridge, was already venerable, but was now long and firmly established on a Unitarian basis after Dr. Henry Ware’s appointment as chief professor of the Divinity School. Yale at New Haven, not far from Middletown, by this time had a reputation from Silliman’s work in the natural sciences, and was orthodox Calvinist,

57 Quoted from the Thorpe MS biography in the Griswold Collection, Boston Public Library.

like Williams, Amherst, Bowdoin, Brown, and Dartmouth. Wesleyan seems to have had little to recommend it other than that it was a Methodist college, and the fact that he attended it, indicates that the family maintained its connection with the church.

Methodism was still young in the 1830's, one of those religions appealing to the "feelings" which Andrews Norton of Cambridge considered vulgar. New England had seen the beginning of the collapse of the old theocracy, and in the face of a growing indifference on the part of the people, the Calvinist ministers found themselves forced to maintain the old dogma of determinism and yet wriggle out of it. It was an increasingly hard necessity to justify to the New England congregations a theology that would send a man to hell by divine decree, yet prove that he went of his own accord. The prodigious subtleties hatched to nourish such a theology were not for common folk. The aristocratic Federalists of Hartford perhaps accepted them, and the residents of the mansion-houses of Boston and Salem meditated on them and rejected them to become Unitarians. But the simpler people—farmers, mechanics, factory hands—turned to other theologies, new or old. "The emotional sects, the Methodists," says Brooks, "throve on the sudden reaction against the logical sermons of the past."

59 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
60 Ibid., p. 40.
62 Ibid., p. 324.
By 1831, the Methodist congregations in the United States numbered over half a million. As they grew in numbers and organizational strength, they became interested in establishing their own educational institutions. Among the secondary schools they founded were those at Casanovia in New York in 1824, Newmarket, New Hampshire, in 1818, and Augusta, Maine, in 1821.

Not all the Methodists agreed that they should give their attention to schools, although they numbered learned men among themselves. Francis Asbury, the first Methodist bishop, who was so active in Virginia around 1800 that he was scarcely ever out of the saddle, pursued his study of Hebrew and Greek on horseback, "...while he sang hymns and shouted hosannas, riding from hamlet to hamlet, sometimes in a concourse of preachers, till the forest rang with his jubilation." But this learned bishop felt that Methodists should concern themselves with evangelism and not education. When the Methodists' struggling Cokesbury College, founded at Abingdon, Maryland, in 1787, burned in 1795, he said, with the wit of his century, "Its enemies may rejoice, and its friends need not mourn."

In spite of the tradition which Asbury's comment represented, the

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65 Ibid., p. 16.


67 Price, Wesleyan's First Century, p. 16.
Methodists continued to establish schools, especially in the Middle Atlantic and New England states, where the ambitions of the towns and villages for their own educational institutions assisted the Methodists and others to establish them. Among the smug, egocentric little Connecticut villages eager for their own academies was Middletown, in the central part of the state. It had seen the establishment of Washington College (later Trinity) at Hartford, and of Yale at nearby New Haven. 68 There was no reason why its own destiny should be less. Its opportunity to have its own institution of higher learning was realized in 1825 when Captain Alden Partridge, a graduate and former superintendent of West Point, opened The American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, which he had built on lands given by the town. 69 But the townspeople and the captain were not yet satisfied, and in 1827 the trustees petitioned the Connecticut legislature for the power to confer degrees. The matter dragged on for a while, and finally Partridge petitioned the Vermont legislature for a university charter, and as soon as it was granted, he moved from Middletown to Norwich, leaving the trustees the buildings he had erected. 70

After Partridge left, the trustees offered the land and buildings to the New York and New England conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church

68 Ibid., p. 20.
69 Ibid., p. 21.
70 Ibid., p. 23.
on the condition that the Conference raise a $40,000 endowment. The offer was finally accepted and the college opened in September of 1831 with Willbur Piak as its president. 71

At the time, the town of Middletown was already 180 years old.

By 1831 it was a thrifty, pious, snug community with muddy streets, frame houses, six churches, a ferry to Portland, then known as Chatham, a few public buildings, such as the brick Custom House at Washington and Main Streets, a frame court house... and a frame Jail on Bond Street.... Small manufactories, chiefly of machinery and wooden goods, thrived, and three of the present day banks had started.... Two little weeklies, the American Sentinel and the Middlesex Gazette, retailed the news. 72

To the town Thorpe came in 1834 to enroll at the new little university for the fall term.

Probably Thorpe did not find the little place wholly unattractive. The opening of his novel, The Master's House (1854), has a description of a New England college town which may well record some of Thorpe's recollections of his time there:

There is not a more charming town in New England, than Malden, so celebrated, and so widely known for its intelligent population, its interesting traditions, and its most excellent seat of learning. Until recently, Malden retained quite a rural appearance, and presented a charming mixture of tasteful cottages, ornamented with choice shrubbery, and a few grand old mansions, half hidden away among elms more than a century old.

71 Ibid., pp. 26-27.

72 Ibid., p. 19.
The students who find a temporary home at Malden, bear patiently with many imaginary grievances of college life, rather than abandon its beautiful streets, its picturesque highways and hospitable inhabitants.73

This is conventional enough, of course, but at least the acceptance of the convention indicates, if nothing else, that he suffered no psychic wounds at the hands of the townspeople. That college life held some grievances for him, not wholly imaginary, is attested by his college record.

The courses Thorpe would be required to take reflect the curriculum common to most American colleges of the time. Studies at Wesleyan were divided into five departments: 1) Moral Science and Belles Lettres, 2) Mathematics, 3) Ancient Languages and Literature, 4) Natural Science, and 5) Modern Languages.74 The first department of the curriculum, Moral Science and Belles Lettres, included the study of rhetoric, elements of criticism, evidences of Christianity, intellectual philosophy, moral philosophy, logic, political economy, and the Federalist Papers. Mathematics included not only algebra and geometry, but navigation and surveying, conic sections, Cambridge calculus, Almsted's natural philosophy, and astronomy. The natural sciences included "chemistry" (as it is spelled in the first catalogues), geology, and mineralogy. The modern languages offered were French, German, Italian, and Spanish.75


74 Price, Wesleyan's First Century, p. 43.

75 Ibid., p. 44.
The requirements for admission to ancient languages are suggestive of what the student was expected to have done in preparation. He was supposed to know, among other authors, Cicero, Juvenal, Tacitus, Longinus, and Demosthenes.76

Although the university did not make the religious tenets of any of its students a condition of admission, it was distinctly religious. The seven members of the faculty who taught while Thorpe was there were all religious men, and three of them were outstanding Methodist clergymen. Church attendance was required of the students on Sunday mornings, and for the rest of the day they would study "evidences of Christianity and kindred subjects."77 Student life was strictly regulated. The curriculum was inflexible, with all the students required to take the same subjects, and learning was by student recitation, requiring much memory work. The students had to spend their evenings in their rooms studying.78

Boarding houses and private families charged $1.50 a week for meals. Over half of the boys boarded themselves on about 75¢ weekly, living chiefly on a diet of milk and vegetables, which they found "conducive to health."79 In the spring of 1833, the year before Thorpe arrived, the University Commons opened, where the students

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76Ibid., p. 44.

77Price, Wesleyan's First Century, p. 37.

78Ibid.

79Ibid., p. 39.
could get their meals for $1.25, and here Thorpe ate and complained about the food. 80

From the time of his first registration in the fall of 1834, Thorpe was regularly enrolled each term until the spring of 1836. 81 The college records of student activity for the years he was there are two blankbooks preserved in the Olin Library at Wesleyan University. One of these contains reports of the Examining Committee which was appointed each year from among the faculty and college graduates of distinction. The only mention of Thorpe in this record is that he passed Rhetoric. Surely he must have passed other courses to have remained two years; but there is no record. The fact that he did pass this course shows that as a student he paid attention to the principles of the art that was later to make him an effective stump speaker and was also to contribute something to his ability as a writer.

The other manuscript volume preserved from Thorpe's time records the merits and demerits of the students for each term. The meeting of the Joint Board on May 13 and 14, 1831, provided among other things for "a book of merits and demerits to be kept, and incorrigible students to be sent home." 82 The book has no entries for Thorpe's first term,

80 Spirit XVI, 235 (July 11, 1846).

81 Unless otherwise indicated, information about Thorpe's career at Wesleyan has been supplied by Professor George M. Dutcher from his own study of the Wesleyan record books and other documents.

but for the winter term 1834-1835 he received two demerits; three for spring and summer, 1835; four for the first term, 1835-1836; one for the second term 1835-1836; and four and one-half for the spring of 1836 his last term. Thorpe's merits ranged from a high of 268 in the second term of 1835-1836 to a low of 210 for the spring term of 1836. It is not now known whether these merits and demerits recorded the moral or scholastic progress of the students, but they likely had some reference to the incorrigibility mentioned in the act providing for the record to be kept. In any event, while several students had as many as 100 more merits than Thorpe's high of 268, few had more demerits, some escaping without any at all. Whatever the merits and demerits recorded, their totals reveal that Thorpe was not a model scholar at the strict little college.

The record book also shows that Thorpe earned the fewest merits and the most demerits of his college career during his final term at the university. The biographical sketches in Griswold's and Duyckinck's anthologies give as his reason for leaving Wesleyan the fact that his health was failing. This was, of course, a conventional explanation, serving to cover a multitude of sins, but it is possible that his record for the term was a consequence of poor health, for it is possible that the demerits recorded absences from class, and incomplete work, among other things.

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Even though Thorpe did not make an outstanding record as a student, he was active in the extra-curricular life of the college. The students at Wesleyan, within two months of the opening of the institution, had organized several societies, debating clubs like those that existed at Yale and Princeton and other American colleges in the nineteenth century. The first to be founded was the Philorhetorician Society, followed by the Non Nomenanda Society, the Adolphian Society, and finally the Tab Philosophers. In July of 1833 the Adolphian Society became the Peithologian Society. When Thorpe entered Wesleyan in the autumn of 1834, he was elected at once to membership in the latter group. It is possible that his prompt admission was through the offices of Aaron Cole Bangs and E. W. Bangs, sons of Nathan Bangs and Nathan Bangs, the latter the man from whom Thorpe probably had taken his middle name, and who may have helped him otherwise at college.

Thorpe at once became prominently active in the programs and debates of the Peithologian Society. Dr. Dutcher says that the minutes of the Peithologian are full enough for 1834 to record in some detail Thorpe's activities in the society but are less complete for the following year. The proceedings of the society normally included a debate at each meeting on a topic which had previously been selected and for which the debaters on the opposing sides had been chosen in advance. Not only was

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81 Price, Wesleyan's First Century, p. 41.
Thorpe frequently chosen as leading debater, but he also usually shared with the others as a voluntary participant in the discussion which followed. The programs also included the choice, in advance, of an essayist to present a carefully prepared essay as a part of each meeting's activities. At the opening ceremonies of the academic year, which began with the autumn term, it was customary for one of the essayists to be assigned to present a valedictory address, as it was called at Wesleyan. Thorpe was chosen by the Peithologian Society to give the address at the beginning of the autumn term of 1834, which was clearly an indication that his colleagues recognized his ability to represent the society effectively at an important function of the university. For both his literary activity and his skill as a political speaker, in later years his experiences in the Peithologian Society were obviously good training.

Among the topics Thorpe spoke on as a debater for his club were the following: "Is the doctrine of final perseverance of the saints consistent with Scripture or reason?"; "Does ancient or modern history provide more examples of patriotism?"; "Which is preferable, public or private education?" The subjects generally chosen by the students for debate were abstract in nature, and there is a corresponding absence of discussion of problems and events in America and Europe at the time. It may be that this reflects partly the inadequacies of the college library, which had opened with merely 900 volumes. It received gifts the first year, and 2,000 more volumes were shortly purchased, but it was still a small collection, and was particularly deficient in periodicals
at the time. But whatever the topics debated, Thorpe here developed, in his class work and in his club activities, interests and abilities which were later to gain him commendation in Louisiana from audiences who had heard Sergeant S. Prentiss and Henry Clay.

The book of minutes of the society also records that Thorpe was frequently fined 6-1/2¢ (a fraction of the Connecticut shilling) for being late to the meetings. His tardiness at meetings, his modest totals of merits, and his large number of demerits all suggest that he was of a rather casual, easy-going nature. It is not surprising that a young man of his temperament should shortly find quite to his liking the leisurely, outdoor life of the South.

Nor is it surprising that he should form friendships with the Southern students attending Wesleyan while he was there. Four students at the time were from Mississippi, and they all returned to the South. That Thorpe was friends with at least some of these boys is certain, for in a biographical sketch published in the New York Spirit of the Times on July 27, 1850, the writer says, "Having formed at college an intimacy with several Southern students, he visited the South, and soon after he permanently located in Louisiana."

Some suggestions of the Southern student at Northern colleges as Thorpe saw him may be had from Thorpe's novel, The Master's House. His hero was a student born of good family in the South who as a child had been brought to the North by his widowed mother to be educated. Graham Mildmay at college probably embodied some of Thorpe's ideas of the ideal Southerner.
Mildmay was cordially accepted among the young men of the college from his section of the Union, as "one of their own set," yet he never entered heartily into their dissipations, or became seriously involved in any way, with their reckless amusements. He was popular with all who knew him for his manliness, and seemed to happily combine industrious habits with the cultivated manners and easy bearing, so peculiar to the youth of the South. There was a sense of innate worth, and pecuniary ability about Mildmay, that so frequently distinguishes the highly educated planter from the mere business man, which, joined with his acknowledged moral worth, made him a universal favorite. His manners stood for many thoughtless breaches of discipline, on the part of his fellow Southerners, and he was everywhere spoken of, as one destined to a high position in the councils of his country, and assigned a leading place as a future statesman of the South.85

It would appear that Thorpe found particularly agreeable the social ease and pleasant manners of the young Southerners, and excused the breaches of university discipline (which he himself committed as often as anybody at the college), but he expected in the highest type he imagined a moral earnestness that would forbid "reckless amusements."

Busy and active in college life as he was, Thorpe did not give up his painting. The "Annals of Wesleyan University" record that in January of 1836 he was appointed by the Prudential Committee to paint a picture of a new chapel which was being proposed, the painting to be sent to the president of the college, who was then travelling abroad, to be lithographed in Europe and used for raising funds.86 Lithographs of two other paintings he did of the campus and buildings still hang at Wesleyan University. One of these is a scene showing North and South Colleges, with a portion of the campus in front of them and the fence which separated the grounds from the street. The drawing is apparently

85 The Master's House, pp. 16-17.

86 Alumni Record of Wesleyan University, p. lxxxix.
done carefully and accurately.

The second picture is considerably larger in size and scope, being a full view of the scene looking westward over the campus from a hill. Dr. Dutcher observes that the angles of the picture seem much distorted. Both pictures were prized enough, however, to have been lithographed by New York publishers of prints. Thorpe's interest in painting was never to leave him.

Like his studies of art, Thorpe left his university training unfinished. His biographers all give as his reason for going South the failure of his health. First he visited with his college friends there and in 1836, when he was twenty-one years old, he returned to stay. Before him lay seventeen years of life in Louisiana, first in the wooded, rolling plantation land of the Felicianas, and then in the delta land of Concordia Parish, still an interior frontier in the 1840's. From the country he moved to sophisticated New Orleans, and finally to the capital, Baton Rouge, central point from which to witness the election of a presidential candidate he helped to make, the collapse of his beloved Whig Party, and the defeat of his own political ambitions.

Viewed in the light of his later development, several of the experiences of Thorpe's early life were to be of significance for his literary activity. First, his academic background was an advantage relatively few young men of his time enjoyed, and his education was certainly made considerably richer and broader by even the limited art training he took under John Quidor, for through it he was introduced
to some of the carefree and pleasure-loving artists of New York, who led a rather different life from what he probably knew in the household of a Methodist minister's widow. Quidor's erratic ways and the amiable amorality of John Jarvis were examples of a culture which a bright boy might well compare to the more soul-killing of Poor Richard's maxims—if, indeed, such rigor found a place in his childhood. In addition to the rather unusual variety of his education, he early delighted in the literary work of Washington Irving. Irving's pose as the romantic wanderer in Europe observing the quaint and the picturesque obviously appealed to the young boy of artistic temperament. Also, Quidor appreciated Irving's humor, and his own sense of the oddly comic was well developed. From the background of his teacher and America's best known writer grew Thorpe's Bold Dragoon, a humorous genre piece, representing his own talent for the comic. Finally, his love of society and his outward-turning personality are evident in his extra-curricular activities in college. At Wesleyan he developed his skill at public speaking which was to make him a useful party member in Louisiana politics of the 1840's. Already he had had a rather varied background and was proficient at many things, although he had been forced to shift his energies from one field to another instead of completing either his art training or his college education. He was, nonetheless, a young man of promise when he went south in 1836.
CHAPTER IX

WRITING AND PAINTING IN THE FELICIANAS

After leaving Wesleyan in the fall of 1836, Thorpe spent the following winter visiting in the South with friends he had made at college, and before he had been long in Louisiana, he decided to make it his home. His various short biographical and auto-biographical sketches do not mention his activities for the period from 1836 to 1839, but it is probable that he painted portraits and other pictures for the planters in and around the Feliciana during the time. By the summer of 1839 he was living at Jackson, Louisiana, and a little over a year later he dated one of his contributions to the New York Spirit of the Times from nearby St. Francisville.

Jackson and St. Francisville are both in the parish of West Feliciana, which lies in the eastern part of the state, just south of the Mississippi border. The western boundary of the parish is the Mississippi River. This section of Louisiana is quite different in appearance from the flat marshes and swamps to the south and the prairies to the west. It is a high, rolling country, covered with pines, beech, and water oaks, much unlike the cypress and live oaks

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1 Spirit, IX, 270 (July 27, 1830).
2 Spirit, IX, 247 (July 27, 1839).
3 Spirit, I, 571 (Jan. 30, 1841).
of the flat lands. The immense magnolias grow here as everywhere in the state. Hedgerows of yellow jasmine and Cherokee rose divide the fields, and the hills are heavily wooded with trees and shrubs. Although it has its ports and plantations along the river, it is less dominated by the Mississippi than the parishes farther south. Instead of slow, muddy bayous of the southern region, clear, sandy-bottomed creeks wind through the country, with Thompson’s Creek looping across the parish, from above the Mississippi border to the river at the southern boundary.

The German sportsman Frederick Gerstaecker visited the area in 1841 and described the little adjoining towns of Bayou Sara and St. Francisville:

Most of the houses of Bayou Sara are built of wood, only three or four being of brick. It may contain about 800 inhabitants, among whom are several Germans, who are carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, sugar-bakers, coffee-house keepers, and a large number of German Jews, who by their low prices have managed to get the trade in ready-made clothes completely into their own hands.

In the United States as a matter of course every person is free to buy and sell whatever he chooses. This was not only the case in Bayou Sara, and in St. Francisville, a town of the same size on a hill about a quarter of a mile behind Bayou Sara, but in all the smaller towns in the United States.

This area, like northern Louisiana, attracted few French or Spanish settlers. It was largely settled by people of Anglo-Saxon extraction who were nominally Protestant, if they professed any

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religion at all. Many of the settlers had migrated to the
Felicianas from the Carolinas even before the beginning of the
nineteenth century. Politically Feliciana County, as it was
first called, remained something of a no-man's-land in the
transfer of the country from Spain to France to the United States.
The Spanish government maintained control of the area as a part of
the Floridas after the purchase, and kept the fort at Baton Rouge
as the seat of the government. The citizens who had migrated from
the Carolinas or other parts of the United States were irked at the
delay in bringing them under the American flag, and in September of
1810 they revolted and captured the fort at Baton Rouge. After they
had driven any protesting Spaniards from the district, they
established the Republic of West Florida, with the seat of their new
government at St. Francisville. Shortly afterward, in December of
the same year, Governor Claiborne marched down with an army from
Natchez, which lay about sixty miles to the north, and raised the
American flag at St. Francisville claiming the area for the United
States and attaching it to the territory of Orleans. The racial,

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religious, and political background of the area was more like that of Mississippi and Alabama and the other areas drawing on the South-eastern states for population than it was like the Catholic, French-speaking parishes lower down the river.

The first settlers, even those who came with a fair amount of goods and livestock, existed under the hard and primitive conditions of the frontier, but by the time of Thorpe's arrival many families, such as the Matthews, the Barrows, the McGhees and others had established large, elegant, debt-ridden plantations. The names of their homes, Richland, Rosedown, and Afton Villa, conjure up the vision of a life that has provided fodder for novelists of the stripe of Frances Parkinson Keyes for a solid century. Timothy Flint, the New England missionary who traveled widely in the South and West, saw the area some fifteen years before Thorpe arrived, and he recorded his pleasure in the appearance of the plantations. The planters, he wrote, had had the taste to leave beautiful groves of trees about their homes. Tom Owen, a humorous local character who topped these plantation trees for a living, was later to provide

Collections of the family papers of these families are deposited in the Department of Archives of the Louisiana State University.

Thorpe the material for his first sketch.

Flint also noted that the planters of the Felicianas were newly rich. They shipped vast quantities of cotton from the ports of the Mississippi, and by the mid-twenties were maintaining an opulent scale of living. With newly established estates, growing families, and fortunes they had made themselves, it is not surprising that they should welcome a portrait painter to preserve their likenesses.

The irreligion of the planters, however, was distressing to Flint. "It produces a painful sensation in the mind of a serious Protestant," he wrote, "that there is not discoverable in all the distance from St. Francisville to New Orleans, on either shore, a single Protestant house of worship." But although the planters generally despised the Methodists and Baptists, these groups were making multitudes of converts. The Methodists Francis Asbury, Peter Cartwright, and Lorenzo Dow all preached to camp meetings on the frontier. Folklore held that Cartwright, who was an immense

9 *Spirit, XXIX, 30 (Feb. 26, 1859).*

10 *Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, p. 287.*

11 *Ibid., p. 289.*

men, once beat the mighty Mike Fink and forced him to say the Lord's prayer. These men found their converts mostly among the uneducated plain folk.

Thorpe never discussed his religion in his own writings. Some of the less delightful aspects of Methodism were exhibited on the frontier, and Thorpe probably shared the aloof attitude of the planters toward the shouting frenzy of the camp meetings. Certainly he disapproved of the violent controversies that were going on between the Baptists, Methodists, and other sects of the area at the time. In explaining why his sketch "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" was refused by one of the country newspapers of the Felicianas, he remembered one of these unlovely squabbles and showed a keen sense of the incongruity of such disagreements. He sent his sketch first to a local paper, he recalled.

Unhappily a sudden excitement was created by a theological discussion, in which the backwoods Boanerges took a most violent interest. People heretofore friends got by the ears on the subject of faith, and baptism, and quarreled fearfully over the doctrine of Christian charity, or became implacable enemies in considering the necessity of brotherly love. No very passionate believer in the importance of dogmas would have made such a comment. Obviously Thorpe was no narrow sectarian. If


15 Spirit, XXIX, 30 (Feb. 26, 1859).
he were not repelled by the excesses of the church, he was probably indifferent to them. A man of modest temperament is not much suited to storming the battlements of heaven.

The evangelical sects also preached to the slaves, but like the other protestant churches in the South, they accepted slavery, and found in their religion that the divine order of Providence approved of whatever was necessary to make the cotton economy work. Frederick Gerstaecker disapproved of slavery, and expressed some disgust at the activity of the evangelists.

In the towns, the Methodist preachers have driven what little understanding Nature has given them, out of the poor blacks' heads, teaching them to jump and shout, to thank God for being afflicted, and to kiss the rod that chastises them. They kiss it, indeed, but leave the marks of their teeth behind....16

It should be remembered that Gerstaecker wrote for a European audience. The South, by this time, was already solidified in its attitudes, and it did not allow criticism of its institutions. Controlled opinion was enforced by law if necessary. Usually the local citizenry saw to it, in one way or another, that legal action was not necessary.

No matter how bigoted the planters were, and how far their narrow intellectual lives were removed from the spaciousness of Jefferson, visitors almost without exception found the outward conduct

16 *Wild Sports of the Far West*, p. 301.

of their life charming. Their manners were pleasant, their hospitality was dignified and generous. Timothy Flint’s analysis of the type as he saw it is a discerning one:

They are easy and amiable in their intercourse with one another, and excessively attached to balls and parties. They certainly live more in sensation than in reflection. The past and the future are seasons, with which they seem little concerned. The present is their day, and “sum vivimur, vivamus,” in other words, “a short life and a merry one,” is their motto. Their feelings are easily excited. Tears flow. The excitement passes away and another train of sensations is started. In the pulpit they expect an ardor, an appeal to the feelings, which the calmer and more reflecting manner of the North would hardly tolerate.... Unhappily, as appertains to all earthly things, there is a dark ground to the picture. The men are “sudden and quick in quarrel.” The dirk or pistol is always at hand. Fatal duels frequently occur. They are prone and excessively addicted to gambling.\(^{18}\)

Flint asserted that he had met wealthy French planters, reared in earlier simplicity, who could neither read nor write, but he noted a growing desire for education. “They have, in many instances, fine collections of books. A piano is seen in every good house.”\(^{19}\) And Mark Twain’s charge, fifty years before it was made, was to find in Flint’s observations a curious confirmation. “The pernicious habit of novel reading, which is an appetite at the North, is here an insatiable craving.”\(^{20}\)

\(^{18}\) *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, p. 324.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 325.
Although the planters formed a small minority of the total population, it was from their culture that the public pattern and direction of Southern life came. It would naturally be to this group that Thorpe would turn for his living. He was a young man without fortune, but with a talent for preserving likenesses which a new society busy founding its own dynasties could appreciate.

Not all of the work Thorpe did for the planters was portraiture. On the contrary, this he may have considered merely necessary hack work. But the planters would provide no market for historical painting which had been his first interest. Consequently he practiced various genres with the eclecticism of an enthusiastic amateur. One of his pictures preserved from this period is a still life, probably executed for some Louisiana planter. It is signed "T. B. Thorp, 1839." It is a conventional decorative piece, showing half a watermelon on a silver tray, peaches, grapes, and other fruit. A knife and some fruit peel lie in the foreground. The group is placed on what appears to be a window ledge, and the background is very lush Louisiana foliage, almost a forest scene. The local touch may divide the interest of the piece, but it would no doubt appeal to a local buyer. Technically the work seems to be quite competent, certainly far superior to the efforts

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21 This picture has apparently never left Louisiana. It is in the possession of Mr. Albert Lienard of New Orleans.
most of the itinerant bootlegs foisted off on an innocent public.

Among the well-to-do planters for whom Thorpe painted was Bennett H. Barrow, master of Highlands Plantation near St. Francisville. Barrow, who is typical in many ways of the men this culture produced, kept a diary from 1836-1846, which although limited in content, is concrete and circumstantial, and provides an invaluable picture of the life of the time. Under the date of April 24, 1841, he recorded, "Few clouds warm--Mr. Thorpe came out to take Caroline Jour's portrait."\(^{22}\) Caroline Jour was Barrow's daughter, and he must have been satisfied with Thorpe's work, for a few days later, May 4, he sat for his own picture. "Few clouds. very warm - Ploughing corn 50 acres ploughed second time, Capt. Chambers of La. Felicians came up this evening, sat for my portrait."\(^{23}\) No doubt Barrow underlined the words because he felt that the painting was an important event. If Thorpe kept a studio at his home in St. Francisville during these years, it was only for a part of his work, for apparently it was his custom to work in the homes of the people whose portraits he painted.

Thorpe seems to have been on friendly if not intimate terms with the Barrow family, which was a large one. On July 10, 1841, Barrow wrote, "Slight very warm - Went to town back to dinner. Mr. Thorpe


with me. Went to A. G. Bowells this evening a Fish Fry there to day
haven’t seen as drunken a set in a great while &c,...

The fish fry
the two attended together at the neighboring plantation after dinner
at Barrow’s home must have been a lively one, for Barrow was not adverse
to drinking himself.

Thorpe’s first introduction to the society of the planters was
probably through his college friends, but his continued attendance in
their homes and at their neighborhood gatherings reflects not only his
own pleasant personality but also the easy hospitality of the people.
His income from his painting would not have been sufficient to enable
him to entertain them in his home or to finance the elaborate hunting
expeditions they all enjoyed, but this seems to have made no difference
in his relationship with them. There were many like him who enjoyed
the kindly generosity of the planters, yet curiously enough they main-
tained their sectional prejudice against Northerners. Barrow himself
was opposed to Yankee speculators “coming out here” to seek their
fortunes. He added, “stragling foreigners, are no better...,” possibly referring to the German Gerstaecher had met at St. Francis-
ville. But Thorpe seems always to have had pleasant social relation-
ships with the planters, and he himself never expressed anything but

\[24\] Id., p. 235.
\[25\] Id., p. 258.
\[26\] Id.
admiration for their ways.

Especially on their hunting trips Thorpe found an easy and natural access to the male society. In contributions to the New York *Spirit of the Times* in 1840 in which he describes hunts for deer and bear and even expeditions for buffalo, it is made plain that he accompanied the planters frequently and with the keenest pleasure on the excursions which were their constant recreation. In September of 1841 he described for the readers of the paper Barrow's pleasure craft, the *Hiawatha*. "The *Hiawatha* is finished, and there is no prettier craft afloat. The wealth and taste of the owner would guarantee this." The ship was a steamer especially built for hunting trips on the Mississippi and its tributaries and adjoining lakes. It had accommodations for ten to twelve horses and two packs of hounds on deck. It was equipped with an elaborately stocked bar, which, to Thorpe's delight, had no money drawer. Thorpe's reference to the owner's good taste, and his exultant description of the luxuries of the craft make it clear that he was pleased and flattered by Barrow's attention, and wished to flatter him in return. He said of himself that he was fond of society, and enjoyed telling stories, a favorite pastime on hunting trips. His easy-going, agreeable, and

27 *Spirit, X, 361* (Oct. 3, 1840), for example, and many others, which will be noted below.

28 *Spirit, XI, 331* (Sept. 11, 1841).


30 Griswold MS. biography.
gregarious ways made him always a pleasant companion.

The summary of accounts in Barrow's diary records payments to Thorpe of $100 in February and $50 in March of 1831, but apparently this does not indicate the end of his work for Barrow. Under the date of May 7, 1842, Barrow wrote, "clear very pleasant day. Mr. Thorpe here to day. had a settlement with him took my Portrait. 4 framed &c. acted very suspicious, told me the frames were $11. new $25 and my reminding him of the 1st place, said he was mistaken they were $26 Which I paid." 31 Possibly Thorpe had sold Barrow other pictures in addition to the two portraits. The reference to Thorpe's "acting very suspicious" over the price of the frames is interesting, if not altogether clear. It may be that Thorpe was a little of the Yankee trader in his dealings, and not above shifting his prices if he could. Anything less than a frank and open attitude toward money would have been displeasing to Barrow, who was a generous soul. The sums involved were small, and the quibble over the few dollars probably meant Thorpe needed the money. Painting for a living in the Florida parishes seems to have offered something less than the opulent existence Jarvis enjoyed in New Orleans and New York.

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Meanwhile, in the summer of 1839 Thorpe had made his first appearance in print in a sketch he wrote about an unusual backwoods

31 Davis, Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes, p. 257.
craft he had observed. The events apparently took place in the fall of 1837 or 1838. He was living at Jackson in East Feliciana at the time and was invited into the country for a few days by one of the local planters. During the visit, Thorpe, his host, and a group of gentlemen were riding into town to hear a political speech when they met Tom Owen, a well-known local character who topped trees for the planters for a living.\textsuperscript{32} Tom's real love, however, was not his vocation, for he "was what the Irish call, a Natural," he had but one idea, and that was to hunt bees.\textsuperscript{33} Thorpe and the others followed him, watching him line the bees to their tree, fell it, and get the honey. Tom Owen was at least fifty years old at the time\textsuperscript{34} and something of a backwoods wit and character. One of the planters suggested that Thorpe write a sketch of the incident, saying that all the local people knew Tom and would enjoy reading about him.\textsuperscript{35} And, as the incident had interested and amused Thorpe, he did write the sketch, and sent it to one of the local papers which did not print it, however, for the editor kept it three months and then returned it.\textsuperscript{36} Thorpe threw the manuscript into a drawer, but finally, at the suggestion of one of the planters who knew the magazine, sent it to the

\textsuperscript{32}Spirit, \textit{XXX}, 30 (Feb. 26, 1859)  
\textsuperscript{34}Census of 1840, Parish of East Feliciana.  
\textsuperscript{35}Spirit, \textit{XXX}, 30 (Feb. 26, 1859).  
New York *Spirit of the Times*. 37

Although Torpe did not know this paper at the time he sent his sketch in, 38 he could not have been directed to a happier choice. It is quite possible that without the direction and support of William Trotter Porter, the owner and editor of the *Spirit*, Torpe would not have done any more writing at all.

The magazine was, as its masthead proclaimed, a *Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage*. Porter had started the paper as a sporting journal devoted to horse racing. It was first issued on December 10, 1831, when Porter was only twenty-two years old. 39 Porter was of old Tory New England stock, and his family had at one time been quite wealthy. His grandfather was an Episcopalian in religion and during the American revolution remained Royalist. After the revolution he removed to Canada, where he received a large grant of land from the crown. 40 The family eventually returned to the United States and by the time of William Trotter Porter's birth was somewhat reduced in circumstances. When he was eighteen, his father died. The boy did not have the

37 *Spirit*, XIX, 30 (Feb. 26, 1859).
38 Ibid.
opportunity of attending college, but apprenticed himself to a
printer at Andover, Massachusetts. In 1829 he became editor of
the Farmer's Herald at St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Later he moved
to New York and established the Spirit in 1831. Like the rest of
his family, he was much interested in horses and horse racing, and
at first his magazine was primarily devoted to this sport. For its
literary content, the magazine merely reprinted the works of the
most popular English authors of the day, without, of course, any
payment to them, as was the custom.

As time passed, Porter became more and more interested in
the literature that was attached to the outdoor, adventurous life.
It had long been printed in the British sporting journals and
similar sketches were appearing with increasing frequency in the
newspapers of the United States. He began reprinting some of
the tales and sketches from the English magazines and encouraging
correspondents for his own paper. By February of 1840 he could
compare favorably the sporting literature of local writers to what
the English papers were producing.

It is the inexhaustible supply of material of this nature —

\[1\] Ibid., p. 23.
\[2\] Ibid., p. 32.
\[3\] Spirit, IX, 365 (Feb. 1, 1840).
the adventurous life of a frontier-settler--incidents of travel over prairies and among mountains hitherto unknown to the white man--the singular variety of scenes in different States, springing from their different origin, or of climate and product--peculiarities of scenery un

acknowledged by a thousand tourists--to this is to be attributed the greater freshness and raciness of American sketches. More evidence needed of the accuracy of this opinion, it would be easy to point at once to the communications of "Frank Forester" and "J. Cypress, Jr." Their descriptions are of scenery and sport that would naturally be most familiar in the immediate vicinity of a crowded city like New York. Yet there is a charm about everything which proceeds from their pens which we do not find in English writers, treating of kindred English themes. Their papers are copied abroad, and compared, in every way, favorably with the articles which are grouped with them in English publications.

Life at the West and South, is a teeming theme for Magazine writers; but the cleverest and most amusing have certainly been of a sporting nature.... "The Spirit of the Times" has been greatly favored with communications of this description, particularly from the famous "Pete Wheatstone," of the Devil's Park of the Little Red; and by the author of "A Quarter Race," and "James's Fight." Their letters are constantly copied in England, with the encomiums of editors. What can we do to keep their pens constantly moving?"

Porter's taste did not limit him to hunting sketches, for he was also pleased with accounts of the peculiarities of local customs and characters in the West and South. Among his earliest correspondents writing in the field he was opening he counted "Frank Forester," whose real name was William Henry Herbert, an Oxford graduate and gifted English expatriate; 45 William P. Hayes who wrote over the pen name "J. Cypress, Jr.;" 46 and "Pete Wheatstone," Colonel C. F. M. Moland,

44 Ibid.


46 Spirit, XI, 37 (March 27, 1841).
Arkansas lawyer and legislator and editor of the Batesville, Arkansas, Eagle.

The plea he printed at the conclusion of his editorial for his correspondents to continue sending him material he repeated again and again in his paper, addressing his writers collectively and as individuals, calling attention to the excellences of their work and giving them praise, encouragement, and friendly criticism. He did not generally pay for the manuscripts he received, for most of his correspondents wrote as amateurs and gentlemen of leisure, but by the force of his personality he kept them writing, and by his own critical judgment he guided them until he became probably the most important single force in creating the humorous and realistic local color literature of the frontier.

Thorpe's "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" appeared in the New York Spirit of the Times July 27, 1839, as "By a New Yorker in Louisiana." It was dated from Jackson, Louisiana, and signed with the initials T. B. T. The sketch itself tells of the circumstances under which Thorpe met Tom Owen, and opens with a reference to Thorpe's reason for coming to the South. "On a beautiful Southern October at the hospitable mansion of a friend where I was staying...to court the

47 Spirit, XIV, 510 (Dec. 8, 1855), and XVIII, 498 (Dec. 9, 1848).
roseate hue of health..." it begins, and continues to tell how the group of gentlemen fell into the train of the bee hunter.

Of this peculiar frontier occupation, he observed in his opening sentence, "As a country becomes cleared up and settled, Bee-hunters disappear; consequently they are seldom or never noticed...." Bee hunting, apparently, is no longer a sufficiently heroic occupation for a frontiersman, but at the time Thorpe wrote there was some interest in this unusual bit of woodcraft. Chapter II of Irving's A Tour on the Prairies, published in 1835, is entitled "A Bee Hunt." It describes the backwoodsmen who was the bee hunter, and tells how he lined the bees to their tree, felled it, and took the honey. Thorpe knew Irving's work, of course, and it is altogether possible that he had read the description, for he shared the age's interest in literature describing life on the frontier. The opening paragraph of Thorpe's sketch also reveals that he knew some of the Crockett books, one of which introduces a bee hunter. Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas (1837) tells of the Colonel's falling in with a bee hunter who accompanied him on a good part of his picaresque journey which ended at the Alamo. James Fenimore Cooper has a bee hunter in The Prairie (1827), and Ben Boden, the hero of The Oak Openings, is a member of the craft.

Thorpe's point of view for his essay is that of an onlooker observing a curious occupation carried on by an unusual and humorous rural character. He explains his recording of so odd a pursuit in his opening paragraph:
To chronicle the exploits of sportsmen is commendable; the custom began as early as the days of the ante-deluvians, for we read that "Methuselah was a mighty hunter before the Lord." Familiar, however, as Methuselah's name may be, or even Davy Crockett's, what does it amount to when we reflect that Tom Owen, the bee hunter, is comparatively unknown.

The marks of preparation for local consumption are still on the page. Thorpe meant that the comparison of old Tom Owen, who was known to everybody in the Felicianas, to such heroes as Methuselah, or even Davy Crockett, should assume by its elevation of the trivial and inconsequential into mock-heroic stature. The treatment is solemn, the comparisons are to serious literature, and the descriptions are concrete, detailed, and factual. Today the essay could have little interest but for them, and they are only a small part of it.

The humor of the piece turns on the character of Tom Owen. In describing his dress, Thorpe begins by observing, "...the difference between him and ordinary men was visible at a glance; perhaps it showed itself as much in the perfect contempt of fashion he displayed in the adornment of his outward man as it did in the more elevated qualities of his mind that were visible in his face." Tom was meant to be humorous simply because his clothes were odd and his speech was quaint. Most of the writing is in the essayist's style, with the story told from the author's point of view. His comments and reactions give the flavor to the scene. The sentences are long and the diction is literary. The piece owes more for its style to Washington Irving and the Spectator than it does to the tradition of frontier literature.
No doubt the style contributed to the popularity of the sketch. The thoroughly respectable literary manner combined with the Southern matter might have made readers feel that they were getting a taste of the eagerly anticipated American literature by a writer who worked in a tradition which educated people approved.

Porter was pleased with the tale, and it was widely reprinted in American and European papers. It appeared in the Calcutta Gazette, among others, and was translated into French and Italian. He attempted to account for its popularity several times. In 1853 he wrote, recalling its popularity, that it was republished first in the English magazines, then on the continent, and finally as far off as Hindostan.

"This article, so popular, was but a simple description of a man who made gathering wild honey a business in the Southern forests, ... but the manner in which it was related, gave it a character of inimitable humor and picturefulness...."\(^{49}\) The piece was reprinted in the two most famous mid-century anthologies of American literature---Griswold's Pensee Writers of America (1847), and Duyckinck's Cyclopaedia of American Literature (1855). The conventional "literary" treatment of a quaint subject was probably sufficient reason for its choice. The subject was

\(^{48}\) *Spirit*, XIII, 477 (Nov. 12, 1853).

\(^{49}\) Ibid.
intrinsically interesting, and the style and manner were respectable.

Somewhat less than a year later, in 1840, Thorpe made a trip to New York, where he met William Trotter Porter. Porter told him of the reception of his sketch and encouraged him to go on with his writing. With the stimulus of Porter's enthusiasm, while he was still in the city he wrote "Wild Turkey Shooting, by the Author of Tom Owen the Bee Hunter," and his pseudonym was established. This is dated at New York City, July 12, and it was printed on the first page of the August 1, 1840, issue of the *Spirit*. It is merely a hunting sketch, but the language is far more racy in spots than that of "Tom Owen the Bee Hunter." It also contains some frontier tall talk. For instance, Americans are called "...a little of the tallest young people that ever breathed." The Indian hunter, in explaining how crafty the wild turkey is in detecting hunters, says, "...first time he see me, don't deem Indian any how...."

The literary language of 1840, the language of "Tom Owen," was plainly and carefully differentiated from the vernacular. There was no developed tradition of language realism in polite letters. Thorpe's use of a swear word and of frontier talk is clearly the result of an introduction to the kind of writing that Porter was fostering through his *Spirit of the Times*. Porter liked the racy, the realistic, the

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50 *Spirit*, I, 421 (Nov. 7, 1840).

51 *Spirit*, I, 253 (Aug. 1, 1840).
immense, and the masculine, and prized most highly those of his correspondents who were most skillful in creating or reproducing such talk and such characters. Thorpe knew of the Crockett books before he met Porter, and their language is realistic, but the "Tom Owen" sketch shows no stylistic influence from this source at all. The meeting with Porter resulted not only in Thorpe's continuing to write, but also in his attempting to reproduce the vernacular of his frontier characters.

Following this hunting sketch about a month, Thorpe had another essay, "Primitive Forests of the Mississippi," in the October 3, 1840, issue of the Spirit. This sketch does not deal with backwoods characters. Instead, it is a description of nature in the romantic tradition, and of her power to stimulate and exalt the thoughts of men. The descriptions of the forest are lush and occasionally rhapsodic. It is described as it appeared to a hunter traveling at night by torchlight, an unusual and dramatic point of view. It concludes with the effect of the experience on the author: "...with a mind filled with the sublimest emotions...I returned to the camp of my companions, their joyous backwoods mirth, their quaint jokes...."52

The romantic attitude toward nature was already well developed

52*Spirit, x, 361 (Oct. 3, 1840).*
in American literature and art by 1840. It had been ushered in by
The Pioneers and The Last of the Mohicans, by William Cullen Bryant's
poems, and by the painting of Asher B. Durand, Thomas Cole and others.
In 1849 Durand was to paint a picture showing two men high on a rocky
promontory viewing a wild valley framed in steep rocks. The names
engraved on a nearby tree are Bryant and Cole. "The title Asher Brown Du-
rand gave his painting, 'Timidred Spirits,' throws a significant
light on the close connection between painting and literature in
American Romanticism."53 Painters and poets alike turned to nature
to hold communion with her visible forces for the comfort and refresh-
ment of their spirits. Both through his interest in art and through
his reading Therpe would have been aware of the tradition. His own
enthusiasm for the outdoors and his trained painter's eye add zest
and precision to his descriptions. Therpe's temper seems not to have
been sentimental, although he occasionally exploited the mood, but the
literary and artistic tradition he knew and began his work in was the
romanticism of his age.

He apparently started back for the South in October, 1840, for
in the October 24 issue of the Spirit Porter acknowledged receipt of
"A Frontier Incident," which he printed the next week.54 This sketch

53 Walter L. Weather, "Thomas Cole and the Romantic Landscape," in
George Beas, ed., Romanticism in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
Press, 1940), pp. 24, 25.

54 Spirit, I, 409 (Oct. 31, 1840).
has for its chief character a gallant but quick-tempered commandant of a frontier military post. It is an attempt to describe briefly what life is like at such a place. Thorpe tries to appeal to his reader by showing the gentler side of the soldierly character, and describes the commander's affection for two pet deer he has. It is an inconsequential piece of work, trifling in its content, and lacking a well developed point.

The following week, November 7, Porter published a short biographical sketch of his new correspondent. It would appear that Thorpe had attempted to sell him a painting which, to judge from its title, was not the sort of thing the Spirit used at all.

We alluded in our last number to a beautiful picture of New Amsterdam in the time of Wouter Van Twiller, from the pencil of Mr. T. B. Thorpe; and we advert to the subject again to say, that when "the times" shall have a little mended, we shall cause it to be reproduced on steel, for the edification of our readers. Mr. Thorpe is now on his way to the South and West, and we commend him to the courtesies and patronage of our readers in those regions, and particularly in those felicitous sections, East and West Feliciana, (La.) where he proposes, as we learn, to quarter for the winter. Mr. Thorpe is an artist of decided genius, and sure promise; and but for an amiable and mistaken modesty—for the world meets nobody half way—would ere this have made himself most favorably known to the public.... We close this hurried tribute with our best wishes for Mr. Thorpe's success in his profession, and a return, are long, to his native state, and a wider field for the exercise of his fine talents."

The picture Porter mentions shows a return to the influence of Thorpe's

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"Spirit, I, 421 (Nov. 7, 1840)."
teacher, John Quidor. And again he turns to Washington Irving for inspiration.

Reuter mentions in the same biographical sketch that when Thorpe left college in 1836 to go South, he did not return to the North until the summer of 1840. This is evidence that Thorpe was married while he was living in Louisiana. Almost nothing is known of his wife. The original returns for the United States Census of 1850 show that his wife’s name was Mariah and that she was thirty years old that year, and had been born in Missouri (1). The age of his oldest daughter, Anna, was given as eleven, and her birthplace as New York. If the age was that at her next birthday, or was in error, it could be that his daughter was born on the trip north in 1840. If the child were born in 1839, Mrs. Thorpe must have been in New York without her husband, something that seems unlikely. The best guess seems to be that Thorpe was married between 1836 and the fall of 1839 and that he took his wife to his home in New York for the birth of their first child.

It is almost certain that on this trip the tall and charming Mr. Reuter introduced Thorpe to the group at Frank Hontenverde’s public house, which was a sort of unofficial office for the Spirit. Thorpe later was to spend much time there in the company of congenial

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56 "Free Inhabitants of the City of Baton Rouge, in the County of East Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana," enumerated the 9th day of Sept. by John Gayle, Assistant Marshall, p. 349.
spirits. The place was described at some length in Porter's magazine in 1859, and its history is worth recording for the picture it gives of the life of the time.

During the palmy days of the old Olympic, when Mitchell's "little box," was the nightly rendezvous of a host of men about town--fast men of an almost bygone generation, these "bloods" were wont to congregate before, or after the play, at a quaint public house on the corner of Howard-street, bearing a mysterious sign-board, representing something like a counterfeit of those engravings we were wont to see pasted on the inside of an imported sugar box. This place, designated the Savannah House, at that period was beneath the supervision of a hearty Italian, Francis Monteverde, afterwards more familiarly known as "Frank," and nightly were assembled beneath his roof, motley crowds of actors and patrons, of sportmen and of fast gentlemen, discussing the merits of the drama, of the turf, and of the chase, interrupted only by the amusements along of domino pieces, employed in deciding wine wagers, by means of the then novel game of "romme."

Noted as was the Savannah House, fortune, however, destined Mr. Monteverde to preside over the destinies of another establishment still more famous, and whose memory will be treasured, in connection with the celebrated sporting sheet, the "Spirit of the Times," as the favorite resort of the coterie of talented gentlemen who delighted to contribute to the columns of that popular journal. Unlike his neighbors, who considered it necessary to migrate to the outskirts of the metropolis to anticipate the emergencies of trade, Frank made a crab-like retrogression and located his hostelry at No. 5 Barclay-street, which he forthwith christened by the title of "Frank's." Within a few doors of his resting spot was located the office of the "Spirit"--that museum of literary, artistic and sporting marvels, the Mecca of every Western pilgrim visiting the Atlantic metropolis....

There were peculiarities distinguishing "Frank's" which could be encountered in no other public house in the city; it was a specialty in its very nature, being to the literary man and the higher class of sportmen, a species of intellectual exchange, comparable to the mercantile
relation that "Talmecico's" bears to its trading patrons. It was the destination of "Frank's" that its patrons were considered almost wholly as gentlemen, as the term was interpreted by the conservatives of twenty years since, meaning thereby men of independent resources of [sic] members of the learned profession. In truth the frequenter at "Frank's" despised anything like mercantile pursuits, for, being gentlemen of education, they treasured a traditional prejudice against that which we are, nowadays, tutored to designate the dignity of commerce.

Among the inhabitants of the place in the early 1840's the history mentions the Forters, William T. and his brother Dr. Porter, who edited The Courier; one Lord Gordon, who lived not by his viti but went of 'em in others; Lewis Gaylord Clark, editor of "old Knick"; Colonel Albert Mills; the painters Henry Inman and Charles Elliott; the poet, Fitz-Greene Halleck; and, when in New York on visits from the South, George Wilkins Kendall, owner of the Figaro, and T. S. Thorpe. These men represent a variety of abilities and professions, but are united in having an enthusiastic amateur's interest in the turf, rod and gun, field sports, the stage, literature, and painting.

Thorpe's visit to New York and the meeting with Porter gave him the stimulation to go on with his writing and also gave his work the direction which was to account for his later reputation in the humor of the Old Southwest. He was to do a great deal of writing of all kinds, but none of his work was so popular or so widely circulated as that which came out of his friendship for William T. Potter Porter.

57 The article originally came from the N. Y. Leader, and was reprinted in the Spirit, XXX, 123-24 (Apr. 23, 1899).
and his connection with the New York Spirit of the Times and its circle.

Thorpe returned from his visit to St. Francisville, and his final sketch of the year was dated from there December 29, 1840. "Sporting in Louisiana" was again written at Porter's request, for immediately under the title appeared the statement, "Written for the .. 'New York Spirit of the Times' by the Author of 'Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter'."58 It is an account of a hunting trip of several days made by three gentlemen of West Feliciana to the mouth of the Red River, some forty miles up the Mississippi from St. Francisville. It opes, "The citizens of Louisiana may with propriety be called a sporting people..." and proceeds to sketch for a national audience this characteristic Southern pastime. Timothy Flint had observed of the planters in the early 1820's that, "Among their ancient amusements, which are still unchanged, is hunting. Their wide forests, their impenetrable swamps, their tangled cane brakes, will harbour, for generations to come, bears, deer, panthers, and a great variety of game."59 Thorpe described this traditional pastime in vivid pictorial detail, showing the warmest appreciation and sympathy for the sport and revealing again that he himself was

58 *Spirit, I, 571 (Jan. 30 1841).*

59 *Recollections of the Last Ten Years,* pp. 326-27.
always an eager participant in the hunts.

Sporting writers in the United States were just beginning to appear, and Porter had several of the ablest as correspondents, as he had pointed out in his editorial of February 1, 1840. Among them, probably the best was the Englishman Henry William Herbert, who wrote under the pen-name of Frank Forester. He had taken honors in Classics at Oxford, and then migrated to the United States in 1831, possibly as exile to escape gambling debts. He wrote many handbooks and novels on hunting, field-sports, and the like before his suicide in 1838. This sporting literature was always the product of a boundless enthusiasm for the subject. Because of his national popularity Thorpe was later to reach a wider audience than Herbert, and some of his own hunting sketches are fine work. He knew the sport intimately, and described it both as the aristocratic chase of the wealthy planter and as the necessary occupation of the roving frontiersmen and squatters of the backwoods.

However, not all of Thorpe's earliest work was written for the Spirit of the Times or done under the influence of Porter, for in the December, 1840, issue of The Knickerbocker appeared "The Mississippi." It is a descriptive piece, showing the interest of the time in American scenery.

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The North American continent, in its impenetrable forests, its fertile prairies, its magnificent lakes, its variety of rivers with their falls, is the richest portion of our globe. Many of these wonderful exhibitions of nature are already shrines where pilgrims from every land assemble to admire and marvel at the surpassing wonders of a new world.

After discussing what some of the seekers after the picturesque and the sublime had found to admire in America, Thorpeobservesthatfor him the Mississippi ranks first in importance by reason of its vast extent and"the charm of mystery that rests upon its waters." He follows with an etymology of the name and a description of what usage, cut-offs, rafts, and sawyers meant to the river travelers. The piece is romantic in approach but generally factual and reportorial in tone, obviously designed to describe the greatest of the western rivers to an Eastern audience.

Porter's influence and that of the frontier writers, however, was to be more fruitful for Thorpe than was the tradition in which he had been educated. His best known and easily his finest piece of writing was produced immediately from his love of hunting and his knowledge of frontier characters of the Old Southwest, where he had lived now for nearly five years. His story "The Big Bear of Arkansas" appeared on the front page of the Spirit on March 27, 1841.61 It

61 Spirit, XI, 43–44. Quotations to follow will be from this version, which is reprinted in Franklin J. Neim's Tall Tales of the Old South- west, and Walter Blair's Native American Humor. A slightly revised version, still Thorpe's, is to be found in V. L. O. Chittic's Ring- tailed Beavers, and in numerous other anthologies.
tells the tale of the hunt of a gigantic bear by Arkansas' greatest bear hunter, and it became so well known that Bernard DeVoto has called the body of literature which followed it the Big Bear School of Southern humorists.

Probably no other one of the tall tales of the Old Southwest achieved the complexity of structure and richness of content that this one did. In 1943 Walter Blair wrote a close and detailed analysis of the piece, "The Technique of the Big Bear of Arkansas," and the following examination is generally indebted to his article.

Tharpa's story uses the device of the framework, which was already old when Chaucer and Boccaccio used it. The reproduction of oral anecdotes lends itself naturally to this sort of treatment, and it became a frequent device in Southwestern humor, which drew heavily on popular lore for its material. Furthermore, it is a realistic device, for the art of the oral narrative flourished particularly in the West and Southwest. Travellers on boats and in stagecoaches, soldiers, hunters around their camp-fires, politicians, lawyers, and judges all told stories for their own amusement, and they

62. "Frontier America," The Saturday Review of Literature, V, 1067-68 (June 1, 1929).

63. Southwest Review, XXVIII, 426-35 (Summer, 1943).

cherished those tales which reproduced the vernacular with fidelity. Story telling was an art which could be shared by the unschooled folk and by well-educated professional men. It is an art still cherished in America, and it is by no means confined to the folk. The circumstances under which the narrative to be reproduced occurs are usually significant, and the framework is a necessary organic device. As it is used in "The Big Bear of Arkansas," it serves to separate the world of the observer, an intelligent, traveled, well-educated man, from the rest of the audience and, more important, from the world of the Arkansas frontiersman, Jim Doggett.

The first paragraph describes the kinds of people a traveler met on up-country Mississippi River steamboats, saying that the author had frequently found himself in such a crowd. The opening is a conventional literary introduction to the setting. The second paragraph introduces the specific circumstances of the tale and the principal character, a backwoodsman who called himself the "Big Bear of Arkansas." He is first heard by the passengers in the cabin as he shouts frontier boasts from the bar, which he keeps up for some time.

As might have been expected, this continued interruption attracted the attention of every one in the cabin; all conversation dropped, and in the midst of this surprise the "Big Bear" walked into the cabin, took a chair, put his feet on the stove, and looking back over his shoulder, passed the general and familiar salutes of "Strangers, how are you?" He then expressed himself as much at home as if he had been at "the Forks of Cypress," and "perhaps a
little more so. " Some of the company at this familiarity looked a little angry, and some astonished; but in a moment every face was wreathed in a smile. There was something about the intruder that won the heart on sight. He appeared to be a man enjoying perfect health and contentment; his eyes were as sparkling as diamonds, and good-natured to simplicity. Then his perfect confidence in himself was irresistibly droll.

The Big Bear's talk and actions begin the creation of his world for the reader, while the passenger's reactions to him and the author's comment in the last sentence serve to maintain the separation of the two areas of experience. Thorpe's tale is not the telling of an anecdote or the recording of a bit of folk lore, but a literary creation to present a peculiar local American type and the experiences of that type to a literate reading public.

The contrast between the two worlds is further emphasized when Jim Doggett himself relates some of his experiences in New Orleans. "Some of the gentlemen that called me green--well, perhaps I am, said I, but I ain't so at home...." After a few such speeches the reader is ready for the character who is not quite at home in the city, but does not find himself crushed at all by the knowledge. He is a citizen whose function lies in a wholly different area. He continues telling about his experiences in the city until one of his comments about Arkansas turkeys calls forth an exclamation from his audience, and the incredulity expressed at his exaggeration causes him to begin a description of his native state. A Hoosier among the listeners objects to the mosquitoes, and the Big Bear defends them. "But mosquitoes
is nature, and I never find fault with her. If they are large, Arkansaw
is large, her varmints ar large, her trees ar large, her rivers ar
large, and a small mosquito would be of no more use in Arkansaw
than preaching in a cane-brake."

The next comment concerns bears, and the chorus of the audience
is increased. "...a timid little man near me inquired if the bear
in Arkansaw ever attacked the settlers in numbers." The backwoods-
man answers that they do not, but he is not quite ready to talk of
bears yet until he has told of his gun and his dog, Bowie-knife.

...and then that dog—wow! why the fellow thinks that
the world is full of bar, he finds them so easy. It's
lucky he don't talk as well as think; for with his natural
modesty, if he should suddenly learn how much he is acknow-
ledged to be ahead of all other dogs in the universe, he
would be astonished to death in two minutes. Stranger,
that dog knows a bar's way as well as a horse jockey
knows a woman's.

The last comparison serves not only to compliment Bowie-knife, but
also to reveal a great deal about Jim Doggett's store of practical
worldly wisdom.

The Big Bear continues to ramble on about Arkansaw animals,
the fertility of the soil and so forth, all in the tradition of
frontier tall talk. Finally the author reintroduces himself in his
own character of the quietly observant bystander.

In this manner the evening was spent; but conscious
that my own association with so singular a personage would
probably end before morning, I asked him if he would not
give me a description of some particular bear hunt; adding
that I took a great interest in such things, though I was
no sportsman. The desire seemed to please him, and he
squatted himself round towards me, saying, that he could
give me an idea of a bar hunt that was never beat in this world, or in any other. His manner was so singular that half of his story consisted in his excellent way of telling it, the great peculiarity of which was, the happy manner he had of emphasizing the prominent parts of his conversation. As near as I can recollect, I have italicized them, and given the story in his own words.

Again the careful description of the circumstances maintains the author's point of view, and here prefaces the introduction of the climactic episode of the tale. All of the points of view have been fully established and the character of Jim Doggett illustrated. Almost exactly one-half of the sketch builds toward the final and most important episode.

After some consideration, the man from Arkansas decides on which hunt he will tell about.

...Yes, I have it! I will give you an idea of a hunt, in which the greatest bar was killed that ever lived, never expected; about an old fellow that I hunted, more or less, for two or three years; and if that ain't a particular bar hunt, I ain't got one to tell. But in the first place, stranger, let me say, I am pleased with you, because you ain't ashamed to gain information by asking, and listening, and that's what I say to Countess's pups every day when I'm home; and I have got great hopes of them ar pups, because they are continually nosing about; and though they stick it sometimes in the wrong place, they gain experience any how, and may learn something useful to boot.

In this exchange of personalities, the polite interest of the author is answered with the easy condescension of the frontiersman. Although each man was conscious of the difference of the other's world, they could exchange compliments on the basis of a thorough equality, for each was a citizen of consequence in his own place.
The Big Bear opens his story by explaining that he learned from an old pioneer how to tell the size of a bear by the height of the marks the animal made by biting the trunks of trees. He became adept at taking the measure of his bears before seeing them. Then one day he discovers the highest marks he has ever seen.

Says I, "these marks is a hoax, or it indicates the darnedest bear that was ever grown." In fact, stranger, I couldn't believe it was real, and I went on. Again I saw the same marks, at the same height, and I knew the thing lived. That conviction came home to my soul like an earthquake.

At this he vows to find the bear or quit hunting, and the animal adds to his motive by beginning to kill his hogs. But at the first chase, the creature outruns his horse and his dogs, something ordinary bears do not do at all. Continuing to miss the bear, causes the hunter to waste away. "I would see that bear in every thing I did; he hunted me, and that, too, like a devil, which I began to think he was."

The next time they meet, the hunter with his pack and the bear come face to face. He is so ferocious that the dogs will not close with him, the hunter's gun snaps, and finally the animal runs from the pack to a nearby lake where he swims out to an island. He is chased back into the water, and Bowie-knife goes in after him. They sink together and the dog comes up alone. With a grape vine for a rope the hunter fishes the thing out and finds that it is not the old creature at all, but a she-bear. "The way things got mixed up on the island was unaccountably curious, and thinking of it made
me more than ever convinced that I was hunting the devil himself."
The hunter makes his second reference here to the supernatural qualities of the animal. The Big Bear's neighbors begin to laugh at him, to joke about what they think is his exaggeration, and he feels near defeat.

However, he makes preparations for one final hunt. "It was too much and I determined to catch that bear, go to Texas, or die." The day before this most elaborate expedition is to begin, he sees the bear getting over a fence, and the hunter makes the second reference to his size. "...he loomed up like a black mist, he seemed so large and he walked right toward me. I raised myself; took de-liberate aim, and fired. Instantly the varmint wheeled; gave a yell, and walked through the fence like a falling tree would through a cob-web." The hunter starts after him, but is tripped up by his "inexpressibles," and by the time he gathers himself together he hears "...the old varmint groaning in a thicket nearby, like a thousand sinners..." and he reaches him only to find that he is already dead.

Jim Baggett is delighted with the size of the creature, and describes eloquently his immense skin. But he is not satisfied with the way he hunted and missed the animal, and with the way the bear gave in to last.

Perhaps he had heard of my preparations to hunt him the next day, so he just came in, like Capt. Scott's cow, to save his wind to grunt with in dying; but that ain't likely. My private opinion is, that that bear was an unanswerable bear, and died when his time came.
Jim Doggett's tale is ended, and the author completes the story in two paragraphs in his own person. He observes that there was a mystery to Doggett connected with the death of the bear. The author adds, "It was also evident that there was some superstitious ace connected with the affair,—a feeling common with all 'children of the wood,' when they meet with anything out of their everyday experience." His account repeats what Doggett has already revealed dramatically in the story itself through his repeated references to the bear as a devil, and through the inexplicable disappearance of the animal on the island. Concretely and dramatically the hunter reveals the powerful hold the bear had on the imagination of the folk, and, more important, through the symbol he reveals what the American frontiersman was and what his life was like.

Through the intricate structure Thorpe achieves several ends artistically. He is interested not merely in recording the folk anecdote of the second half of the piece, but in presenting with some fullness a frontier character to an audience who could learn of this type only through literary work. By means of the framework, the contrast between Jim Doggett and the more conventional characters of the audience is made clear. First the reader sees Doggett as the author sees him. Through Doggett's anecdotes, the reader sees him as the New Orleans sharpsers saw him. By means of the first-person narrative, we see the frontiersman as he saw himself. And finally, in his longest
anecdote, we see him dramatically, in action in his own environment, for the completion of the picture of the American frontiersman.

The language of the story is notable for an age which looked upon the prose of Washington Irving as its highest literary achievement. The literary language of the time, as it is used by Cooper, Irving, and a host of lesser figures, is generally distinct from speech in its form. Even Cooper’s backwoods characters use an elevated fiction. Obviously Thorpe accepted the idea of a literary language, possibly without even thinking about the matter, and the opening and closing paragraphs are done in the conventional style.

This stiff, unimaginative, literary prose, which is often a weakness in Thorpe’s writing, is here a virtue because it is proper to the person of the author observing the frontiersman, and it serves to emphasize the contrast of the two worlds. The interruptions which comment on Doggett and the questions of the audience are consistently in the literary style.

However, even within the literary convention, Thorpe achieves a more concrete and imaginative style when he begins to describe the immediate scene. He had a good eye for the significant in whatever he described and a good ear for the spoken language. He had picked up the vernacular terms used for the citizens from different parts of the country, and in describing his audience he notes Wolveroons, Buckers, Hoosiers, Buckeyes and Corn-crackers, as well as the half-
horse half-alligator man of the old Mississippi. In describing
the action of his protagonist he achieves a graphic terseness that
is vivid and concrete. Jim Baggett's first appearance illustrates
his ability to describe action directly. "...in the midst of this
surprise the 'Big Bear' walked into the cabin, took a chair, put his
feet on the stove, and looking back over his shoulder, passed the
general and familiar salute of 'Strangers, how are you?'

Once he begins reproducing the speech of his main character,
Thurpe does his best work. He avoids the extreme of trying to re-
produce phonetically the pronunciation of his protagonist, but de-
pends more on rhythm, vocabulary, and imagery for his effects of
realism. The frontiersman's language seems always appropriate to
him. It is racy, vivid, and highly imaginative.

One of the characteristics of the American frontiersmen who
had no book education but were intelligent and unabashed was the
quaint, half-conscious misuse of legitimate words. This seems to
have differed from malapropism in that it was half conscious. When
the timid man asks if the bears ever attack the settlers in numbers,
the Arkanseyer replies that bears do not go about in crowds, but
adds, "...the way they scampers about in pairs and single ones is
edifying." In addition, his comparisons are always vivid. The
sentence quoted above in which Baggett says his dog knows a bear's
ways like a horse jockey knows a woman's will serve as one example,
as will the comparison of the bear's walking through the fence to a
tree falling through a cobweb. All the frontiersman's speech is
full of such comparisons. He describes the actions of the bear in
his greatest hunt with two that are quite complete in the finality
of the picture they present.

On he went, until he came to a tree, the limbs of
which formed a crotch about six feet from the ground. Into
this crotch he got and seated himself, the dogs yelling
all around it; and there he sat eyeing them as quiet as a
pond in low water. A green-born friend of mine, in company,
reached shooting distance before me, and blazed away, hitting
the critter in the centre of his forehead. The bear shook
his head as the ball struck it, and then walked down from
that tree as gently as a lady would from a carriage.

The names of the places and objects mentioned, too, show the
imagination of the American frontier at work. The hunter himself
is called the Big Bear of Arkansas. His dogs are Bowie-knife and
Countess. Localities he mentions in Arkansas are the Hurricane
and Bloody Crossing. Finally, his own settlement is located at one
of the prettiest places on old Mississippi, Shirt-tail Bend. Such
names combine humor and realism, and the frontiersmen used them
everywhere. Shirt-tail Bend, for example, though not on the Missis-
sippi, does (or did) actually exist on the Bayou Meta, near Lonoke,
Arkansas. 65 Hurricane is in north Louisiana. These names Thorpe
took because of their propriety and rearranged geographically ac-
cording to artistic necessity.

65 James R. Masterson, Tall Tales of Arkansaw (Boston: Chapman
Generally, the humor of the piece is not physical. It does not depend on bodily discomfort, the failure of weapons, or the collapse of furniture. On the contrary, it is a humor of character. The interest of the tale lies in the person of the Big Bear of Arkansas, who is representative of the frontier type. He is amusing because his language is coarse and direct when that of polite society was refined to abstract generalities. His life is sufficiently adventurous, but in telling of it he exaggerates. He is boastful when polite society is modest. He is self-reliant, an individualist, himself at ease with himself even when he is aware how much he deviates from the accepted pattern. In his individualism there is a touch of the romantic concept of the natural man. The author sees him at the end as a child of the wood. Thus he is presented at three levels. First he is seen as the butt of the jokes of the cynical New Orleans cheats. Second he is seen as the author's child of nature. And most elaborately, he is seen in action as the American frontiersman.

Whatever the point of view of the observer, the presentation in each case is realistic and full of local color. The framework description of the river boat is realistic in its picture of the heterogeneous character of the travellers on the Mississippi in 1840. The details of the hunt are authentic. Jim Doggett, whether he ever existed or not, is a far more believable character than the
actual Davy Crockett of the Sketches and Eccentricities and the other books. The character of Crockett is a folk creation only beginning with the real Crockett. He is one of the demigods of the frontier. Doggett is not a folk creation. He is a character realistically and formally presented for the literate and sophisticated audience of the New York Spirit of the Times. Doggett is one of the folk, and, consequently, through his character the folk element enters the tale. He introduces the fabulous in hunter, dog, and prey. But it is through Thorpe's skillful literary development of the elements of humor, folk fantasies, realism, and local color that he achieves dramatic unity in the presentation of the frontiersmen. 66

It is obvious from the emphasis which Thorpe gives Jim Doggett's reactions to the bear and from his final comment that the creature was no ordinary bear, either to the hunter or in the author's use of him in the story. The pursuit of the fabulous beast is an ancient motif in folklore, and one frequently used in the oral tales of the American backwoods. 67 The bear serves as a symbol of the powerful and malignant forces of nature which the frontiersman had to face daily. The Ariadneoyer states boldly the pioneer's alternatives in his struggle. "...I determined to catch that bear, go to Texas, or die...."


67 Ibid., p. 163.
A man had to conquer whatever wasted his land, or be conquered himself.

Constance Rourke in *American Humor* has noted the parallel between the basic conflict of "The Big Bear of Arkansas" and *Moby Dick*:

In *Moby-Dick* this many-sided diabolism reached an ultimate culmination. Its concern is with one of those illusionary marked creatures of the natural world, magic and powerful, which had often appeared in western legends of the jet-black stallion or the white deer. In one of his descriptions of the whaler Melville spoke of the White Steed of the Prairies, "most famous in our Western annals and Indian Traditions." Among the tall tales of the West was one which ran close to the main outline of *Moby Dick*, describing the comic adventures of a backwoodsman who sought a fabulously large bear, the Big Bear of Arkansas, in revenge for depredations. 68

Although Melville knew America's frontier humor, there is no evidence that he used the fabulous bear story in any way. The parallel lies in the basic concept and is only general, but it serves to emphasize that Thorpe was dealing with a universal conflict and that he used valid symbols to tell his story.

In all the body of frontier literature, "The Big Bear of Arkansas" is the masterpiece of its kind, created from the momentary equilibrium attained by the meeting of two traditions. Thorpe's literary and artistic background had been in the romantic tradition, and he was aware of the search for the American character and of the belief that the conditions of the frontier would bring it forth. He knew the work of Cooper and Irving, both of whom had written of the frontier and its

guides and hunters in the romantic mode. Upon this conventional
background of the educated man, a second tradition had been imposed
through his work for William Trottter Porter's *Spirit of the Times*.
Before he knew Porter, he knew the Crockett books, and from his
acquaintance with the *Spirit* he became aware of the vigor and variety
of the new frontier literature based on the realism of personal ob-
servation, on humor, and on the use of local color. His own best
sketch was written for the *Spirit* and thus immediately in the second
tradition, but it was done against the background of the first, so
that his sketch is primarily a character study and the Big Bear
emerges not as a rogue and not as an object of satire but as a
strongly marked individual, humorous because his own mode of address
is comic, self-reliant because the conditions of his life demanded
it, easy and frank because he was free and independent, and withal
a little heroic. He is the first ideal frontiersman done in the
realistic tradition.
CHAPTER III

The Reporter of the Old Southwest

When "The Big Bear of Arkansas" was printed in March of 1841, nothing quite like it had appeared in American letters. It invited innumerable imitations and became the type-specimen of the species. The Big Bear was the symbol of the new Western man. Lacking the reserve of Matty Bumppo, he did not know his place, but was the frank and open equal of every man he met--something of a Whitman-esque creation of the democratic age of the common man.

New as he was, the literary modes that went into his creation--realism, local color, and the frontier humor of tall-talk--were not innovations in 1841. William Byrd of Virginia had described the backwoodsmen of Lumberland, Cooper had romanticized the pathfinder, and the tall-talking frontiersman had appeared on the stage as early as the 1820's. Noah Liblow, a well known comedian, had flattered the Kentuckians and riverboatmen at that time by impersonating in a New Orleans theatre one of the fabulous, half-horse, half-alligator men who manned the broadhorns on the Ohio and the Mississippi. Colonel

1Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1932), p. 256.

Nimrod Wildfire of Paulding's *The Lion of the West*, 1831, was also a representative of the type, and he, too, was played in the theatre, by James H. Backett. The beginnings of the characters, the materials, and some of the literary conventions of the new literature were being formed by the mid-1830's.

Two of the characteristics of the humor of the Old Southwest to be introduced thus early were the use of realism and the use of popular or folk lore. Thorpe revealed in the opening paragraph of "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" that he knew some of the Crockett anecdotes. Davy Crockett was the most popular and the most fully developed of the folk heroes of the frontier. From 1833 to 1836 at least four volumes and numerous editions devoted to his adventures had been published in the United States and England. By 1835 the endless series of Crockett Almanacs was begun. In these tales the frontier humor of exaggeration and the folk element of the fabulous reached their most fantastic heights. Parts of the purportedly autobiographical books may have been dictated by Crockett, and they surely do contain many authentic details of his career. He was a colorful and unique character. His life was large, free, and

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3 Ibid.

adventurous. As a result, he became a symbol to the East of what the frontier character was and what life in the Western forests was like. The popular imagination appropriated him, and the myth-making faculty of the day, as F. O. Matthiessen has pointed out, transformed him to fabulous proportions. Some of the myths which grew up about Davy as a folk hero are not only fantastic but also grotesque. In one of the tales of the Crockett Almanacs, Davy woke up one January morning to find it so cold that the earth had frozen on its axis, and the sun, jammed between two cakes of ice, could not rise. So Davy, to save human creation, walked up Peak O'Day and Daybreak Hill, squeezed hot bear oil on the sun and the earth's axis, "... give the earth's cog-wheel one kick backward till I got the sun loose--whistled 'Push along, keep movin'!' an' in about fifteen seconds the earth gave a grunt an' began movin'. The sun walked up beautiful, salutin' me with such a wind o' gratitude that it made me sneeze." Plain Davy Crockett, backwoods politician, ended in folk literature as a frontier demigod.

The Crockett stories comprise a rather large cycle and contain a heterogeneous mass of material. Among the actual events of Crockett's life, they record his historical enmity with Andrew Jackson and contain some political satire, though this is no prevailing

7 Quoted in Walter Blair, Native American Humor, p. 286.
mood as it is in Seba Smith's Jack Downing letters, which began in 1830. Like the tale of Crockett's freeing the frozen sun, the other stories about him contain many folk myths. More important, however, the tales collected around Crockett's character add a number of qualities to the frontiersman as a type, and expand and emphasize earlier developments. He treats dangerous situations humorously, his language is less than genteel, and he boasts of his prowess by comparing himself to an animal. These speeches of boastful exaggeration develop into set pieces. Curiously, among his characteristics, all ferocious, he is, with incongruous coyness, "the yeller blossom of the wilderness."

Crockett was something of a picaresque wanderer, particularly as he was portrayed in Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas (1836), and during his travels he meets many frontier types—the Mississippi riverboat gambler, the bee-hunter, the backwoods politician, tavernkeepers, usually grasping and sometimes gullible, Yankee traders, and a host of others. Descriptions of nature and local color are rare. The stories are tales of character and action in the American West of the early nineteenth century.

Many of the tales and sketches that Thorpe wrote were accounts of anecdotes he had heard, as he probably had heard the Big Bear tell his story on a Mississippi steamboat. But though he mentioned Crockett

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from time to time, he never wrote any tale of this hero. It may be
that Thorpe knew of Crockett only what he read in books or newspaper
sketches. From these printed sources he could learn something of
frontier types, something of frontier society, and could see frontier
tall-talk transcribed. But better, he occasionally had opportunities
to observe about him at first hand these types, this society, this
talk.

The writers of some of the Crockett books, no doubt poor-devil
authors eager to turn a penny, took material from other writers in
the field. Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas includes
an episode lifted bodily, wording and all, from the sketch. "Georgia
Theatrics" in Longstreet's Georgia Scenes, which was first published
in book form in 1835.9

Augustus Baldwin Longstreet introduced into the literature of the
Old Southwest the conscious use of faithful realism as a consistent
literary theory. Longstreet was a Southerner but, like Thorpe, he
had been educated in New England, at Yale, and during his long life
he was lawyer, legislator, judge, editor, and college president--
first at Emory, then at Centenary in Louisiana and later at the Uni-
versity of Mississippi.10 He began his sketches in 1832, but most of

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9Colonel Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas (London:
R. Kennett, 1837), p. 17.

10See John Donald Wade, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet (New York:
The Macmillan Co., 1924).
them appeared during 1834 in the Augusta State Rights Sentinel, a
small weekly, and they were gathered into a volume and published
at Augusta in 1835, and by Harper and Brothers of New York in 1840,
and ran through at least eleven editions.  

In the preface to the first edition, Longstreet outlined his
literary theory quite clearly.

The following sketches were written rather in the hope
that chance would bring them to light when time would give
them an interest, than in the belief that they would afford
any interest to the readers of the present day. I knew,
however, that the chance of their surviving the author would
be increased in proportion to their popularity upon their
first appearance; and, therefore, I used some little art in
order to recommend them to the readers of my own times. 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; usually real, but happening at different
times and under different circumstances from those in which
they are here represented. I have not always, however, taken
this liberty. Some of the scenes are as literally true as
the frailties of memory would allow them to be.

Almost without exception, the literature of the Old Southwest is
based on actual fact, grounded in personal observation. Longstreet
says some of his realism is literally reportorial, just as Thorpe's
Big Bear seems to have been drawn directly from life. Longstreet
reserves for himself as an artistic necessity the right to put his
real incidents and characters together in fanciful combinations, just

11 Blair, Native American Humor, p. 187.
as Thorpe rearranged his local geography and, no doubt, other parts of his tale for "The Big Bear of Arkansas."

The "little art" that Longstreet used is his obeisance to the demands of the readers of the time. His style, as Poe pointed out in a review of the book in The Southern Literary Messenger, March, 1836, echoes that of the Spectator. This influence is shown not only in the rhetorical cadences of the sentences but also in the interest in odd characters and the insistence on moralizing which Judge Longstreet often indulges in at the beginnings and endings of his tales. Each sketch usually opens with some kind of a formal introduction, in a carefully literary prose—not the best Addisonian, but Addisonian nevertheless. The prose of the openings and closings is generally slow, more appropriate to the essay than to the short story. But these introductions are short, and once the narrative is begun, it is skillfully handled. Both Thorpe and Longstreet suffered somewhat from the too carefully mannered in their literary styles, though in different ways, and both showed how the conventional styles of the time could be strengthened and invigorated by the vernacular.

The element of realism in Longstreet's work was pervasive. It

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12 Blair, Native American Humor, p. 76.
included character, incident, language, and scene. Much of this was offensive to the taste of the mid-century, and he apologized at the end of his preface to the first edition for what would be considered his improprieties:

I cannot conclude these introductory remarks without reminding those who have taken exceptions to the coarse, inelegant, and sometimes ungrammatical language which the writer represents himself as occasionally using, that it is language accommodated to the capacity of the person to whom he represents himself as speaking.

Low characters might be suffered in some circles to speak an ungrammatical language, but the reader wanted to be assured that the writer who observed these creatures was a gentleman.

Longstreet did attempt to reproduce the language appropriate to his characters. Fat John Fulgar won a prize in "The Gender Pulling," and asked that the hatful of small coins be brought to him. "...let your uncle Johnny put his potato stealer (hand) into that hat and tickle the chins of them are shiners a little! Oh you little shining sons o' bitches! Walk into your Mas' Johnny's pocket..."13 This kind of realism was quite forbidden in the polite letters of the period, and Donald Grant Mitchell says that the taboo against it had caused Georgia Scenes to be almost forgotten by the end of the century.14 But far earlier than this,

13 Georgia Scenes, p. 118.
14 Quoted in Wade, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, p. 317.
in the middle of the century, Thomas Chandler Haliburton decided that such language was too strong for Englishmen in the reign of Victoria the Good. For his three-volume *Traits of American Humor*, 1852, he changed Pat John's masculine endearment to "Oh you little shining critters." Only the critic who stubbornly perseveres in propriety will deny that Longstreet's language is the more appropriate.

Longstreet was a morally earnest person, and some of the sketches in *Georgia Scenes* have a didactic purpose. This most often appears in the tales dealing with middle class or planter society. The two most obvious examples, "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife" and "The Mother and Her Child," satirize habits of women--affectation, poor domestic management, the practice of using baby talk, and hypocrisy. This, too, reflects the Addisonian tradition. Longstreet did not always leave his moral to be inferred, but intruded his own person as author to express his disgust at the cruelty and barbarism of the ignorant country people, which, however, he seemed to enjoy describing in detail.

Thorpe had neither Longstreet's didactic motives nor his interest in the preservation of local customs as matters of historical interest. Rather he was interested immediately in defining and presenting the

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frontier character and life in the South and Southwest. From Longstreet and Crockett and the correspondents of the Spirit of the Times he had precedent for a fairly well developed realism and for the use of humor in treating the frontier characters. He differed from them in that his romantic literary background influenced both his style and his selection of material. He lacked the physical grossness which is a marked trait in Longstreet's work and is a frequent characteristic of the Southwestern humor. He did not treat violence either frequently or in much detail, and he avoided the representation of physical or moral ugliness. It is probably such rather subtle alterations in the humorous tradition as he found it that brought his work nearer to the standard literary pattern of the day and made his sketches more acceptable to the anthologists and the general book-reading portion of society.

Whether Thorpe read Longstreet or not, both men were aware through the response to their work of certain forces in the nation as a whole which were helping to create and sustain this new writing. A growing and literate public was eager to learn of the life in faraway parts of the United States. The backwoodsman and particularly the frontier settler were types of Americans who were interesting not only to themselves and their neighbors but also to readers in the older, more settled parts of the nation. Irving's Tour on the Prairies was an attempt to exploit and gratify this demand. Wealthy, discriminating Philip Hone recorded in his diary in April of 1835 the response of the comfortable
Tuesday, April 15, I passed a few hours delightfully in reading Irving's "Tour of the Prairies." It is of the very best kind of light reading. Killing buffaloes, hunting wild horses, sleeping every night on the ground for a whole month, and depending from day to day for the means of existence upon deer, wild turkey, and bears which the rifles of their own party can alone procure, are events of ordinary interest to the settlers in the great west, but they are matters of thrilling interest to the citizens who read of them in their green slippers before a shining grate, the neatly printed page illuminated by a bronze astral lamp.

Thus the audience for the literature of the western parts of the country included not only the readers of the innumerable local newspapers which published it, and not only the sophisticated sporting followers of The Yankee Blade, The Constellation, and the New York Spirit of the Times, but also part of the book-reading segment of the Eastern public.

Popular as the new literature was, its periodical publication (and here most of it began) brought little or no financial rewards to its authors. During the two years after the publication of "The Big Bear of Arkansas," from the spring of 1841 to the spring of 1843, Thorpe wrote almost a dozen sketches for the Spirit. Not a few of these were long and carefully worked out. For the work

16 Allan Nevins, editor, The Diary of Philip Hone (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1927), I, 155-156.
he received no pay from Porter at all. 27 His writing was done for his own pleasure and the gratification he gained from the approval of Porter and the readers of the Spirit of the Times. Apparently none of the men who wrote humorous tales for Porter's paper received any pay. The correspondents were all men who liked Porter, who enjoyed writing for his paper, and who wrote because they had the leisure to, and because it pleased them. They wrote what they liked. As a result, this literature has a great deal of zest. It can afford to make free with the conventions. It is buoyant, vigorous, and satirical.

From 1841 until the spring of 1843 Thorpe continued to live at St. Francisville in the Feliciana, writing for the Spirit, and painting pictures for the planters. For William R. Barrow of West Feliciana, Bennet Barrow's brother, he painted a picture called "A Louisiana Deer." The deer is the center of interest of the picture, of course, and Porter in reviewing the picture for his readers described the background as one of lush Louisiana foliage, magnolia blossoms, and

27None of Porter's personal notes to Thorpe printed in the columns of the New York Spirit of the Times suggest any payment for the work, nor do any of the letters of Thorpe show he was paid for his writing. Mr. Norris Yates, who is doing a doctoral dissertation at New York University on William Trotter Porter and the development of frontier literature, has examined many of Porter's letters, which have never been published, and he has found no evidence that Porter paid Thorpe for his work. He offered this information in a letter dated November 21, 1952.
"...solemn tresses of moss." As late as 1880 the critic S. G. W. Benjamin was to write that animal painting had been very little practiced in the United States. In this branch of the art, Thorpe must have been self-taught. He was again following his own interests in this pioneering, as well as taking advantage of the tastes of the planters.

Thorpe apparently wrote to Porter about having the picture published in his paper, and on July 10, 1841, Porter wrote in his column of notices to his correspondents that the picture would be gratefully received and held to Thorpe's order after an engraving had been made from it. He added that another picture of Thorpe's, "Mont du Mouz," would also be acceptable. Three months later he announced the arrival of the work. "T. B. T. of Louisians is informed that the painting arrived safe, and is now on exhibition at our office, where it is regarded as a very beautiful specimen of the art. It will be engraved for the "Turf Register."
The American Turf Register was another paper which Porter edited, devoted primarily to horse racing, as the title indicates. It also printed sporting sketches and a fairly large number of engravings.

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20* Spirit, XI, 217 (July 10, 1841).
Porter kept the painting in his office for almost a year, but finally, in July of 1842, possibly in reply to inquiry from Thorpe, noted in his column to correspondents that the picture was in the engraver's hands. He added that it was to be published in the Register and asked Thorpe whether he would send an article to accompany it. About two months later the announcement of the publication of the painting appeared. "American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine for November, 1842, William T. Porter, Editor.... The following is its embellishment. A Louisiana Deer, Engraved by A. Balbort from an original painting by T. B. Thorp. In the collection of William R. Barrow, Esq., of St. Francisville, La."23

S. C. W. Benjamin's Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch, published in 1880, shortly after Thorpe's death, makes but one reference to him as an artist, and that to his work as an animal painter. After noting that animal painting has been the weakest feature of American art, he mentions several painters who had achieved some proficiency. "Colonel T. B. Thorpe, an amateur with artistic tastes, in such semi-humorous satires as 'A Border Inquest,' representing wolves sitting on the carcass of a buffalo, struck a vein peculiarly American in its humor...."24 The date of

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22 *Spirit*, XII, 217 (July 9, 1842).
23 *Spirit*, XII, 467 (Nov. 26, 1842).
24 Page 86.
this painting is not given, but it obviously unites Thorpe's interest in animal painting and his ability to comment humorously and satirically on frontier society. Frontier justice has often been romanticized, but it frequently meant little more than giving the appearance of legality to mob action. The free life was freest to the man who was fastest with his gun. The dispassionate observer could not help noting that there was occasionally something to be desired in the solemn inquests held over the bodies of the slain. Thorpe had, when he chose, a realistic eye for the unlovely in the untamed life of the wilderness.

Benjamin's observation that the painting was "peculiarly American in its humor" reveals that the sense of humor was accepted by the time he wrote as a national characteristic. In his use of humor, Thorpe did touch on a primary quality of the frontiersman's mode of address to his existence. Beyond this, throughout his work, Thorpe was interested in the "peculiarly American." Both his painting and his writing show his concern with whatever is unique and distinguishing in the American character, the American experience, and the American scene. Animals, landscapes, people and their actions all came under his observation. His reactions to such experiences were not usually in the abstract, in definition and speculation, but concrete, emotional, and immediate, expressing themselves in paintings and writings which are the reports of experience. The objective of American humor, Constance Rourke has said, "the unconscious objective of a disunited people--has seemed to be that of creating fresh bonds, a new unity, the semblance of a society
and the rounded completion of an American type." And Thorpe, a young man a little past twenty-five years old, of only moderate talents but sensitive to the intellectual stirrings of the times, was beginning to make his contribution to the national self-realization, to the creation of the American character.

Although he seems to have been primarily dependent upon his painting for his income, Thorpe continued to write sketches for the Spirit of frontier and backwoods life and character as he observed it along the Mississippi in the 1830's and 1840's. After the Crockett cycle and Longstreet's Georgia Scenes, Thorpe was the next important writer to add any considerable body of work to the literature of the Old Southwest, and he was not only a humorist but also a reporter of the West and South whose essays recorded the ways of the planters as well as the frontiersmen. Following "The Big Bear of Arkansas," Thorpe's next hit of writing to appear in the Spirit was another sporting sketch, "Woodcock Fire Hunting." The essay describes a method of hunting by night. The hunter is accompanied by another person bearing a long-handled,

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26 *Spirit*, XI, 103 (May 1, 1841).
shallow pan in which is kindled a brilliant fire. Stupified by the light the birds fly up from their roosting places as the hunters approach them, and can be shot in immense numbers. Bennet Barrow in his diary under the date of February 22, 1838, records, "Very cold; went fire hunting last night for Woodcock failure. Jn. Magrant with me." The technique was not peculiar to the Felicians, however, where Thorpe first witnessed it, but was apparently quite popular there for Timothy Flint also wrote about a fire hunt in the area in his Recollections of the Last Ten Years. Frederick Gerstaecker described using the same method to hunt deer on the Arkansas frontier, and there are numerous other reports of the sport in the literature of the West and Southwest. Today the use of lights in hunting is generally forbidden by game laws, but the technique is still practiced by poachers.

Thorpe's article was reprinted in the American Turf Register with quotations from the naturalists Audubon and Wilson defending the practice. It seems to have given rise to some controversy over whether or not it was sportsmanlike, for in the October 15, 1842,


29Wild Sports of the Far West, p. 172.
issue of the *Spirit* Thorpe wrote another piece entitled "A Defense of Woodcock Fire Hunting."30

Sketches describing hunts or telling about unusual techniques would be interesting mostly to the sportmen in Porter's audience, but these made up a good part of his readers, and Thorpe wrote several pieces on animals and hunting them. Porter published even inconsequential bits from Thorpe's pen on the subject. In "An Extra Deer Hunt in Louisiana" he printed extracts from a letter Thorpe had written him detailing the wild pursuit of an old deer which had long lived in one of the local planter's parks.31 The anecdote describes the hubbub of a confused chase which included children, dogs, Negroes, villagers, and everybody who saw the mob. The material could be amusing, but it is carelessly presented and not worked into any form at all.

"The First Hunting Trip of the Steamer 'Nimrod'" mentioned in the preceding chapter would be included in Thorpe's sketches of sporting experiences.32 Another one, "Opossums and 'Possum Hunting," appeared in December, 1841.33 Thorpe described the opossum and its

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30*Spirit*, XI, 386.

31*Spirit*, XI, 223 (July 10, 1841).

32*Spirit*, XI, 331 (Sept. 11, 1841).

33*Spirit*, XI, 469 (Dec. 4, 1841).
peculiar habits as something of a curiosity for readers who had never seen one. One of the episodes of the sketch, told to illustrate the animal's ability to feign death, is a humorous anecdote of an Irishman who thought he had killed one, and put it in his pocket. After a time the animal roused itself and bit the Irishman in his ischial tuberosity. The Irishman was already considered a humorous type because of his speech and excitable temperament, and Thorpe exploited both his personality and his dialect as comic devices. For another portion of the episodic essay, Thorpe quoted an old "backwoods Boanerges" who, in one of his sermons, compared the Christian to an opossum. For his illustration, the preacher observed that "...the world, the flesh, the devil compose the wind that is trying to blow you off the gospel tree. But don't let go of it, hold on to it as a 'possum would in a hurricane. If the forelegs of your passions get loose, hold on by your hind legs of conscientiousness; and if they get loose, hold on eternally by your tail, which is the promise, that the saints shall persevere unto the end." The anecdote is one of the earliest examples of a burlesque of a backwoods sermon, a device later to be used by other writers of the Old Southwest. The writers of such pieces, as here, satirize the frontier preacher's ignorance of the Bible and his uncouth language.

Possibly the most famous of the burlesque sermons was "The Harp of a Thousand Strings," published in the *Spirit*, September 29, 1855, where Porter prefaced it with the remark that he found it in a New Orleans
paper. It concludes, in praise of Baptists, with the same figure that Thorpe used fourteen years earlier. "And then, my brothering, thar's the Baptist, ah! and they hev bin likened unto a possum on a 'saimon tree, and the thunders may roll, and then the earth may quake, but that possum slings there still, ah! And you may shake one foot loose, and the other's thar; and you may shake all feet loose, and he laps his tail around the lim', and he clings fur ever...."

As early as 1840 a series of mock sermons was published in the New York Sunday Mercury by "Dow, Jr." (E. F. Paige), and the next year, 1841, they were collected and published in book form. "Dow's Patent Sermons" eventually became popular enough to warrant a four-volume edition by Peterson's of Philadelphia in 1857. It is possible that Thorpe knew Dow's sermons when he wrote his own sketch; he certainly knew them by 1847, when he was republishing them in his own newspaper. But wherever he got the idea, Thorpe's anecdote was an early use of the burlesque sermon applied to backwoods characters. From the sketch of the Irishman and the satirical sermon it is plain that Thorpe was taking stock comic characters and situations from the general newspaper literature of the time and applying them to circumstances in the backwoods.

34 Franklin J. Meine, *Tall Tales of the Old Southwest*, p. 233


36 *New Orleans Daily National*, December 2, 1847.
In addition to the sketches concerned with hunting, Thorpe wrote several essays descriptive of nature or of various incidents of Western life which he thought might be of interest to the readers of the *Spirit*. "Scenes on the Mississippi" is the report of some of Thorpe's observations of a group of Indians being moved further west by the United States government. Some two or three years before the writing, Thorpe states, he had taken passage on a boat bound from New Orleans to St. Louis which had been engaged by the government to carry four hundred Seminoles to lands west of the Mississippi. It was a melancholy sight, and Thorpe noted that the Indians were dispirited and broken-hearted. They lapsed into a mere vegetable existence on the boat, and would sleep through the entire twenty-four hours of the day. Of all the remarkable traits of character that dignify them in history, we could discern not the least one...," he observed.

The essay is divided into two parts. The first describes the death of an old chief, and the second the killing of a bear which had swum into the Mississippi. The chief was a very old man, and his body was merely the wreck of a once gigantic physique. As he died, he began a chant recounting his deeds as a warrior. After he was finished, he

37 *Spirit*, XI, 319-20 (Sept. 4, 1841).

38 This may be evidence that Thorpe made his trip to New York by taking a steamer up the Mississippi to St. Louis and then traveling overland to the Atlantic coast.
turned his face to the setting sun and died. "The Indians cast a
look in the direction of their homes, gave an expression of malignity,
as well as sorrow, and then silently and sluggishly sank into repose,
as if nothing had happened." The incident is a pitiful one, but
Thorpe records it without commenting on his own feelings toward the
events. In later work, Thorpe was to exploit the sentimental love
of tears, and the power to evoke the pathetic became one of his criteria
for measuring effective writing. But in this sketch, his approach is
objective, and so is more to the modern taste. In general, Porter's
tastes and the influence of the other writers for the masculine Spirit
were good antidotes for the sentimentalism Thorpe had inherited as a
part of the romantic tradition.

His description of the circumstances of the bear hunt which takes
up the second half of the essay is also restrained and not at all raptur-
ous. The boat had run aground, and Thorpe described the morning scene:

Long after our accustomed late hour of rising, we dressed
and went on deck. The fresh mist blew in our faces with
sickening effect, and the sun—then two hours high—was
invisible. The shore, which was so near that the break-
ing of twigs could be heard, as cattle, or game moved about
in it, was indiscernible. Even the end of the boat oppo-
site to the one on which we stood was in obscurity. A
deepest, damp, opaque Mississippi river fog, had swallowed us
up. As the sun continued to rise and gain strength in its
ascent, its rays penetrated through the gloom, and we at
last discovered it, looking about as brilliant as
illuminated cheese.

The nature descriptions in the sketch are not attempts to write beautiful
prose, and the writer does not indulge in the fallacy of attributing his
own moods and reactions to trees and clouds. After describing the scenery, he tells how a bear swam into the river and was pursued by the Indians. They wounded it, but did not succeed in killing it. Finally the animal was shot from the boat by a white hunter, who expressed his hatred for the Indians by saying that if he had missed the bear and hit an Indian he would not have been ashamed of the shot.

Another descriptive piece, entitled "A Storm Scene on the Mississippi," appeared on March 26, 1842. The sketch opens with a party of horsemen travelling through the forests on the lower Mississippi. As the afternoon advanced, the weather grew increasingly hot and oppressive, and the insects became even more annoying than usual. The old Indian guide accompanying the group told them that a storm was brewing. They finally reached a rude cabin on the edge of the Mississippi where they proposed to spend the night. The thunder and wind increased, and the lightning began to set trees afire, which soon were hissing in the falling rain. Meanwhile the party sat around the fire in the hut, listening to the old woodchopper tell stories of his youth as a flatboatman on the river.

The hut was far from waterproof, and during the miserable night no one could sleep. Finally, in the blackness before morning the Indian guide got the party out of the cabin just before the banks of the river crumbled and the building fell into the waters. Thorpe shifts from narration to exposition at the conclusion by ending the essay with a
description of how the Mississippi continually eats away at its banks. Again the material is intrinsically interesting but its organization is careless. However, the writing is good reporting for it is graphic and concrete in its portrayal of the scene and action. The essay also reveals the kind of experiences through which Thorpe gained material for his writing. The group sitting around the campfire with the woodchopper telling tales of a bygone day is a picture often repeated in his sketches. The adventure itself could be written up for the Spirit of the Times and perhaps the tales of the woodchopper retold.

Two weeks later, April 9, appeared "Romance of the Woods, Wild Horses of the Western Prairies." It is the account of events witnessed by a hunting party which camped near a large group of Osage warriors somewhere in the country at the headwaters of the Arkansas and Black Rivers. It is almost certain Thorpe visited Northwestern Arkansas and northern Texas with such a party, for he described parts of the area as an eye witness in several later sketches. Thorpe listed the various kinds of animals inhabiting the country—antelope, deer, turkey, bear, buffalo, and so on. But most of the essay described what magnificent creatures the wild horses were. One particularly fine specimen had been captured by the Indians, but the horse managed to throw every

brave of the tribe who tried to ride him. In the end a white hunter managed to ride the animal by tying a blanket across the saddle under which he could wedge his knees. When the horse rolled over, the rider stepped off, and as it got to its feet, he remounted. After the horse was almost exhausted, the hunter stepped from the saddle and suddenly threw the animal to the ground. When the horse stood up, Thorpe noted that "big tears rolled down his cheeks." The bridle and saddle were removed, and "he walked slowly off, to be found, by a singular law of his nature, associated with the pack of horses of the tribe, and waiting for the burdens of his master."

While Thorpe had echoed the romantic attitude toward nature in his "Primitive Forests of the Mississippi," this sketch was his first explicit use of the sentimental in his writing. For the earlier piece he had described the primitive grandeur of the forests of the lower Mississippi, noting their power to elevate the soul of man. Another aspect of the romanticism of the time was shown in the exploitation of the pathetic when the attention was shifted from nature to animals and people. The breaking of the wild spirit of the animal was occasion for regret; and the horse was pictured with tears on his "cheeks" as a visible sign of his anguish. The title too is significant of the literary tradition Thorpe drew on for the essay--"Romance of the Woods." Horse-breaking scenes done in the sentimental mood could have been intended only for the edification
of genteel readers.

The final sentence telling that the horse walked slowly off to join the pack animals "by a singular law of his nature" is probably also a part of the romantic view of the universe. It was a bit of unnatural natural history designed more to delight the reader's desire for order in nature than to inform him of the habits of newly broken horses. But these two sentences experimenting with the sentimental are only a small part of the whole essay, which is done in a calm, reportorial style. They stand out because they are subjective comments, because they represent the author's point of view when he does express his own reactions to the events. Thorpe's early life, his education, and his general reading had all impressed upon him the attitudes of the Romantics. For his humorous writings he had to depend on his own observations and experiences, and on his acquaintance with the Spirit and the few authors who wrote realistically about the Old Southwest.

If further evidence were necessary of how complete Thorpe's knowledge of the romantic and sentimental tradition was at the time he was writing his humorous sketches for the Spirit, it is abundantly offered in a tale which appeared in The Knickerbocker in October, 1842, entitled "Place de la Croix."\(^{40}\) The opening of the piece is in the

\(^{40}\text{B. Thorp [sic], "Place de la Croix," The Knickerbocker, X, 364-70 (October, 1842).}\)
standard literary mood of the day as it was maintained in the good
national magazines.

There is much of beautiful romance in the whole
history of the early settlements of Florida. De Soto
and Ponce de Leon have thrown around the records of their
searches for gold and the waters of life, a kind of dreamy
character that renders them more like traditions of a
spiritual than of a real world.

The hero, Rousseau, was a despondent wanderer in the new world who,
at the point of death in the wilderness, fell at the foot of a great
cross which the Spaniards had erected to overlook the Mississippi.
Here he was found by a delicate Indian maiden, who nursed him back
to health. His experience decided him to accept again his duties
toward the church he had left, and he determined to spend the rest
of his days ministering to the Indians. The romantic tradition frowned
upon unions between Europeans and the darker races; so Chechoula, the
Indian maiden, continued to love him with a pure love. Complication
entered when she refused a suitor among her people, who, in revenge,
killed Rousseau.

For this particular sketch, Thorpe expressed an attitude toward
the history of the Spanish occupation which was thoroughly romantic.
His observation of the conventions of the relationship between European
men and Indian maidens was wholly in the genteel manner of polite letters.
The style, the sentiment, the exploitation of the pathetic were all
romantic. Obviously Thorpe had prepared the piece carefully for the
Knickerbocker audience, and knew from his own literary background
precisely what he was supposed to do.

Thorpe was widely enough read to be aware of the literary fashions of the day, and he had a journalist's willingness to accommodate himself to his audience. For the *Nickerbocker* he wrote romantic nature descriptions and sentimental tales of love. For the *Spirit*, too, he sometimes wrote romantically, but, more often realistically and humorously, probably because he took pleasure in the latter mode. He was a romantic by training and may possibly have been prompted by the practical consideration that romanticism was the respectable literary fashion, but his own temperament welcomed enthusiastically the new modes of humor and realism.

Along with his hunting sketches and his descriptions of nature and scenes in the West, Thorpe wrote three more humorous tales during this two-year period ending early in 1843. The first, "A Piano in Arkansas," appeared in the *Spirit of the Times* for October 30, 1841. Of all Thorpe's writing, this piece is most closely related to the work Longstreet had done, for it is a satire on frontier village life and the pretensions of the backwoods sophisticate. Although Colonel Crockett had passed through Arkansas on his way to Texas in 1835 and recorded some of his adventures with the natives in the *Exploits and Adventures*

*Spirit* XI, 409-10 (Oct. 30, 1841).
this is the first elaborate social comedy turning on what was eventual-
yly to become the legendary ignorance of the Arkansawyer.

The scene opens in the village of Hardscrabble 42 just as the
natives are excited to learn that a real piano has arrived with a
family from somewhere north. What it was the good people did not
know, but from a stray volume of Captain Marryat's Diary 43 they learned
that he had seen one in New England with pantalettes on; therefore it
must have legs. Public opinion was in favor of its being an animal,
though a harmless one, for some of the citizens had seen advertisements
in foreign papers indicating that young ladies at a "Female Academy"
learned the use of the piano. The excitement mounted, and in the midst
of it, "...one or two old ladies, presuming upon their age and respect-
ability, called upon the strangers and inquired after their health, and
offered their services and friendship...." Of the piano they learned
only that the damp had injured its tones and one of its legs had been
broken so that it could not stand up. The news caused the old ladies
to click and exclaim their sympathy, but still it was not sufficient
to resolve the mystery.

Within two days the one man of the village who could solve the
riddle returned, Mo Mercer, the son of "old Mercer" who was in the

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42 Hardscrabble, like Shirt-Tail Bend, actually exists. It is a
community about 15 miles southwest of Little Rock. See James R. Masterson,
Tall Tales of Arkansas, p. 338.

43 Probably Frederick Marryat's A Diary in America, with Remarks on
its Institutions (1834).
Senate. No had been twice to the Capitol with his father and, consequently, was a man of infinite sophistication, intimate with the most refined elegancies of fashionable society. He received the news with unruffled calm and explained that the piano was a musical instrument, adding that he had seen more pianos in Little Rock than ever he had seen woodchucks. Ladies played the thing, he said, and the way "... the deer creepers could pull music out of it was a caution to hoarse owls."

The audacious No and his "wheel horse," Jim Cash, called on the newcomers but found no one at home. However, they did discover on one end of the gallery a strange machine surmounted by bars and rollers and an enormous crank. At Cash's anxious inquiry, No informed him coolly that he was looking at the piano. Cash moved the crank and the machinery grated harshly.

"What delicious sounds," said Cash.
"Beautiful," observed the complacent Mercer, at the same time seizing Cash's arm, and asking him to desist, for fear of breaking the instrument or getting it out of tune.

Eventually the new family decided to give a grand party to return some of the kindness they had been shown by the hospitable villagers. Everyone was invited; everyone accepted; and the excitement was immense at the prospect of seeing and hearing the elegant new instrument. "...the supper was passed over with a contempt that rivals that cast upon an excellent farce, played preparatory to a dull tragedy in which the star is to appear." No was at his scintillating best; Cash and
several young ladies grew hysterical at his wit. Eventually Mo, at
the impertinence of his friends, asked Miss Patience to favor the
company with a little music on the piano. "Oh that Beau Brummell,
or any of his admirers, could have seen Mo Mercer all this while!
Calm as a summer morning, and as complacent as a newly-painted sign;
he smiled and patronized, and was the only unexcited person in the
room...." When the piano was revealed—the company had thought it
was some kind of a thick table—Cash wanted to know what the instru-
ment was that Mo had shown him on the gallery. Miss Patience blushed
to admit it was a Yankee washing machine. The revelation ended Mo
as the social arbiter of Hardscrabble.

The central device, mistaking a washing machine for a piano, is
a crude one, but suitable to the kind of life the backwoodsmen led.
Indeed, this part of the plot may well not have been invented by Thorpe,
for the failure to recognize a piano while pretending familiarity with
it is part of American folklore. But Thorpe's satire on the igno-
rance of the villagers is rather gentle, and he does not fail to
mention their kindness and friendliness. Even his treatment of the
ridiculous Mercer is far from splanetic. There is no evidence in
the work, as there is in Longstreet's, of any desire to reform. The
primary aim of the author seems to have been to reveal the characters
and to provoke the reader to laughter. Such marked detachment or

indifference to the most ahsymal human shortcomings is characteristic of much of the literature of the Old Southwest, and is in marked contrast to the moral earnestness of the New England writers.

Technically this story is different from Thorpe's other work. The plot is rather carefully worked out, and, although the reader suspects what the outcome will be, the suspense is maintained by preparing Mo for his downfall. The author does not reveal himself as observer and commentator; instead, the point of view is omniscient. The piece is, as a matter of fact, not a sketch, but a short story.

For his next tale of Western life, Thorpe chose as his hero the mighty Mike Fink, next to Davy Crockett the most important of the heroes of frontier tall tales. Like Crockett, Mike was a real person—to begin with—and he had flourished in the early years of the century when the keelboats and broadhorns carried passengers and freight down the Ohio and the Mississippi. Mike, too, had appeared in print. In 1829 a gift annual, the Western Souvenir, was published at Cincinnati, and in it had appeared "The Last of the Boatsmen," signed "N" and later ascribed to Morgan Neville. The sketch describes the author's meeting Mike on the river between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati and witnessing a shooting match in which Mike shot a tin cup of whiskey off the head of his younger brother. The deed was not only a test of skill, but a more or less common event in the frontier life of the time. Appropriately, the successful execution of the shot was followed by drinks all around,
paid for by the man who had wagered it could not be done. Neville concluded his sketch by saying that he had asked about Mike a few years later at New Orleans and had learned that he had been shot in a fight somewhere up the Missouri. Thus by the time Thorpe wrote of him, Mike had been dead close to twenty years. The tale he told might well have been one he had heard at some hunters' campfire at night, or maybe the old woodchopper, who himself had been a boatman, had recounted it at the fire during the night the travellers' cabin was washed into the Mississippi.

Thorpe's story was entitled "The Disgraced Scalp Lock, or Incidents on the Western Waters," and it attempted to recall the character of a day that was already gone. He noted that one could still see on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers older men who were singularly powerful and striking in appearance.

The manner, the language, and the dress of these individuals are all characteristic of sterling common sense, the manner modest, yet full of self-reliance; the language strong and forcible, from superiority of mind rather than from education, the dress studied for comfort rather than fashion; on the whole, you instantly become attached to them, and court their society. The good humor, the frankness, the practical sense, the reminiscences, the powerful frame, all indicate a character at the present day extinct and anomalous....

The description showed some idealization of the frontier character and was another attempt on Thorpe's part to define the type of the Western

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[45] SPIRIT, XII, 229-230, (July 16, 1842).
American.

The development of such unusual characters he attributed in part to the necessities of their environment. Great strength was required of the riverboatmen, for only physical force could overcome the swift waters of the Western rivers. Courage was necessary, for the Indians still waited in the forests for the weak and the unwise. The threat of the savages and of renegades meant that the boatmen had to share the frontier warrior's ability at rough and tumble fighting and his skill with the rifle and the knife.

It is no wonder, then, that they were brave, hardy, and open-handed men; their whole lives were a round of manly excitement; they were, when most natural, hyperbolical in thought and deed, if compared with any other class of men. Their bravery and chivalrous deeds were performed without a herald to proclaim them to the world—they were the more incidents of a border life, considered too common to attract attention, or outlive the time of a passing wonder. Death has nearly destroyed the men, and obscurity is fast obliterating the record of their deeds; but a few examples still exist, as if to justify the truth of these wonderful exploits, which now live almost exclusively as traditions.

It is plain that Thorpe desired not only to define the Western American, but also to rescue from oral tradition the mighty exploits of a disappearing race of men, for if they were not preserved in print their deeds would soon be forgotten. He chose Mike Fink because Mike by tradition was the greatest of the riverboatmen, the symbol of a type not to be found in the work of Cooper or in the Crockett books.

The conception of the character of Mike is somewhat romanticized in the opening portion of the sketch. "Wild and uncultivated as Mike
appeared, he loved nature, and had a soul that sometimes felt, while
admiring it, an exalted enthusiasm." Furthermore, Thorpe wrote that
Mike noted with sorrow the "desecrating hand of improvement" along
the river. He lamented the appearance of the squatters and the rise
of towns. "Who ever found wild buffalo, or a brave Indian, in a city?
Where's the fun, the frisking, the fighting? Gone! Gone!"

Once he has done with explaining what kind of a person Mike
was, Thorpe begins the action of his tale with an account of a deed
of senseless cruelty which was possibly more characteristic of his
hero than was the soul full of exalted enthusiasm he imagined the
bootsmen as possessing. Mike, spoiling for a fight in one of the little
towns where his boat had tied up, taunted a group of shiftless renegade
Indians but failed to provoke any of them to action. Among the group
of outcasts was one called Proud Joe, who in spite of his careless,
drunken habits was taciturn and haughty. As Mike's boat pulled away,
Joe stood on the bank above in such a way that he was outlined against
the sky. Mike seized his rifle, aimed at Joe's head, and fired. The
Indian fell to the ground, and a group of townspeople who saw the deed,
indignant at such a cold-blooded murder, rushed toward the boat. Mike,
taking his rifle in one hand and his powder horn between his teeth,
leaped into the river to escape them, but they pursued in boats, and
he escaped only after threatening to shoot one of them. Meanwhile, to
everyone's surprise, Proud Joe had risen from the ground, and the onlookers
discovered that Mike had not shot him, but had severed his scalp-lock at the point where the hairs were tied together in a tuft. From being a murderer, Mike was suddenly transformed into a hero for a rifle shot which established him ever afterward as the unrivalled marksman of all the flatboatmen of the Western waters.

Proud Joe disappeared unnoticed by the townspeople, but to his associates he vowed vengeance, for the taking of the scalp-lock while its owner lived was the greatest disgrace which could befall an Indian brave. All other ignominy he had suffered, but this he would not bear.

Mike, unaware of what had happened, fled through the forests down the river until he was picked up several days later by his companions on the flatboat. He was satisfied to learn that his shot had turned out as he intended, but was quite indifferent to the fact that Proud Joe was not dead.

More than a month later and several hundred miles down the Mississippi the boat tied up one night to allow the crew to sleep. Long after all was quiet on the boat, a band of Indians leaped whooping aboard, and in the ensuing fight one of the boatmen and one of the Indians were killed. The men expressed nothing but delight with the fight, for conflict seemed to be a necessary part of their existence, and it was not until the next morning that they discovered the cause of the attack. The dead Indian was Proud Joe. He had travelled nearly a thousand miles through the forests with a group of friends to avenge
the insult to the sacred scalp-lock.

The fact that Mike's best shot had cost the life of one of his companions was a matter of no concern to the boatman, whose attitude provides a measure of the wild and desperate character of the life at the time. Happily, Thorpe made no comment at the end beyond the revelation of the cause of the final action. The introductory section showed his effort to characterize the group for which Mike would serve as symbol. He called them chivalrous and attributed to them an attitude toward nature which Bryant and Cooper and the Hudson River School of painters were defining for the United States. But the adventure he recorded, which he probably took from oral tradition, emphasized a harsher life than seems wholly congruent with the refined sensibilities shown in the delight in picturesque scenery. Thorpe's work again represented the meeting of the accepted literary tradition of the day with a new tradition—the tradition of realism rooted in close observation and in the utilization of popular lore.

In some of his nature sketches, the romantic point of view is fairly consistent throughout, as it is in "Primitive Forests of the Mississippi." In some of his tales of frontier life, such as "The Big Bear of Arkansas" and "A Piano in Arkansas," the realistic point of view is consistent. But in "The Disgraced Scalp-Lock" he mixed the two, shifting from romantic character delineation to the realistic report of action, and the Mike Fink with his soul full of exalted...
does not seem to be the same person as the brawling riverboatman who would kill Indians for sport. Thorpe began his writing with preconceptions concerning the powers of nature, and the characteristics of nature's children, and it was only Porter's taste for realistic humor, Thorpe's own use of popular lore, and his own observation of life in the Old Southwest that caused him to treat his material in a different way from that of the current literary mode. One result of this twofold point of view was that he never limited the body of material that he dealt with and he never achieved the unity of tone that Longstreet and the Crockett books show. Writing as he did chiefly for his own amusement and to oblige Porter and his audience, he seems never to have given any extensive consideration to the problem of how to present his material. He did not take it seriously, accepting the tale as a kind of subliterary form, and his attitude was that of the amateur, interested in experimentation and the superficial exploitation of novelty.

Thorpe's next sketch for the Spirit, "The Devil's Summer Retreat in Arkansas," comes very near being as good as "The Big Bear of Arkansas." It is not as carefully worked out as the earlier piece, however, and includes too much material for its length. It contains

\[46\] Spirit, XII, 295-96 (Aug. 20, 1842).
not only the description of a hunt by the main character, Bob Herring, the Arkansas bear hunter, but also the account of one Thorpe himself witnessed with a party in Arkansas which had Bob as its guide. What unity the sketch does have is achieved by having Bob tell his story to the author as the two sit at the fire, surrounded by sleeping hunters, and then having the two together the next day in an exciting and successful bear hunt. Thus the structure of the earlier sketch is reversed with the action of the hunt the point of emphasis and the character of Bob Herring only incidental. The piece opens with Thorpe's usual device, a description of the setting.

It is not expected that a faithful description of the Devil's Summer Retreat, in Arkansas, will turn the current of fashion of two worlds, from Brighton and Bath, or from Ballston or Saratoga, although the residents in the neighborhood of that delightful place profess to have oracular demonstration, as well as popular opinion, that his Satanic Majesty, in warm weather, regularly retires to the "retreat," and "there reclines in the cool." The solemn grandeur that surrounds the distinguished resort is worthy of the hero, as represented by Milton; its characteristics are darkness, gloom, and mystery; it is composed of the unrivalled vegetation and forest of the Mississippi Valley. View it when you will, whether decked out in all the luxuriance of a southern summer, or stripped of its foliage by the winter's blasts; it matters not, its grandeur is always sombre. The huge trees seem immortal, their roots look as if they struck to the centre of the earth, while the gnarled limbs reached out to the clouds.

Bob Herring's tale, told that night at the camp fire, was of a hunt in which he made a poor shot, cutting his bear through the hams in such a manner that the animal could only drag himself along by his forefeet.
"Stranger, the bar, as I have said, was on his hams, and
than he sat, waiting to whip somebody and not knowing
what to begin, when the two dogs that followed me came up,
and pitched into him like a caving bank. I knew the
result after the fight began; Brusher had his whole scalp,
ears and all, hanging over his nose in a minute, and Tig
was laying some distance from the bar, on his back, breath-
ing like a horse with the thumps; he wiped them both out
with one stroke of his left paw, and than he sat, knowing
as well as I did, that he was not obliged to the dogs for
the hole in his carcass, and than I stood, like a fool,
rifle in hand, watching him, instead of giving him an-
other ball."

The hunter recollected himself and fired again to save his pack
further destruction, but he missed. The bear then lunged for him
and backed him up against a bank, which he just managed to scramble
up out of the animal's reach. "If I ever had the 'nervous' that
was the time, for the skin on my face seemed an inch thick, and my
eyes had more rings in them than a mad wildcat's." Bob Herring's
third shot was successful, and he ended by observing that a good
hunter never fired until he was sure of his aim—a lesson for the
novice hunter, Thorpe.

The next day the whole group went hunting, and after many mis-
advantages in the cane brake, Thorpe came up on the bear which the
dogs had brought to bay, and gave his first description of a cornered
bear as he saw it with his own eyes.

A still nearer approach, and the confusion would clear off
for a moment, and the head of the bear could be seen, with
his tongue covered with dust, hanging a foot from his mouth;
his jaws covered with foam and blood, his eyes almost pro-
truding from their sockets, while his ears were so closely
pressed to the back of his head, that he seemed destitute of
those appendages; the whole indicative of unbounded rage and terror.

The descriptions of the killing of the bear continue in as vivid a vein, and the sketch ends with the feast of the hunters at camp that night.

The strongest points of the sketch are the graphic descriptions of the two hunts, and the characterization of old Bob Herring. The Big Bear of Arkansas had been somewhat boastful in his speech, although less of a tall talker than Davy Crockett was pictured as being, but Bob Herring is merely an old squatter who has lived so long in the breaks that he has become "...the ancientest inhabitant in the hull of Arkansaw." He is neither the romantic child of nature nor the extravagant yaller blossom of the forest, but belongs in the tradition of the realistic portrayal of the backwoodman.

Poor in flesh, his enormous bones and joints rattle when he moves, and they would no doubt have long since fallen apart, but for the enormous tendons that bind them together as visibly as a good-sized hawser would. Such is Bob Herring, who on a bear hunt will do more hard work, crack more jokes, and be more active than any man living, sustaining the whole with unflinching good humor, never getting angry except when he breaks his whiskey bottle, or has a favourite dog open on the wrong trail.

The contrast between Bob Herring and The Big Bear, both of whom Thorpe had seen, on the one hand, and Mike Fink on the other, whom Thorpe had created from oral tradition, clearly demonstrates that his strength lay in reporting what he himself had observed.

Through such honest realism he made his own small contribution to
the American frontiersman as a national type. The traits he saw in Bob Berring and the Big Bear were useful traits in a new and wild country, which could be used only after it had been conquered by men who were self-reliant, courageous, and willing to accept back-breaking labor as their lot. Such men lived in a wilderness where there was neither the opportunity nor the inclination to amuse themselves by bowling or racing on the green. When they had leisure, they restored their souls with what the country offered: they got drunk on bad whiskey, they fought, and they told tales of their own exploits which were as full of lies as they were of truths. If the symbol of the American frontiersman was to function in the national consciousness as a useful controlling image, it had to be renewed from time to time by contact with reality. To whoever was interested in knowing, Thorpe was reporting what the Western man was like. Matty Bumppo was not wholly satisfactory, nor was the West wholly populated with the off-scourings of the East—the thieves, murderers, and gamblers. There was room for an image in between, and Longstreet, Thorpe and others to follow them were beginning to complete the picture.

In the history of American Literature the work of Thorpe and Longstreet and their followers is important because it is the first developed realism in the national letters. It is the frontier and the backwoods described by men who knew them at first hand, and who tried to give some literary expression to the life and the people. The literature was born

\[47\] See Bernard DeVoto, *Mark Twain's America*, p. 91.
of the realities of its time and place, and in Thorpe it was strengthened
particularly by the folk art of the oral anecdote, which perhaps reached
its highest development in the United States on the Western frontier.\footnote{48}

Thorpe and Longstreet saw their way into books which had a wide circula-
tion in the country at large, and they were followed by a host of others
who established an extensive tradition which was to see its flowering
in Mark Twain.\footnote{49}

Samuel Clemens's first literary effort is a humorous
sketch contributed to a humorous newspaper. Its material is
the characteristic frontier life of Hannibal. It is typical
of the newspaper humor of the South and Southwest that was
the first vigorous realism in American Literature. It was
the sort of thing that Sam Clemens, printer's devil and
journeyman printer, had seen flourishing in the little
weeklies that came to the exchange desk. Its genre was the
native expression of the frontier. He began writing it
in his first experiment and he continued writing it all
his life.\footnote{50}

Melville, too, made use of the image that Thorpe was helping
to create. F. O. Matthiessen saw Ethan Allen in Israel Potter as
a character created from the new symbol:

...though born in New England, he exhibited no trace of
her character. He was frank, bluff, companionable as a
Pagan convivial, a Roman, hearty as a harvest. His spirit
was essentially Western; and therein is his peculiar American-
ism; for the Western spirit is, or will yet be (for no other
is, or can be), the true American one.\footnote{51}

\footnote{48} Ibid., pp. 92-93.

\footnote{49} Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 172.

\footnote{50} DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 91.

\footnote{51} F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance, p. 498.
No single figure in American literature embodied these characteristics more completely than did the Big Bear of Arkansas. Mike Fink and Bob Herring were variations on a theme. The pattern of the myth of the common man was being completed. Although the critics of polite letters were unaware of it, by the end of 1842 it was no longer possible to say, as Hugh Henry Brackenridge had said in Modern Chivalry in 1805, "The American has, in fact, yet no character; neither the clown nor the gentleman..." 52

In addition, the literature of the Old Southwest has its importance for history, for the body of it offers the most complete and circumstantial picture of frontier society available. It is not without significance that this literature flourished in the three decades of the common man following 1828. 53 Increased political power added impetus to the desire of the frontier to examine itself and to dramatize itself. Examining itself, amusing itself, and dramatizing itself, it created through its writers a body of material, oral and written, which omitted almost no aspect of the lives of men who manned boats on the Western rivers, hunted bears, and raised hogs and turnips in the wilderness.

Early in January of 1843, the second annual fair of the Louisiana

53Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 93.
Agricultural and Mechanics Association was held at Baton Rouge, and Thorpe came down from St. Francisville to exhibit four of his oil paintings. The Baton Rouge Gazette for January 6, 1843, announced, "In the fine arts, T. B. Thorpe, famous as the author of 'Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter,' took a premium for some noble specimens of painting."

James Maguire of New Orleans exhibited daguerreotypes, and A. T. Wood showed some water colors, but apparently Thorpe's were the only oils at the fair. He entered two portraits and two pictures of animals, one of a pointer dog, and the other of a Louisiana wildcat robbing a partridge nest. He also served as a judge of the fine arts exhibition. His companions, in awarding him a first prize, commented with pride on the propriety of the pictures he showed.

With all due regard for the feelings of Mr. Thorpe, his colleagues in committee deem it a duty to speak laudably of the subjects selected by him for exhibition. In addition to the merit of superior execution, they possessed the very remarkable merit of belonging strictly to the state. They were native subjects, the illustration of which is eminently calculated, not only to teach our citizens the natural resources of Louisiana for the encouragement of the arts and sciences, but also to elicit the talent of her sons and daughters, in works, the study of which, tends no less to embellish and adorn the mind, than does their happy execution to embellish and adorn our public and private saloons.\[sig\]

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54 Baton Rouge Gazette, Jan. 21, 1843.
55 Ibid.
To make the occasion doubly significant for young Mr. Thorpe, who was a Whig like most of his planter friends, Henry Clay was the distinguished guest. Thus Thorpe had a chance to meet the head of his political party, and was no doubt introduced as a talented artist and writer, for the occasion demanded it. Not only had he won first prize for his painting, but Tom Owen, the prototype of his best known story, was there and was introduced with pride to Henry Clay. He had been hired by a planter to drive a wagon down from the Felicians which contained what was shortly destined to become a famous hog—the largest native breed at the fair. Tom's fame was called to Mr. Clay's attention, and Tom replied by observing, "Mr. Clay, you are a great man." Then he pointed to himself and added, "and here is another great man." And finally he turned to his charge and continued, "And here's a hog that will outweigh both of us." Henry Clay was said to have laughed at this. Within a little while, Thorpe was making stump speeches for the Whig party.

Apparently, painting in and around the Felicians did not continue to provide sufficient income for Thorpe, his wife, and their little daughter, and his writing for the Spirit, however gratifying it may

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56 Baton Rouge Gazette, Jan. 14, 1843.

57 Reminiscences of Tom Owen, "Spirit, XXIX, 30 (Feb., 26, 1859).
have been in other ways, did not add anything to their support. Shortly after the fair, Thorpe seems to have formed some kind of a minor connection with the New Orleans Tropic, a well established Whig daily. The paper printed a sketch of his, "My First Dinner in New Orleans," written in the first person and purporting to describe an awkward mistake the author made in eating with a group of men in a hotel dining room only to discover that the affair was a private and exclusive game dinner. A little later he wrote for them "The Louisiana Law of Cock-Fighting." Nothing satisfactory came of Thorpe's relation with the Tropic, and by June of 1843 he had left New Orleans.

58 "My First Dinner in New Orleans By The Author of 'Tom Owen, The Bee Hunter'" was signed T. B. T. and dated St. Francisville, La., Jan. 1843. It was reprinted from the Tropic in the Baton Rouge Gazette, Feb. 18, 1843.

CHAPTER IV

EDITING A COUNTRY NEWSPAPER

By mid-June of 1843, Thorpe had left New Orleans and joined Robert Patterson as co-editor of the Concordia Intelligencer at Vidalia, Louisiana, where he was to live for the following two years, managing a country newspaper and also in the second year serving the town as postmaster. Sometime during 1844 or 1845 his son, Thomas, was born, and the needs of a growing family, no doubt, urged him to activities financially more predictable than painting. His free-lance writing made the shift to newspaper work natural enough, and it may be that all he had to offer Patterson, the owner of the Intelligencer, was his ability with the pen and his name and reputation as a humorist. And his appointment as postmaster at Vidalia on May 15, 1844, may well have been one of the rewards of his growing political activity. Also by the summer of 1845 he had prepared his first book for the press.

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According to the "Free Inhabitants of the City of Baton Rouge," original returns for the Census of 1850, p. 349, Thorpe's son, Thomas, was six years old on the enumeration day, Sept. 9, 1850.

A letter to the author dated November 4, 1952, from Thad Page, Chief Archivist, Legislative and Fiscal Records Branch, National Archives and Records Service, at Washington. Thorpe served until the appointment of his successor on July 31, 1845.

The Preface to The Mysteries of the Backwoods is dated from Louisiana, August, 1845.

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Altogether the period is one of an increasing diversity of activity, which characterized Thorpe's whole career.

He was a man of not inconsiderable talent, but he never concentrated his energies on painting, writing, editorial work, or politics, and as a result he was, in each field, only the gifted amateur. He was thoroughly a man of his time and he measured himself against the standards of his time; his desire was not to achieve but to succeed in the popular sense, and he sought always to discover what the public demanded of him and to adjust himself to its demands. The people of the turbulent 1840's, seeking to establish an American nationality, demanded conformity as one of the prices of their approval. The era consistently intermingled the aims of art, politics, morality, and business, and it refused eminence to writers and artists unless it approved of their opinions on subjects which it held much dearer than the aims of literature and art. Thorpe, for his own ends, sought to discover what the times demanded of him, and in his seeking helped to discover and to reveal the America of his time.

The newspaper of Thorpe's time had become a thoroughly popular institution, and as a result of the spread of literacy and of the newspapers' success in giving their readers what they wanted, the United States had, by the end of the first third of the century, a larger number of newspapers with a larger aggregate circulation

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than any other country in the world. The necessity to popularize
had also brought a shift in the concept of what made news from the
orderly presentation of important historical events to an increase
of local events, emphasis of sensational events, crime and sex,
and the appearance of human interest news—stories of persons who
were interesting merely as human beings. Another characteristic
of the newspapers of the time was their political partisanship,
which could scarcely be escaped, although, it should be added,
there was generally no desire to escape it. On the contrary,
political partisanship was frequently the prime reason for the
existence of many newspapers.

Into this national background the Concordia Intelligencer
fitted as a superior, conservative country newspaper. There are
only a few scattered copies of the early issues extant, but from
them it is possible to reconstruct in general the few years of its
history before Thorpe became associated with it. It had been
founded in June of 1841 and by September of that year B. C. Smith
was listed as owner. Sometime after this, Patterson acquired the

6 Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: The Macmillan
Co., 1941), pp. 167-68.

7 Ibid., p. 243.

8 Ibid., p. 215.
paper and was publishing it when Thorpe associated himself with it in June, 1843.

The paper was a large, well-printed four-page weekly, and the first prospectus stated that it was an "Independent Newspaper, devoted to Agriculture, News and Literature." The prospectus of the third volume, which began at the time Thorpe associated himself with the paper, set forth in some detail the objectives of the paper.

This Journal is strictly neutral in politics and devoted to Literature, Agriculture, the dissemination of useful intelligence.

As a Literary Journal, The Intelligencer will claim the attention of the reader, as it will be the object of its Editors to devote a large space of its columns to the current literature of the day, carefully avoiding that character of reading that combines only amusement, without utility; believing, as we do, that the region we live in offers as fine a field for useful literary labor, of a character original and peculiar to itself, and of local interest and importance to the community which is, we believe, vastly superior to the ordinary light literature of the day; while we shall, at the same time, offer our readers such portions as we may deem most interesting and important, from the works of authors of acknowledged literary merit connected with the Newspaper and Magazine literature, foreign and domestic.

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*Louisiana Newspapers*, prepared by the Louisiana Historical Records Survey, WPA, p. 223.

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11

Among the facts worth noting in the editors’ declaration of intention for their paper are the determination to be neutral in politics and the attention given to literature.

Political neutrality was not unusual for a Southern newspaper in 1843, for the party lines had not yet been drawn on a sectional basis; slavery and secession had not become the paramount issues they were shortly to be. Louisiana, and the Southern states in general, had at this time a workable two-party system which achieved in the early '40's a kind of equilibrium. The Whig party during the years of its origins, 1830 to 1835, was not much more in the South than an opposition party on a broad basis, hospitable to almost every anti-Jackson-Van Buren faction. While the South generally believed in a strict construction of the constitution and a maximum of state control, the cotton interests everywhere benefited from the commercial facilities of the National Bank, and in Louisiana the sugar planters could not exist without the protection of the tariff advocated by Clay in his American System. Thus while most


14 Ibid., p. 3.
newspapers were politically partisan, it was still possible and even at times profitable for an editor to remain free of party allegiance and merely support or condemn policies on the basis of their application to his own locality. Such vigilance for the interests of the cotton planters of Concordia Parish and the surrounding country explains the *Intelligencer*’s editorial of September 25, 1841, attacking Tyler’s veto of the bank bill.

The *Intelligencer* served an area almost wholly devoted to cotton planting, for its circulation was not limited to Concordia Parish, but extended west to Catahoula Parish, north through the present Tensas and Madison Parishes, and east into Mississippi in the area around Natchez. By the beginning of the fourth volume in June of 1844, the paper could announce that it had the largest circulation of all papers in Louisiana outside of New Orleans.

The population of Concordia Parish was not unlike that of the Felicianas which Therpe had left. The planters were Anglo-Saxon in race and Protestant in background. As early as 1806, just three years after the end of the Spanish regime, one of the parish historians has pointed out, the Spanish landholders could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and the French planters were no more

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nearly. Obviously, the Spanish grantees of the area had been mostly American colonists. Apparently, too, the planters were large slaveholders as a class, for the census of 1840 showed a white population of 1360 with 3003 slaves, and that of 1850 showed 832 whites and 6934 slaves.

Topographically, the area is much different from the Felicianas, for Concordia Parish is all flat delta land and swamps; and the village of Vidalis in 1843 was considerably smaller even than St. Francisville. The post office of which Thorpe was shortly to become postmaster had only recently been established. In addition, the town had a court house and a branch of the New Orleans Mechanics & Traders Bank. Actually, there was little reason for the town to expand, for it was located, as the masthead of the Intelliigencer weekly proclaimed, opposite the city of Natches, which stood high on its bluffs eastward across the Mississippi. Here on green, rolling hills stood the magnificent mansions of the great slaveholders who, in defiance of the world's moral judgment, lived elegantly on the fruits of an anachronistic labor system and a continuing exploitation.


17. Ibid., p. 35

18. Ibid., p. 67

19. Ibid.
of the soil, observing the conventions of a social system as beautiful and symmetrical as the rules of a tennis match. But as the writings of Longstreet, Thorpe, and the men who were to follow them made abundantly clear, the woods were full of another kind of Southerner, one who had no place in polite letters.

By lowering the gaze a little from the mansions, one could see, looking eastward from Vidalia, one of the haunts of Mike Fink and others of the demi-heroes of the Old Southwest. Natchez-Under-the-Hill. Davy Crockett visited here on his way to Texas in the mid-1830's, was impressed by the recreational facilities and asked Thimblerig, a Mississippi riverboat gambler, to write an account of the place, as he did in fruited prose.

Natchez is a land of fevers, alligators, niggers, and cotton bales; where the sun shines with force sufficient to melt the diamond, and the word ice is expunged from the dictionary, for its definition cannot be comprehended by the natives; where to refuse grog before breakfast would degrade you below brute creation; and where a good dinner is looked upon as an angel’s visit, and voted a miracle; where the evergreen and majestic magnolia tree, with its superb flower, unknown to the northern climes, and its fragrance unsurpassed, calls forth the admiration of every beholder; and the dark moss hangs in festoons from the forest trees like the drapery of a funeral pall; where bears, the size of young jackasses, are fondled in lieu of pet dogs; and knives, the length of a barber’s pole, usurp the place of toothpicks; where the filth of the town is carried off by buzzards, and the inhabitants are carried off by fevers; where nigger women are knocked down by the auctioneer, and knocked up by the purchaser: where the poorest slave has plenty of yellow boys,
but not of Benton's vintage....

Thus Crockett began his (or somebody's) description of Hatches about the time Alcott and Emerson were beginning to demand more realism, more racy and exuberance in the literary language of America, and Emerson himself spoke of the meal in the firkin, the milk in the pan. The Crockett books were not Literature, of course, but they and others like them were destined to have their effect on another Southern writer—Mark Twain. And Thorpe, in his newspaper work at Vidalia, was to have more opportunity to write outside the genteel tradition.

2

Thorpe's chance to report again on the Hunter, Nature Undeefiled, and the American Woodman began in Scotland, where Sir William Drummond Stewart, baronet, after travels in Russia, Circassia, the Holy Land, and Europe, conceived the plan for an expedition to the headwaters of the rivers flowing from the Rocky Mountains into the Mississippi. He planned to leave from Boston on the Missouri River sometime between the middle of April and the first of May, 1843, for the sources of La Platte and the Yellowstone. Sir William was familiar with Thorpe's writing, which by this time had been widely reprinted in the English sporting journals, and he sought

20 Col. Crockett's Exploits and Adventures in Texas. Written by Himself, p. 64.

him out in New Orleans early in the year and asked him to make one of the party. Thorpe, who was not a man of leisure, was compelled to decline, but George Wilkins Kendall of the New Orleans Picayune sent Mat Field along to report the expedition for his readers. Shortly afterward the public was treated to Field's accounts of the activities of the party, full of the romance of the wilds, tales of heroic endurance, and even--for the expedition turned out to be a complete literary success—a death pathetic enough to make a strong man sob.

Shortly after the expedition was on its way, Thorpe conceived the idea of writing for his own paper a series of burlesque reports of the party, purporting to be the work of a member. He wrote, in a not very consistent Irish dialect, from the venerable comic point of view of the man whose every effort to be like his fellows is solemn, sincere, and abortive. If his character tried to hunt the wild game of the prairie, his heroism degenerated into farce, his prudence into baldest cowardice, and his sentiment into the ridiculous.

Because he was writing for the male audience of a country newspaper, Thorpe was free to make fun of the standard literary treatment of the adventurous life in the Far West. This he could do with

22 Griswold MS.

some precision because he, in his Knickerbocker essays, knew the
conventions well himself, and had exploited the genteel public's
interest in the area, and satisfied its demands for pathos and
sentiment. During the course of the dozen letters printed between
the summer of 1843 and the early spring of 1844 he burlesqued the
extravagant adventures of hunting in the wilderness, satirized the
joys of the outdoor life, the frequent appearance of fabulous
animals in Western literature, the idea of the noble savage, and,
in addition, took occasion to make fun of numerous minor follies
of nature lovers and explorers. He captioned his reports "Letters
From the Far West," and signed them "P. O. F."

The first letter solemnly described the Crow Indians, commented
on certain philological questions, noted the difficulties of travel-
ing, and told anecdotes about various members of the expedition,
including Audubon, who was, in fact, a member of the party. He
offered also an etymology of the sort dear to the traveller in
strange lands:

The name "Yellow Stone" is a corruption of the Indian title
"Yalhee Stone," literally, "the running water with green

24 Only two of these letters are available in the extant copies
of the Concordia Intelligencer, one in the Nov. 25 and one in the
Dec. 30, 1843, issues. All quotations from them are from the
Spirit. The first letter was printed in the Spirit, XIII, 303
(Aug. 25, 1843).
pebbles." I got this information from a trapper who had resided several years above the Falls of St. Anthony on the Upper Missouri.25

In the second letter Thorpe begins his report of the noble savage.

We have had a great many savages with us one time or another, but most of them are more than half civilised, as they will get drunk and steal as quick as any white man I ever saw.

The observation cuts two ways, for it says something about white men as well as Indians. The humor, of course, is revealed in the way the observation is made, not in what is said. On the contrary, it was the standard practice of the time to explain the savage's thievery and drunkenness as marks of the corrupting influence of civilisation.

In the same letter Thorpe also described the Indian from his burlesque point of view of the romantic explorer, this time seeing the savage for the first time.

He was short and thick set, and smelt strongly of rancid bear's oil, which he used as we do cologne. I took to him naturally; there was something that pleased me in his eye and the grateful expression of his face as I gave him a drink out of my canteen; I asked him if he had ever been in war? At the question he started back, placed himself in a most elegant attitude, a perfect representation of a corpulent Apollo, then tracing the sun's course with his finger through the heavens, he turned his face full towards me, uttered a guttural "ugh!" took a plug of tobacco out

25

Ibid.

26

Spritt. XIII, 333 (Sept. 9, 1843).
of my hand, stuck it in the folds of his blanket, and quietly walked out of my tent.... I never saw a more noble and beautiful exhibition of savage life.

It would appear from this that if the fat warrior could not think of a lie to delight his observer with, he could always play the part of the inscrutable Indian to earn a drink of bosse and a plug of tobacco. This chubby native was Tar-pot-san-ja, and he forthwith attached himself to the expedition as official noble savage. For his service, he and his squaw were fed, transported about the country, and, no doubt, entertained during the whole course of the adventure.

In one of his misadventures, the Intelligencer's correspondent fell from his horse and blinded both of his eyes. Tar-pot-san-ja's squaw was delighted with the brilliant hues, thinking they were painted, but in rubbing her finger over them, she discovered that the color was beneath the skin. She concluded that this was the work of a powerful medicine man and went to tell her spouse of his beautiful work.

She told her husband that my eyes resembled "bright shells, surrounded by rainbows." The Indian language is so figurative and beautiful, that I cannot resist the temptation of giving in full, their expressions whenever I hear them.27

In a later letter the matter of the Indians was summed up in a sentence. The group was sitting around the campfire drinking, the customary nightly activity, and they began a series of toasts.

27
Ibid.
The little Irishman's toast was to the area the party was traveling through and its inhabitants: "The Indian hunting grounds—like the Indians themselves, more interesting in ladies' books than anywhere else."

Throughout the letters there are many burlesques of the tall tale of fantastic events which frequently attached itself to any hunting expedition into the wilds. One of these described how the noble carcass of a mighty buffalo was attacked by a vulture and two wolves, who, in their rapacity, so disturbed the corpse that it rolled down a bank, killing the bird and pinning the two wolves to the ground with its horns. To complete the poetic justice of the scene, the two wolves bit each other's eyes out.

Another equally absurd tale was told in the same letter of a buffalo who caught his hind foot behind his horn just as he was shot. As the hunters skinned him, the foot was dislodged, striking an Indian in the head and driving his scalp-lock out his mouth. Needless to say, this killed him instantly.

Both of the tales are so fantastic that they are merely ridiculous, and, like many similar pieces being printed in the newspapers of the time, quite lacking in point. Both of the stories

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28 *Spirit*, XIII, 445 (Nov. 18, 1843).

29 *Spirit* XIII, 356 (Sept. 23, 1843).
show pointedly how the tall tale could (and frequently did) degenerate into the telling of grotesque and absurd lies. Idle hunters spinning yarns around campfires did not always create profound and beautiful works of art.

The account of the correspondent's continued effort to kill a buffalo goes on through many of the letters. Early in the series one of the fabulous and mysterious animals of the great American wilderness was introduced. Crafty and evil bears with the intelligence of men, swift and beautiful white steeds, mermaids and maris occur in the humorous literature of the 1840's, and on Sir William's expedition the little Irishman had his mind stuffed with tales of a mysterious one-horned buffalo. One morning while out hunting the animals he thought he saw the mythical creature, and so he lay down, said his prayers and prepared to die. Soon he felt the beast's single great horn thrusting him in the side, but hearing a voice, he opened his eyes to see Sir William poking him in the ribs with the muzzle of his gun in a preliminary and tentative diagnosis of his difficulty. "'A gude mornin' to you, mon,' said he...

The reference to the one-horned buffalo and other references to a Scotch fiddle are made in such an enigmatic manner that one is led to suspect that either the matters were a private joke under-

stood by the initiate or that they had some bawdy significance.
But whatever other meanings the great one-horned buffalo might have
had, on the surface he made material for a little jest at the
fabulous animals of the frontier.

Another of the peculiarities of visitors to the frontier which
received Thorpe's attention was the habit of collecting relics of
one kind or another. Sometimes such curiosities were beautiful
in themselves, valuable in the light they threw on native life, and
attracted much attention from the people who saw them, as did the
artist George Catlin's collection of Indian items. Oftentimes,
however, the collector was duped by the Indians or his own ignorance
so that he accumulated nothing but trash, and exhibitions of his
treasures to his friends were accompanied with boring accounts of
personal reminiscences attached to the various items. The

Intelligencer's correspondent, too, accumulated curiosities.

I have got a real Indian tomahawk, that has been much
used, as its appearance indicates. The history of the
weapon is singular, as it once belonged to an old hunter
by the name of "Collins," who seems to have originally come
from "Hartford, Ct." as he has cut his name on the side.
I also have a very fine "Buffalo chip," which I had taken
great care of, but having got my coat wet, it has injured
it very much, and I shall have to look around for another
specimen. 32

32 Spirit, XIII, 405 (Oct. 21, 1843).
Anything as characteristic of the great plains as a buffalo chip should have excited admiration wherever it was exhibited east of the Mississippi.

Throughout the letters Thorpe made much of the inconveniences and difficulties of outdoor life, the uncomfortable qualities of skin clothing, and the like. But all of this was told from the point of view of one who was eager to experience such difficulties in the fond belief that he was seeing Life and Nature. But the romantic attitude of explorers and innocent adventurers was not the only one burlesqued, for silly tall tales and interminable hunts were characteristic of the frontier settlers themselves. Altogether, the letters offer a realist's comments on several of the more prominent aspects of the literary attitude toward the frontier and on the frontiersmen themselves.

Probably not too much could be made of the letters by a reader of the time without some knowledge of the backwoods and the growing frontier literature. Further, the letters were a broad burlesque of the most fashionable literary tradition of the day. It is not surprising, then, that they were never published in book form. More important than their unconventionality, the abominable style of the letters themselves would preclude any general popularity for them. They are all carelessly done, and the individual pieces are made up of odd anecdotes and comments without any unifying point. Furthermore, the point of view of the writer
is inconsistent from letter to letter. Sometimes he is the romantic adventurer in the wild country, sometimes he is the indefatigable hunter, and sometimes he is the comic little Irishman, prudent to the point of cowardice and infinitely pains to find his mother's son somehow caught in the heathen wilderness. The dialect of the Irishman is not even consistent in the individual letters, but is merely used for its comic effect when it can be easily slipped in.

However, the letters did enjoy a great popularity in the newspaper press, and were republished not only in the Spirit but also in other newspapers about the country. Curiously enough, some of the papers accepted them as genuine reports, in spite of their fantastic accounts. There were various things about the letters that might deceive a reader: each one was carefully dated from some place the expedition was to visit; anecdotes were told on Field, Audubon, and other actual members of the party; and the country was always described in detail. The New Orleans Picayune even charged that the Spirit had been deceived, and roused Porter to a much sharper comment than was usual to his good nature.

Said.—Somebody has been quizzing the editors of the "Picayune." Hear them:—

Our friend T. B. T. of the "Concordia Intelligencer" gets up his letters from the Far West very well, even for a backwoodsman. At the North they do not appear to take the joke. "The Spirit" has been "done brown" by him. They are cut by a saw of which T. B. T. possesses the exclusive patent.

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33 *Spirit*, XIII, 426 (Nov. 4, 1843).
So they don't take the joke at the North! Oh, no! We republish another of the letters today, from the "Intelligencer" and hope "the Pie" will be able to publish some half as clever from its exclusive correspondent. No wonder they are horribly exasperated, in "the Pie" office, that people in the North will not "take the joke" of reading Mat FIELD's dull letters, when THORPE's are to be had at the same price. We recollect no Northern editor who has been sold so cheap.

Field's letters were dull, but Porter himself printed one of them and it was unlike him to make so ill humored a statement.

Field's reply to Thorpe's fooling showed that the two were acquainted and, in spite of its exaggeration, is interesting for the light it throws on Thorpe's personal appearance.

We have alluded several times to the "saw" run by THORPE of the Concordia "Intelligencer" upon Mat C. FIELD, of the "Picayune." As a set off Mat introduced "The Intelligencer Man" in his narrative of Sir William Stewart's Expedition after a manner that is quite irresistible. Thorpe takes this joke very good naturedly, and introduces it to his own readers in the following terms:

Our Far West Correspondent, --We publish below an extract from one of Field's letters, describing our Far West Correspondent as he appeared to him while with Sir William Stewart. We have only to say....that he has altered some since he left us....

The greatest genius we had among us was the poor little fellow with an awful face. He looked like an embodiment in semi-human form, of a thick fog on the Mississippi, at half past three in the morning to a

34
*Spirit*, XIII, 426 (Nov. 4, 1843).

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man who had just lost his last dollar at poker.... He was about 4 feet 4 in height.... He was decidedly brain stricken but quite amiable and harmless in his madness.... He was a dangerous wit.... But his grave and saturnine countenance quite belied a kind and playful spirit that seemed to live in light and loveliness beneath all the madness and gloom of his character.  

At the time Field wrote the sketch, Thorpe was twenty-nine years old, apparently a short, thick-set young man, with a big nose and a saturnine face. Thorpe's gloomy appearance contrasted noticeably with his quick wit on the one hand and his gentle manners on the other, and persons who wrote descriptions of him usually noticed it. Field's description of his character as one of light and loveliness beneath his madness and gloom also apparently was based on fact, for William Trotter Porter, writing to the Philadelphia publishers Carey and Hart in 1845, remarked that Thorpe was a very nervous man but extremely well-liked by those who knew him. His writings, too, reflect a playful and kindly spirit, fond of people and social amusements such as storytelling and hunting parties, fond also of nature and the outdoor life, broad in his sympathies, and in all a pleasant person.


37 See, for example, Spirit, XXIX, 123-124 (April 23, 1859).

Field's reference to Thorpe's ugliness was in an old frontier tradition, a tradition that was known as late as Lincoln's time. It was necessary for frontier heroes to have their ugliness, and Daniel Boone, Jim Beckworth, Davy Crockett and countless others were honored with the attribution of fantastic ugliness. In 1853 Baton Rouge had its Ugly Club, and one of the members nominated his cab driver, who was found to be admissible, for "The independent order of the Ugly Club regards no man for his internal qualifications..." Thus the description of Thorpe's ugliness may have had some reference to fact, probably to his big nose, but generally it was merely the celebration of a convention, and also, apparently, an expression of masculine affection.

In addition to the Far West Letters, Thorpe wrote a good deal for the Intelligencer, much of it reflecting his own particular interests and some of it a little unusual for a country newspaper. An account of Vier's picture of the Pilgrims was reprinted from the New York Aurora with Thorpe's praise of the author of the criticism, whom he knew from his New York days. In another 41

39 See Bernard De Veto, Mark Twain's America, p. 93.

40 The Daily Comet, January 12, 1853.

41 Concordia Intelligencer, Nov. 25, 1843.
single issue appeared an article on flowers, a selection of
commets by Samuel Johnson on letter writing, and an account of
William H. Prescott’s progress with his Ferdinand and Isabella.
It cannot be stated with certainty that all of this is Thorpe’s,
of course, but it is obvious that the paper had a distinctly more
literary flavor after his association with it began.

In the December 30, 1843, issue appeared "The Way Americans
Go Down Hill,” an essay written by Thorpe after reading Howitt’s
Moral and Domestic Life in Germany. The piece is an account of a
wild ride down a steep mountain in the Alleghenies in a stage
driven by some John of the back country. It opens in the leisure-
ly, literary manner of Washington Irving, increasing its pace to
the description of the terrifying ride, and closes by drawing the
general conclusion that the impetuous and headlong rush and the
desire always to be moving are national characteristics of the
Americans, characteristics in sharp contrast to the careful, method-
ical travel habits of the Germans. This quality Thorpe observed
elsewhere in his writing, and years later he quoted Emerson to the
effect that Americans have "no repose of character." Once more
the essay reveals Thorpe’s continual search for a definition of

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*New Orleans Daily National*, November 26, 1847.
the American character, a question which his reading, experience, and observation stimu-
ated time and time again.

The mention in this issue of the Intelligencer of Prescott, Johnson, and Bowditch, together with other chance references in his sketches, throws some light on the books and authors Thorpe read and enjoyed, although any reading list compiled in such a way is necessarily incomplete. He enjoyed books and was an unusually wide reader. Among the ancients he read Homer (in Pope's translation), Aristophanes' The Frogs, Herodotus, Pliny, and Strabo. Shakespeare, of course, he knew and referred to many times. Among the plays he mentioned Antony and Cleopatra, Othello, Macbeth, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Henry IV (he took much delight in Falstaff), and A Midsummer Night's Dream. He knew Beaumont, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Raleigh, Sandys, and quoted from A Counterblast to Tobacco. He seems to have been particularly fond of Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy and Walton's The Compleat Angler. Of Milton he knew at least the Paradise Lost. He read Addison, Swift, and Boswell's Life of Johnson. Samuel Pepys he praised for his faithful recording and Collins and Shenstone for their pastoral sweetness. He knew Coleridge's Specimens of the Table-Talk and Lamb's Elia. Of the work of his own time he knew some of the science and enjoyed travel accounts and history, mentioning Prescott, Von Humboldt, Silliman, Audubon, and Wilson. Irving's and Cooper's works he knew well, and he quoted from Emerson and Lowell in his own paper
in 1847. He was early acquainted with most of the writers of the Old Southwest through the columns of the Spirit, and a few of them were printed or reprinted in the Intelligencer while he was with it. "The Last Duel in Loaferville" by Joe Macone appeared originally in it, addressed to Robert Patterson, and Thorpe himself wrote a piece for his paper revealing the identity of "The Georgia Major, Joseph Jones" as William Tappen Thompson, who was Longstreet's friend and admirer, then editing the Southern Miscellany. When Johnson Jones Hooper's Adventures of Simon Sigan appeared, Thorpe praised him as one of the most talented of the humorists. In addition to his acquaintance with the other authors writing the humor of the Old Southwest, and with the standard literary figures, Thorpe's later work was to show increasing attention to the historical and scientific work of his time as he turned more and more to writing based on research.

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44 Concordia Intelligencer, Mar. 9, 1844. The progression of the tradition of the literature of the Old Southwest is neatly illustrated in the career of Thompson, who, after working with Longstreet on the State Rights Sentinel and modeling his own writing on the Georgia Scenes, was the man to introduce Joel Chandler Harris to the Savannah News in 1871. See DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 97.

45 In addition to his collected work, Thorpe's journalistic writing contains much information about his reading. The following references are particularly useful: Spirit, IX, 247; XI, 469; XII, 295; XIII, 409; XIV, 471; Today's Lady's Book, XLII, 306-309; and Harper's, VIII, 392-98; X, 37-49; X, 615-28, XI, 1-18, XIII, 455-72; XVIII, 606-21 and XIX, 587-92.
In his writing for the *Intelligencer* and in his work which followed, Thorpe never had occasion to discuss his reading, but even a casual look at his literary knowledge reveals that it was rather broad. Thorpe’s education, the breadth of his interests, and the quality of his reading all suggest the imprropriety of treating him as a naive artist. Although he and the other humor- ous writers of the period 1830 to 1860 made use of folklore and recorded realistically many folkways, none of the major writers of the group could be called folk artists, and a critical examination of their work from points of view other than that of the folklorists reveals increasingly the quality of their work and its importance for the development of realism and local color in the literature of the United States.

In addition to the little Irishman of the Far West Letters, the *Intelligencer* had another imaginary correspondent during the time Thorpe was associated with it—one Stoke Stout, a backwoodsman who lived on the Bayou Choo-A-Luck and wrote for the paper grossly mis- pulled accounts of his hardships. The Stoke Stout letters could have been done by Patterson, or even by both Patterson and Thorpe, but the humor of them is quite characteristic of the latter, and their appearance at the beginning of his association with the *Intelligencer* and

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disappearance after he left lead one to believe that he wrote them.

The first introduced Thorpe to the readers of the *Intelligencer* and was entitled "The Way to Kill Wild Turkeys and Rheumatism." Another dated Christmas, 1844, was "Stoke Stout's Adventures with Mr. Stiggins' Bull," which repeats the ancient country contretemps of a man caught in a little stream by a fearsome bull. The humor depends on situation, the countryman's lack of knowledge of civilized modes of living, his combination of shrewdness and naivete, and his quaint spelling—this last device one much used by later comics and one which Thorpe did well not to perpetuate under his own name. These letters are of slight interest; none of the extant copies of the *Intelligencer* contain any of them, and altogether the *Spirit* reprinted only three.

For the *Intelligencer* Thorpe also wrote sketches and anecdotes of hunting, fishing, and outdoor life, most of them short, casual pieces. One, entitled "A Tall Hunt—Crack Shot—Big Heat," retold the classic hunters' anecdote of the man who, after elaborate preparation and magnificent stalking, succeeds in bringing down an old cow.

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47 *Spirit*, XIII, 253 (July 29, 1843).
48 *Spirit*, XIII, 589 (Feb. 10, 1844).
49 In addition to the two above, another appeared XIV, 38 (Mar. 22, 1845).
Another sketch, "Angling in Lake Concordia," praised the art of fishing and commented glowingly on the beautiful country around Vidalia. These casual sketches for the *Intelligencer* all show the marks of haste in conception and execution, and are generally much inferior to the work he did for the *Spirit*. Careless work would inevitably be the result of Thorpe's increasing activity, for by the spring of 1844 he not only was doing his share of the work for the paper, but had also received, in March, his appointment as postmaster at Vidalia, and was, in addition, taking an increasing part in political affairs in Concordia Parish.

Busy as he was kept by all these activities, he also began about this time to plan a book to be made up of his sketches and essays. On March 2, 1844, Porter wrote Thorpe a note in his column "To Correspondents" acknowledging receipt of an essay, "Little Steamboats of the Mississippi," adding, "Shall give you, at the same time, 'a lick ahead' with your volume of sketches." The essay was printed in the *Spirit* the next week, with a note that it was "Written for the Spirit of the Times." Possibly Thorpe did the

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51 *Spirit*, XIV, 140 (May 18, 1844).

52 *Spirit*, XIV, 1 (March 2, 1844).

53 *Spirit*, XIV, 19 (March 9, 1844).
sketch for his old friend and sent it to him, writing at the same time asking assistance in his plans. Thorpe continued his work on the volume, keeping in touch with Porter, and five months later Porter wrote again about the matter in his column to correspondents advising him to treat with the Harpers and promising to speak to them for him.

At the same time, Thorpe was expanding his political activities.

Early in June of 1844, Concordia Parish held its Whig convention and apparently Thorpe was elected as one of the delegates to the state convention, for when the great mass meeting of Whigs was held in Baton Rouge the following October 7, T. B. Thorpe, of Concordia, was elected one of three secretaries of the convention. The great meeting was a colorful and exciting affair, attended by more than 10,000 Whigs, according to the Baton Rouge Gazette.

On Monday morning when the boats arrived from New Orleans, the scene at the landing was the most gorgeous we have ever beheld on any occasion, twelve steamboats decorated with numerous flags and devices, as densely crowded as it was possible to place them lay

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55 *Baton Rouge Gazette*, June 8, 1844.

56 *Baton Rouge Gazette*, Oct. 12, 1844.
close to each other. The constant roar of the cannon from the shore and the re-echoing from the boats—the incessant muskets from the assembled throng, altogether presented such a scene as is rarely beheld....

The Convention adjourned about sundown and marched in town in the same order as in the morning. Some of the delegations started that same evening. The New Orleans delegation took with them the big ball which had been presented them by the Natchez Straightouts. Those that remained met opposite the City Hotel in the evening where they were addressed by Messrs. Nichols and Sparks from Lafayette, Thorpe from Concordia, Guion from Vicksburg, and H. J. Sevier from New Orleans.57

Thorpe, it would appear, not only enjoyed the color and excitement of political activity, but was also not at all backward about taking a lead in the proceedings.

Among the resolutions adopted by the convention at Baton Rouge was one recognizing that the extension of United States' territory by the annexation of Texas was desirable, but opposing it "...unless it be compatible with the honor of our country and the stability of our Union." The Whig party in the South was the party of the aristocratic planting and slave-owning class, placing the good of the union in general before narrow sectionalism, doing its best to avoid a break in the party on a regional basis. The attraction of the party for Thorpe could be explained both as a result of his allegiance with the planter class and also as a

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
result of his own experience. He was a man born, reared, and educated in the North, but at this time he had lived eight years in the South and was attached to the country and its people. Simply his personal connections in the two regions would be sufficient to show him that neither the Northerners who abhorred the institution of slavery nor the Southerners who practiced it were evil men fit only to be wiped from the face of the earth. The papers do not record what subject Thorpe spoke on to the crowd in front of the City Hotel, but it is probably safe to assume that his talk was a conventional reinterpretation of conservative Whig principles, entailing the Union in the face of the growing Democratic sectionalism, and supporting Henry Clay and the spirit of compromise he stood for.

The election which followed in November of 1844 was extremely close, but was lost by the Whigs as a result, they charged, of the frauds in Plaquemines, across the river from New Orleans. The Baton Rouge Gazette on November 16 reported the issue still in doubt, but what had happened at Plaquemines it already knew.

The returns from this state are yet incomplete. Several of the Red River Parishes are yet to be heard from. The contest has been a close one, and the result is still uncertain. The majority of the legal votes are certainly in our favor, and but for the immense frauds at Plaquemines our triumph would be decided. Plaquemines, according to the census of 1840 contained a male population over 20 years of age, of 935, in that year it gave 240 votes, and in 1843, 243, and now it gives over 1000. Comment is unnecessary. There is a crying evil somewhere; if the loss is due to fraud means, they are welcome to the victory thus acquired. We have still some hope, however, of carrying the state by a small majority.
The Democratic voters had been transported across the Mississippi to vote in a district where their majority would tell against the Whigs, who were outraged at the maneuver in so close a contest. Unfortunately, no copies of the Concordia Intelligence reporting the results of the election are extant; consequently Thorpe's and Patterson's reactions to the affair are unknown.

Meanwhile, as Thorpe worked on his book, his friend Porter, too, was busy preparing a volume to be made up of sketches printed in the Spirit. By February of 1845 Porter had finished the preface to The Big Bear of Arkansas which took its title from Thorpe's story, printed first in the volume. The book was published by Carey & Hart of Philadelphia and illustrated with the delightful drawings of Felix O. G. Darley, whose wit and sense of humor made him the perfect illustrator for this odd and comic collection.

The full title of the book indicated its general scope: The Big Bear of Arkansas, and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Characters and Incidents in the South and South-West. In his Preface, Porter explained something of the nature of the new kind of writing which had so recently made its appearance.

A new vein of literature, as original as it is inexhaustible in its source, has been opened in this country within a very few years, with the most marked success. Up to the period when the publication of the first American "Sporting Magazine" was commenced—at Baltimore, in 1829—
and which was immediately followed by the publication, in New York, of the "Spirit of the Times," there existed no such class of writers as have, since that recent day, conferred signal honour on the rising literature of America.... In addition to correspondents who described with equal felicity and power the stirring incidents of the chase and turf, it enlisted another and still more numerous class, who furnished most valuable and interesting reminiscences of the pioneers of the far West—sketches of thrilling scenes and adventures in that then comparatively unknown region, and the extraordinary characters occasionally met with—their strange language and habits, and the peculiar and sometimes fearful characteristics of the "squatters" and early settlers.

Porter recognised from the beginning that this new literature, which he did much to help create through his own tastes and critical ability, not only was novel and truly original, but was, in fact, the first literary (or sub-literary) creation of the authentic American idiom and the peculiarly American character of the Old Southwest and the trans-Mississippi West.

Porter further noted that by 1845 the westward movement of the pioneers had carried them all the way to the lands overlooking the Pacific, going even beyond the boundaries of the Federal Union.

But they have left behind them, on all hands, scores of original characters to be encountered nowhere else under the sun. Indeed, several of the south-western states have been so recently reclaimed from the wilderness—Mississippi and Arkansas particularly—that no one acquainted with the country can be surprised at the fact. In these two states...yet reside some of the most extraordinary men who ever lived "to point a moral, or adorn a tale." With exteriors "like the rugged Russian bear," some of them are gifted with a great degree of good sense and knowledge of the world; it is not to be denied that many are as fond of whiskey as of hunting, and that there are desperate and utterly reckless spirits among them; but a large majority of those to whom we refer, are
characterised by no more striking features than their courtesy to the stranger, and their passion for hunting, except it be their fondness for story-telling. Of adventures and scenes in which these characters stand out in bold relief, this volume is mainly composed, relieved occasionally by sketches of men and things in some of the older southern states.

Porter's point of view like Thorpe's and Longstreet's was that of the educated man looking at the folk, with an eye for the odd, the local, and the humorous. The volume was an attempt to satisfy what Porter called "...the eager curiosity to know more of the distinguishing traits of character of the denizens of the many comparatively unpeopled regions of the West and Southwest." The popularity of the book, like that of the Georgia Scenes, was partly the result of the appeal of its humor, and partly the result of the growing desire for the image of the American frontiersman, for at least in the title-page readers could find an admirable but unsentimental version of the Western character.

In addition to "The Big Bear of Arkansas," the book contained two of the Stokes Stout letters, with the byline, "By Thorpe and Patterson of the 'Concordia Intelligencer.'" "The Big Bear" was introduced with a rather long biographical sketch of Thorpe in which Porter noted that he had a distinguished reputation on both sides of the Atlantic, that he was a painter by profession, that he was currently engaged in editing the Intelligencer, and that he was planning to publish a collection of his writing shortly. The only critical comment on the story that Porter made was to say that it
indicated Thorpe's ability to describe an original character of the Mississippi valley.

The book also contained one of Johnson Jones Hooper's early Simon Suggs sketches—"How Simon Suggs 'Raised Jack.'" Hooper, who had first appeared in the Spirit of September 9, 1843, had created in his Simon Suggs a fascinating rogue of the poor-white class whose ethical system was summed up in his favorite frontier maxim, "It is good to be shifty in a new country."

Another tale which shows how close some of this humorous literature is to the bucolic anecdote dear alike to the country squire and the traveling salesman is "That Big Dog Fight at Myers's." It is the story of a drunken crew who, celebrating Jackson's victory at New Orleans, terrorised a little country town all one day, and then, on the way home, witnessed a curious fight. The road they took led past Myers' house, who kept fenced in his yard a dog celebrated throughout the country for his viciousness, and as they rode by, the dog set up a fierce barking. One member of the group, called Iron-Tooth, offered to take up the fight, climbed down from his horse, undressed to his shirt and boots, got down on all fours and began snapping and sniffing through the fence at the dog inside. When he had aroused the animal to a perfect fury, he entered the gate, still growling. When his opponent rushed for him, he struck the creature a glancing blow with his shoulder and then whirled around, as dogs do, to give the animal a view of his posterior. The
sight so terrified Myers' dog that he broke his chain and fled. Such
beauty, vulgar realism is quite offensive to certain tastes, and sure-
ly is evidence that the book was intended primarily for a masculine
audience, and not for the middle-class lady of 1845.

Edgar Allen Poe, who was editing The Broadway Journal at the time,
reviewed the book. Thorpe's sketch and one other he thought "... much
exaggerated by the editor—they seem to us dull and forced. Many
of the others are irresistibly comic and fresh...."The Great Kalamasoo
Hunt' is a study in this species of writing; and 'Swallowing an
Oyster' by our friend Field, of the inimitable 'Reveille,' is a jewel
of a thought, and to perfection." The tale Poe praised—the title
is "Swallowing an Oyster Alive"—is an anecdote of a country bumpin
foolced by a city dandy, the slightest kind of a sketch, told merely
for the trick and quite without character or plot. Probably Poe's
lack of interest in backwoods types is sufficient to explain his
praise of "Swallowing an Oyster Alive" as well as his dismissal of
"The Big Bear of Arkansas," which is primarily a development of a
frontier character.

The English papers generally regarded the comic writers highly,
and a critic writing in the Westminster Review, April, 1852, praised

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The Broadway Journal, 1, 331 (May 24, 1845).

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Louis Fraiberg, "The Westminster Review and American Literature."
American Literature, XXIV, 323 (Nov., 1952).
The Big Bear of Arkansas, among other reasons, for setting forth the peculiar features of American character.

Much to our surprise, the author adduces it as a subject of regret, that educated Americans lose the peculiar features of American character, and become hardly distinguishable from Englishmen; while the only books, it is asserted, which reflect the national mind, are those which are representative of, and are popular amongst, the descendants of the aboriginal colonists; such, for example, as "Hick of the Woods, The Life of David Crockett, and The Big Bear of Arkansas!...."

Porter, through his affection for the new literature, and the anonymous English critic, thanks possibly to the perspective of distance as well as critical acumen, both evaluated the significance of the book with some accuracy—it was the beginning of the reflection of the national mind.

For Thorpe the volume meant increased prestige and reputation, not only because of the compliment of naming the volume for his story, but also because of the compliments paid him in the preface and in the little introduction to his sketch.

After having discussed his plans with Porter, to issue a volume of his own, Thorpe began planning another trip to New York in the spring of 1845. He was also making numerous trips to New Orleans at this time. On April 5, Porter wrote in his column, "T. B. T. Re-

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Ibid., p. 324.
ceived your letter dated Vidalia, 19th, ult., and presume our last to you, directed to New Orleans, has not reached you. It was directed to the care of the good folks of the ‘Pic.’ Send for it. Get here in time to see the great match, and you can ‘pay expenses,’ sure." Two weeks later, Porter addressed him again, reminding him to call at the office of the Picayune to get his letter. On June 12, Thorpe wrote Porter complaining that he had been delayed at Vidalia nearly a month longer than he had expected; he asked Porter to hold his mail for him at the Spirit office.

Then, in the June 28, 1845, issue of the Intelligencer, the following statement appeared:

The partnership heretofore existing under the firm of Patterson and Thorpe as editors and proprietors of the Concordia Intelligencer ceased on the 20th inst. by mutual consent.

The charge of the Intelligencer will devolve upon Mr. Patterson, who has become sole proprietor, Mr. Thorpe will assist in the editorial department until the close of the present volume.

Robert Patterson
T. B. Thorpe

Vidalia, June 21, 1845.

Another letter dated June 21 was printed in the same issue, signed by Patterson, saying that his health had been somewhat shattered for some months past. The columns of the Intelligencer, the letter noted, had been filled with matters not properly suited to the usual miscellaneous character of the paper. A disagreement over the content of the paper might be inferred from this. Elsewhere in the issue Patterson printed another notice.
The assistance expected from Mr. Thorpe until the close of the volume—refers only to a series of letters promised by him on his route east: his connection in all other relations, with the Intelligencer, ceased on the 14th, instant. The present "we" is alone responsible for the editorial matter that may fill the columns of the paper.

The manner of the notices scattered throughout the single paper, and their angry tone, show a venting of spleen on Patterson’s part, but the cause of the disagreement is never stated directly. Significantly, however, the New Orleans Tornado, for which Thorpe would be working within a year, is mentioned as a Whig paper, and Patterson’s editorial for the unhappy twenty-eighth was one condemning "...those whose aim is to monopolize and guide Public opinion...." It seems likely that Thorpe’s ardor for the Whig cause was increasing, or perhaps Patterson’s appreciation for the Democrats was growing, so that the partners quarreled over the political function of the paper and finally dissolved their association. It is also possible that Thorpe’s trip to New Orleans and later to New York shows some dissatisfaction with his opportunities at Vidalia and a desire on his part to find something else to do. Furthermore, on July 31, 1845, the period of his appointment as postmaster at Vidalia came to an end and was not renewed. He did not return to the little village across from Natches.

Conducting a country weekly with a partner had left Thorpe time to work on the volume he had been planning at least since before
Porter's offer to help him printed in the March 2, 1844, issue of the
Spirit. Then in August Porter had suggested he get in touch with
Harper's, but if he did, nothing came of it, for within five months
he had written again to Porter, and this time Porter wrote to his own

"Talking of guns!" I enclose you a note from T. B. Thorpe,
Esq., the author of the "Big Bear of Arkansas." Thorpe is
a man of decided genius. The "Big Bear" hardly gives one
an idea of what he has done or is capable of. He is post­
master of Vidalia, Louisiana, (a little village opposite
Natchez, Miss.), editor of the "Concordia Intelligencer,"
and, by profession, a portrait painter. So see what you
can do for him. He is as nervous as our friend Henry Iman,
but like him is a capital good fellow. He is well known
to "the press gang" on both sides of the Atlantic and every
man who ever saw him will "go his death" on him. Some of
his sketches of scenery in the great Valley of the
Mississippi and of the "characters" encountered there are
equal to anything in the language, in my humble opinion.
You will see that, like many other young writers, he looks
to "this child" as a sort of "literary godfather." 63

However, it would appear that meanwhile Thorpe had written
directly himself to Carey & Hart and received a favorable reply from
them, for less than a week after Porter's letter was written, Thorpe
dated one from New Orleans, March 8, 1845, outlining in some detail
his plans for the volume.

Gent.,

Your letter was forwarded to me from my residence,
Vidalia and received by me this day, I hasten to answer
it. I have made no definite arrangement regarding the
publication of my sketches, and I wrote to Mr. Porter to

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The original is in the New York Historical Society Library.
see on what terms it could be done. A friend of mine who has interested himself much in my favor, has spoken to the Messrs. Appleton of New York and they have expressed a desire to have the M. S. I have waited to attend to the business personally, and no business arrangement of course could not be completed.

The volumes will be made up of most of my best articles published, corrected and made more perfect than they were as far as I have been able to make them, and then a series of sketches, which I have been engaged on, the last year and a half, among which there are some I believe to be superior in every way to any of my published articles. I would remark that I originally contracted to write for A. Ackerman of London "100 pages of writing" at one guinea a page, but the house failed before they arrived in London, and the gentleman who managed my business sent them back to me unopened, and I wanted then to publish them in this country and was glad they were thus returned. If it is proposed to illustrate these sketches I can furnish illustrations myself drawn from life and consequently correct, a thing not possible when attempted by northern artists unacquainted with this peculiar country. I would not, however, render any pictures unless they were expressed at least in the best style of Lithography. Six illustrations could be made in one story, with a beautiful picture I have in my possession of "Tom Owen engaged in a Bee hunt" as a frontispiece would complete the series. I do not mean I could draw the pictures as such, but possess the paintings to draw these from. If I should undertake this task, which I do not covet, I should expect that the correctness of the pictures would be their chief merit.

Owing to the disarrangement of business in this section of the country, I have had more leisure than heretofore to write, and pursue the romantic history of this unknown country. At my leisure I have been engaged in a work intended when finished, to reach the size of two ordinary volumes. The book will be illustrating "Western life and manners" as exhibited in 1799-1800. I have so far progressed through half of the work and intend only to finish it after the greatest labor, and correctness, of these early times. The plan of the book is original in its character and peculiar, and occupies a ground untrodden by any writer, and only to be dealt fairly and truthfully, by one who has lived in the South and knows it all. This work is to follow the "Tom Owen sketch," provided its sale, and merit justifies its being finished, and offers inducement
for further literary pursuits.
I shall be in Philadelphia in the [two words blurred] of May with the M. S. of the "sketches" complete, and will wait on you at once relative to their publication and will have the illustrations as soon as wanted.

With great respect

Yours, T. B. Thorpe

Thus for his forthcoming collection of sketches, and the two volumes he planned to follow it with illustrating "Western life and manners" Thorpe conceived that their primary value would lie in their revelation of a peculiar and unusual part of the country to the public at large and that their prime merit in both content and illustrations would be their correctness, their fidelity to the actual scenes.

Carey & Hart must have felt that there was sufficient interest in the Southwest to justify such an edition as Thorpe proposed, for they answered at once, sending Thorpe two of their recent volumes and proposing that his volume be illustrated with woodcuts rather than engravings, which were more expensive. This he found acceptable, and wrote them from Vidalia on April 1, 1845, saying that he hoped to be in Philadelphia the 15th of the following month, May, to confer with them about the publication of his sketches.

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64 T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, New Orleans, La., March 8, 1845. The original is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Library, as are the other letters from Thorpe to Carey & Hart, unless otherwise noted.

65 T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, Vidalia, La., April 1, 1845.
But Thorpe was delayed at Vidalis by business matters connected with his paper, and did not leave until late in June, after he had finally broken his connections with the Concordia Intelligencer. While in New York and Philadelphia in the summer of 1845, he completed the arrangements for publication, and on August 25 he wrote Carey & Hart from New York City enclosing the manuscripts to complete his first volume and giving instructions about the order in which he wanted the essays printed. Thorpe added that he would pass through Philadelphia on his way south between September 1 and 6, and that he wished to talk to Mr. Hart "relative to business connected with literature? of great importance to me." Obviously he had plans for more literary enterprises afoot.

The Preface to the Mysteries of the Backwoods, as the work was titled, was dated August, 1845, and outlined Thorpe's experiences in the South that had led to his writing. Its mood is that of the romantic lover of nature.

The Southwest, with its vast primitive forests, its beautiful prairies, and its magnificent rivers, presents exhibitions of nature before which the pilgrim from every land bows in wonder and awe. The author of this little volume has felt an inspiration among them, which was never called forth by the more merely beautiful and familiar scenery of the North.

Years since he was a stranger among the people inhabiting the Southwest, in pursuit of fortune and health, he found friends, and a hospitality as unbounded as their soil is prolific; and in the pleasant airs of the seasons,

to which the rose turns its full-blown and blushing cheek in mid-winter, he found health.

Such sentiments as these are appropriate for the most refined sensibilities, and in the sketches following Thorpe omitted completely his "The Big Bear of Arkansas" and "Bob Herring, the Arkansas Bear Hunter," not merely, one may assume, because the first had been the title piece for Porter's collection and the second was to be published in his next anthology, but because their somewhat earthy realism did not fit the refined tone of the nature essays filling the book.

Continuing his Preface, Thorpe noted the circumstances of the composition of "Tom Gray, the Bee Hunter," expressed his surprise at the popularity of the sketch, which encouraged him to continue writing of backwoods scenes, for he had thus learned that there was an "intrinsic merit in the subject associated with the forests which took place of style or manner of composition." Partly, this statement is, of course, a conventional expression of modesty, but there was surely also some sincerity in it— and it helps explain why Thorpe was a minor writer throughout his career. Too little dependence on the work of shaping the material and too much dependence on its intrinsic interest are more appropriate to the journalist and the amateur than to the serious writer, which Thorpe was not and never tried to be.

Thorpe concluded his Preface with a statement of the aim of the book.

The "Mysteries of the Backwoods" has one object, which
the author would press upon such readers as may honor him
with their attention. An effort has been made, in the course
of these sketches, to give to those personally unacquainted
with the scenery of the Southwest, some idea of the country,
of its surface, and vegetation. In these matters the author
has endeavored to be critically correct, indulging in the hon-
est ambition of giving some information, as well as to lighten
the lagging moments of a dull hour.

In this modest aim, which is appropriate to the minor writer, the
journalist, and the amateur, Thorpe succeeded admirably.

The little volume of 190 pages contained sixteen essays, most
of them revisions of reprints of sketches published earlier in the
Spirit. That part of Thorpe's writing which compilers of anthologies
have seen fit to preserve and literary historians to commend in his
humorous work, but only two of the pieces in his first published book
are in this vein. Revised versions of "A Piano in'Arkansaw" and
"Tom Owen, the Bee-Hunter" both appear, and, together with "The Dis-
graced Scaly-Loch," make up all that Thorpe offered in illustration
of characters in the Southwest.

More than half the essays express his interest in the outdoor
sports of fishing and hunting, emphasizing the unusual character of
these activities as practiced in Louisiana. One of the sketches,
entitled "Piscatory Archery," describes a method of fishing with a
bow and cabled arrow, and another, "Alligator Killing," describes
the appearance and habits of the great reptiles infesting the swamps
of the lower Mississippi.
"Pictures of Buffalo Hunting" is one of the longest sketches in the book, and in its parts it describes the animal, the methods the Indians used in hunting it, and finally a hunting expedition the author had taken into northern Texas. The piece describes what some of the frontiersmen were like and manages to maintain some realism amidst the romance of the nature description.

On the confines of the buffalo hunting-grounds, migrated a family, consisting of a strange mixture of enterprise and idleness, of ragged looking men and homely women. They seemed to have all the bad habits of the Indians, with none of their redeeming qualities. They were willing to live without labour and subsist upon the bounties of nature. Located in the fine climate of Northern Texas, the whole year was more delightful than a continued spring, and the abundance of game with which they were surrounded afforded what seemed to them all the comforts of life. The men never exerted themselves except when hunger prompted, or a sport magazine made the acquisition of "peltries" necessary to barter for powder and ball. A mere lazy, contemptible set of creatures never existed, and we would long since have forgotten them, had not our introduction to them associated itself with our first bubbleしな

Thorpe was making no attempt to be humorous in the essay, and the picture he paints represents the obverse of the romantic pioneer as idealized by Cooper. Obviously, of course, the frontier was populated by creatures such as these as well as by noble Daniel Boone and as Thorpe himself foresees, the greatest merit of his writing lay in its fidelity, such as the quality was neglected in satisfying the popular

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67 Mysteries of the Backwoods, p. 92.
demand for the romantic point of view.

The description which followed of the mode of life of such frontier-men is also realistic. The hunters, on being told that there was a "squatting" home in the vicinity, had approached the place hoping for a comfortable shelter.

A large rude-constructed shed, boarded up on the northern side, was all we found. Upon nearer examination, it appeared that this "shed" was the common dwelling-place of the people described above, with the addition of two cows, several goats, poultry, and as we soon discovered, three horses. Immediately around the pen the prairie grass struggled for a sickly growth. As you entered it, you found yourself growing deeper and deeper in a fine dust, that had been in the course of time worked out of the soil. Some coarse blankets were suspended through the enclosure, as retiring rooms for the women. On the ground were strewn buffalo skins, from which the animal inhabitants kept aloof. We entered without seeing a human being. After some delay, however, a little nondescript, with a white sunburnt head, thrust aside the blankets, and bellowed out, "They ain't injuns." The mother then showed herself. She was as far removed from femininity as possible, and appeared as removed at our presence as the post that sustained the roof of her house. We asked for lodging and food; she nodded a cold assent and disappeared. Not disposed to be fastidious, we endeavored to make ourselves as comfortable as possible, and wait for the development of ensuing events. In the course of an hour a woman younger than the first, made her appearance, somewhat attractive because younger. On hearing the detail of our wants, she wrinkled her sunburnt visage into a distorted smile, and told us that the "men" would soon be here with "buffalo meat," and then our wants should be attended to. 68

The party waited the coming of the hunters, whom they imagined to be tall, active men riding wild steeds, but the reality was again disappointing. "Two short, ill-formed men, with bow-legs, long bodies, and formidable shocks of red hair, destitute of intelligence, clothed

68 Ibid., p. 92-94.
in skins, and moving with shuffling gait, were the realities of
our conception. Thorpe's expectations represented the myth,
and his descriptions represented the reality of at least a part
of frontier existence as he saw it. The conditions of its exist-
ence were hard, ugly, and often brutalizing, and its products were
not all tall, bronzed noblemen of nature.

However, the beauty of nature rather than the ugliness of
frontier life is the dominant theme of the volume, and the con-
cept of the Noble Savage, in spite of Thorpe's ridicule of the
idea in the Far West Letters, is offered gravely to the public.

During the buffalo hunt with the two shaggy squatters, a group
of Indians joins the party. The first sign of one of the savages
is his cry.

It was a joyous whoop, and vibrated through our hearts;
we looked up, and saw just before us a young Indian warrior,
mounted upon a splendid charger, rushing across the plain,
evidently in pursuit of the retreating buffalo. As he swept
by, he threw himself forward in his saddle, placed his right
hand over his eyes, as if to shade them from the sun, making
a picture of the most graceful and eager interest.

The cliche is complete even to the convention of the pose.

After the description of the picturesque appearance of the Noble
Savage is complete, another is added, intended apparently to suggest
the sensibility of the child of nature to the death of his prey.

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69 Ibid., p. 101.
The Indian dismounted and stood beside the buffalo the instant he fell. There was a simplicity and beautiful wildness about the group and would have struck the eye of the most insensible. The shaggy and rough appearance of the dead animal, the healthy-looking and ungroomed horse with his roving eye and long mane, and the Indian himself, contemplating his work like some brute status of antique art.

An illustration for this scene is provided by Felix C. C. Darley, possibly from a picture by Thorpe, showing the gentleman hunter, mounted, in hunting coat and cap, in the background, the Noble Savage with satisfactory muscles and melancholy face, standing over the buffalo, and finally, the poor-white squatter lending his disgusting contrast to the tableau.

Two sketches Thorpe had published earlier in the Knickerbocker magazine were also included: "The Mississippi," and "Place de la Croix." The latter piece, subtitled "A Romance of the West," celebrated the romantic tradition of the captured white man and the beautiful Indian maiden, and the sentimental mood of the two essays is representative of the tone of the whole book.

The book aimed not only at describing the appearance, people, and customs of the Southwest, but also at being a financial success. To achieve this end, Thorpe attempted to celebrate all the popular conventions of polite letters that he could. In some of the nature

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70 Ibid., p. 103.

71 Knickerbocker, xvi, 461-464 (Dec., 1840), and xx, 364-370 (Oct., 1842).
description, as in "Hit of the Woods" no noun goes without an adjective, metaphors sparkle, and the sublime in the forests keeps the author's soul a quiver. The convention of the Noble Savage, the picturesque, melancholy love, and pathetic death all seem to beg for the attention of the idle boudoir.

The book was received by the reviewers as a good but undistinguished work. It was not cut until late in the year; Porter announced in his November 22, 1845, issue that he had the title page of the volume and anticipated a rich treat upon its appearance.72 De Bow's Commercial Review included a notice of it in February, 1846, and the Southern Quarterly Review the following April.73 De Bow's Review noted accurately the intention of the volume, praised it for its originality, and hailed Thorpe as a good writer.

The Mysteries of the Backwoods. The present work of Mr. Thorpe is in a lively vein, and happily takes off many of the scenes in Western life, and the rare peculiarities and originalities of Western manners. It is always gratifying to mark an increase of good writers among us, and we hail Mr. Thorpe in that class.

The notice in De Bow's, apparently the result of a reading of one or two of the sketches, was like the others to follow it--recognizing that the work was competently done, somewhat unusual in its subject matter,

72Spirit, IV, 464 (Nov. 22, 1845).

73The Commercial Review (De Bow's), I, 191 (February, 1846), and Southern Quarterly Review, II, 528-29 (April, 1846).
and not really distinguished at all. What was actually superior in Thorpe's work, the humorous and realistic delineation of frontier characters and incidents, he had omitted probably because he considered it a sub-literary form; "what he included was the kind of thing other writers could do better...." But he had attempted to satisfy what he conceived to be the demand of genteel readers; the book was launched and its reception was yet to be seen.
CHAPTER V

NEW ORLEANS DAILIES AND THE MEXICAN WAR

For the two and a half years following the summer of 1845, when Thorpe left the Concordia Intelligencer, he concerned himself almost not at all with the writing of fiction or with painting. The Mysteries of the Backwoods had been well received critically, but it was only an indifferent success financially. And financial success was what Thorpe now began to pursue with increasing singleness of purpose. Neither his painting nor his fiction offered any financial security, but he was now well known to what Porter called the press gang, and he had had two full years of experience in getting out a newspaper himself. Journalism not only gave him opportunity to write, but also made it possible for him to express his opinions on the current political scene. And surely by this time he was aware, after his appointment as postmaster at Vida, that if he served his party well, his reward might be great. Possibly through journalism, or journalism and politics, he would make his fortune.

So Thorpe continued for two more years trying to establish himself as a newspaper editor, two years of such rapid change and movement that he was connected during the period with no less than four papers, three of which he seems to have established himself, possibly, however, with the financial backing of others.
By September 20, 1845, Thorpe had left New York, for on that date Porter published in the Spirit a note that he was remailing several letters to New Orleans. Meanwhile, another of Porter's correspondents from the Southwest, Colonel Charles Fenton Mercer Noland, who signed himself "N. of Arkansas" and also "Col. Pete Whetstone," for he was a lawyer and member of the Arkansas Legislature, was editing the Batesville Eagle, a Whig journal, and, hearing that Thorpe was establishing a paper in New Orleans, wrote Porter asking about the progress of his fellow correspondent and political ally. Porter inserted a note in his column in November saying that Thorpe's Commercial Times was daily expected to make its appearance. A week later, November 22, Porter announced, "Thorpe is out already with his Daily Commercial Times, in the same city (New Orleans) — a large, elegant sheet, we are told...." Porter added that he had not yet received a copy.

Apparently no copies of the paper are extant from the period of Thorpe's editorship, although there are two bound volumes in the New Orleans Public Library for the periods January 1, 1848, to June 30, 1848, and January 1, 1849, to February 22, 1849. The issue for January 1, 1848, is given as volume 3, number 53, which would indicate

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1James R. Masterson, Tall Tales of Arkansaw, pp. 29-31.
2Spirit, XV, 441 (Nov. 15, 1845).
3Spirit, XV, 464 (Nov. 22, 1845).
that the paper was established early in November, 1845, just as Porter's notice reveals. The paper's name suggests that Thorpe planned to give special attention to New Orleans' business life, for the city was a thriving and busy port for both inland and ocean-going transportation. The issues for 1848 substantiate this supposition, for they are made up of much advertising matter, commercial directories, commercial and financial reports, and import and export statistics. The fact that the paper was still being published in 1849 shows that it did not fail; probably it was sold by Thorpe once he had established it, for he managed it only five months.¹

The founding of a new paper in the middle forties did not require any great financial investment. Only the larger journals had rotary power-driven presses, but for the smaller ones the type was set by hand from two or more compartmented cases and looked into frames from which the sheet could be printed on a hand-operated press. This equipment could easily be bought at second hand from defunct sheets, or, more often, from established papers wishing to improve their appearance with fresh, new type. Advertisements for type and the other equipment appeared frequently in the columns of the time.

This was Thorpe's only connection with a financial journal, and

¹Baton Rouge Gazette, April 4, 1846.
it may be that he did not find it as the kind of a paper he intended
to continue owning and editing all his life, but merely as a financial
venture, to sell after a short investment in time and money. For when
Thorpe established the Commercial Times in the fall of 1845 he was
still a young man, just past thirty, busily trying to make his fortune.

Although his new paper was primarily financial in its emphasis,
Thorpe apparently did not restrict its content to business news, for
shortly after it was founded the Spirit republished from its columns
an essay of Thorpe's evaluating Johnson Jones Hooper as a writer.5
The essay showed Thorpe's continuing interest in the literature of the
Old Southwest and his belief that it was generally an inferior literary
genre.

Among the writers who have contributed to the infant
literature of the Southwest, Mr. Hooper of Alabama has dis­
tinguished himself in a series of sketches, which exhibit
talent of the first order, and give promise of great future
excellence. Mr. Hooper has written, evidently, very un­
conscious of his own ability, he mixes up pathos along with
the commonplace, quite indifferent whether the one or the
other meets with notice. The Adventures of Simon Suggs is
a curious work, and we doubt if any one could be more suc­
cessful in portraying his character; but the episodes which
occasionally show themselves in this volume, betray the
genus which, if cultivated, would attract lasting
attention...

To illustrate our remarks we quote... a short
sketch illustrating the heartless ingratitude of the white
man towards the Indian, a sketch we think faultless in manner
of narrative, and as simple as the tale of a child.

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5 It is not absolutely clear that the article is a reprint from the
Commercial Times, but the heading seems to indicate that it is: "The
Spectator and Simon Suggs / By T. B. Thorpe, Esq., / Author of Tom Owen
the Bee Hunter, etc., and editor of the N. O. 'Com. Times.'" Spirit, XV,
471 (Nov. 29, 1845).
Thorpe follows this by quoting the Story of Inkle and Yarico from the *Spectator*, and then Hooper's "The Story of Litka and Her Lover." The literary fashion of the day demanded pathos and celebrated the convention of the noble savage; only once did Hooper write in the popular manner, and this episode Thorpe chose to commend. He praised what the taste of the time approved.

Thorpe did recognize Hooper as a man of genius in recreating backwoods life and characters, and in this he shows his best critical judgment. Hooper had begun his sketches in *The East Alabamian*, and the first of them, "Taking the Census," Porter had recognized at once as belonging rightfully to the fresh, new literature of the frontier and had reprinted in the *Spirit*, September 9, 1843. Later, in December of 1844, Captain Simon Suggs of the Tallapoosa Volunteers appeared in the *East Alabamian* in the first of a series of sketches about the character which were destined to be printed in book form in less than a year.

Thorpe said of the book in his review that it was a curious

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7*Spirit*, XIII, 329.

work, and it was in that it introduced to American literature the first elaborate portrayal of the Southern poor-white. However, Suggs was no listless backwoodsman, but a picaresque hero in the Spanish sense, a rogue who stood somewhere between William Byrd's stupid and apathetic lubbers and the poor but heroic Davy Crockett. The Big Bear of Arkansas not only hunted, he planted crops of turnips, corn, and potatoes. Suggs lived by his wits; he lied, he cheated, and he stole, and lived up to his motto consistently -- "It is good to be shifty in a new country." But he did not reap or sow, for before he would submit to degrading work, he would go hungry -- or at least let his family go without eating.

As he sat one day, ruminating upon the unpleasant condition of his "financial concerns," Mrs. Suggs informed him that "the sugar and coffee was nigh about out," and that there was not "a dozen j'ints and midlins, all put together, in the smoke-house." Suggs bounced up on the instant, exclaiming, "D--n it! somebody must suffer." Suggs is one of the workless ancestors of William Faulkner's Anse Bundren and of Erskine Caldwell's Jeeter Lester. His existence testifies to the vigor of the new literature and the variety of types it could produce.

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9Shields McIlwaine, The Southern Poor-White (Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 48, suggests the comparison, but he is wrong in asserting that Suggs is entirely a fictional character. See Hoole, Alias Simon Suggs, p. 51.

10Johnson J. Hooper, Simon Suggs' Adventures (Glasgow: Cameron and Ferguson, n. d.), p. 103.
Although Thorpe's review of Hooper's book showed his continuing interest in the literature of the Old Southwest, he seems not to have written any more himself during the five months he edited the Commercial Times — at least Porter reprinted nothing from him in the Spirit. The work of establishing and editing a daily paper did not leave much leisure for frontier sketches, which were, as far as Thorpe was concerned, of slight literary importance. Thorpe's chief aim during these years was to establish himself in the world. While he had been in Philadelphia in the summer of 1845, A. Hart of the publishing firm of Carey & Hart, had made him the offer of a position with the house, and late in the year Thorpe wrote him, asking that the offer be made definite, outlining what he thought he could offer the publishers, and revealing incidentally but clearly that he considered his life to be at a point where his decision concerning his work would determine his future.

New Orleans, Dec 5, 1845

Mr. Hart

Dear Sir

I spoke to you last summer relative to becoming a citizen of Philadelphia. You made me some very kind offers of which I have thought much since, and from circumstances which have since transpired, I wish to allude to them again. When in Phil a city I like very much, or think I should like very much, I presumed that I had made such arrangements in N. O. as rendered my removal from the South impossible but I find such is not the case and that my engagements are limited to time and under my control. I only consented to undertake the conduction of a daily paper
because it I presumed would prove very profitable, but I do not find that I can command what I wish, and therefore I may at some future time if events warrant it, quit an enterprise that entirely sacrifices my time to business, disconnected in every way with literary pursuits, a sacrifice I am not yet prepared to make. [Two words illegible] should if connected with the press in the South be owner or part owner of the establishment I am connected with, and before I begin so important an undertaking on my own responsibility, an undertaking which if once commenced locates one permanently in the South, I wish to know if your kindness will permit, what I could do in Philadelphia, and then having both prospects before me act decidedly and promptly and bend all my energies to the extent I propose to do. I must honestly confess Mr Hart that I am much disposed if possible to devote myself to literature wholly and do nothing else.

Taking the liberty of speaking of myself I would say that I believe I have a great deal of judgement with regard to books that will please the public without sacrificing anything to refined taste. I feel very competent to compile books, select popular subjects, and introduce formally to the world any enterprise you may wish to present to the public through the press. In these particulars I must yield to none. I also feel satisfied that I would be successful in conducting "Rambler and rambles" everywhere and as I am able to illustrate my own works I could if in Texas, Mexico or anywhere else do much to add to the value of my writing by such sketches. I have now in hand [three] half finished literary enterprises which need but the time to complete. In winter if I should come north I would occasionally go abroad to relieve myself of the effects of a cold climate and spend the winters in such a way as would result in making a book, in this matter your advice would of course be of all service. Finally if I should come north I should wish by industry to acquire a competency, a position in society, and whatever else pertains to a gentleman.

... If as a result of this you will give the subject your serious consideration and write me what I can probably accomplish, and certainly expect as far as my arrangements with your house is concerned, I shall be most happy and will shape my business here according to your answer. For reasons which you will appreciate, I do not wish it known I even speculate upon leaving the South, until I resolve to do so, it would injure me here if I should not go very [one or two words illegible] among my friends ... . I should also say that my long residence in the South has given me a command of incidents,
scenery, etc., that would give me an advantage over any
writer superior to me in other respects in details of the
Southwest. Wishing not [to impose] upon your time
I am your obliged Servt
T. B. Thorpe

Messrs Carey & Hart, Philadelphia

I return by the mail the volume of "Mysteries," marked on
the margin, some few typographical errors have occurred
not of serious importance save one or two. I am pleased
with the book as a whole and shall do all in my power to
give it circulation in the South. I hope no paper or
paper [sic] will publish an unfair [prospective] in their
columns . . . . I trust I shall be able to send you the
second volume soon. I write [several words illegible] all
the leisure I can command from the editorial conduction of
a Daily paper. 11

Plainly Thorpe hoped for some concrete offer from Carey & Hart that
would enable him to devote his time wholly to writing, and, probably
more important, provide him with a means whereby he could ... acquire a competency, a position in society, and whatever else pertains
to a gentleman." This honest sentence expresses neatly the primary
ambition of Thomas Bangs Thorpe at thirty, and explains the motivation
behind his enormous activity during the busy years of the middle 1840's.
He would make his fortune where and how he could and be a gentleman.

Late in January, 1846, he wrote again to Carey & Hart, acknowledg-
ing their check for two hundred dollars and stating that he had been

The original is in the collection of the New York Historical Society,
as are the following letters to Carey & Hart unless otherwise
indicated. Doubtful readings are bracketed.
so busy with his paper that he had had no time to work on the second volume of sketches he had proposed. Instead, he had shifted his attention to something else. He had bought a manuscript telling the story of someone's residence of a year and a half in northern California, full of information about the climate, soil, towns, rivers, and the like. "I am rewriting it," he added, "mixing it up with a variety of adventures and hope to have it ready to send north in six weeks." He felt that such a volume would fill a public demand for information about a part of the country to which the nation's attention was being turned as a result of the continuing westward movement of the pioneers and the disputes with England and Mexico over the control of the territory.12

The letter also mentioned his dissatisfaction with Porter's treatment of his work. "I notice in the last 'Spirit' that Porter says he had not seen a copy of my book, it is strange indeed, he has been much censured here for his apparent neglect of Tom Owen."13 The circulation of the book depended in large part on the notices it received in the press, and the many sketches Thorpe had written for the Spirit certainly entitled him to expect that Porter would do all in his


13 Ibid.
power through his paper to encourage the sales of this first
volume. But so far nothing had appeared in the New York Spirit
of the Times about the Mysteries of the Backwoods other than the
notice given the title-page late in November.

Shortly afterward Thorpe received a reply to his letter to
Carey & Hart asking what he might expect from them in the way of a
position with the house. Their letter contained disappointing news
as to sales of the Mysteries of the Backwoods. Thorpe answered at
once, giving more details of his activities.

March 2, 1846
New Orleans, La.

Very Kind Sir,

Your last letter relative to my interests I received
a day or two since, and I read it with pleasure, as it was
characteristic of your continued consideration for my
welfare. I must confess myself surprised at the apparent
want of interest my little volume has created at the north,
and I bow with submission to your judgement relative to all
matters relating to the publication of books intended to
sell. Tom Owen has done well here: I should judge, at least
as far as New Orleans city is concerned. I have heard
nothing that has led me to think otherwise. Lineau, Healy,
and Mayfair will dispose of all they had sent to them and
will I predict send orders for more copies. As it regards
the north I still have hopes the book by some mischance has
not been fairly treated. I have not seen a notice of it
that betrayed its real character. The New Englanders of all
people in the world would like the Mysteries, if they could
be induced to read it, but the name of the book, I am
satisfied, is unfortunate. I shall use some efforts to have
it properly noticed in Boston, and I shall still hope. The
book contains, I predict, some standard Literature and if
several words illegible apprehended in its character.
According to the present public taste Irving's Sketch book
would be a failure. The day will come when the "Hit of the
Woods" will be classical. I say it with due reverence.
I was gratified at a small notice in the "(one or two-word title illegible)" of the book. I have written to a friend to say that if Kerris will properly treat the work, I will return the compliment by lending a helping hand for his newspaper. I will attend to this matter as my good friends at the north who are really under obligation to me have entirely neglected me in the matter of my book. As it regards my "California" I am waiting to see what the book announced "just published" amounts to before I finish mine if it covers the same ground over which my M. S. travels, of course I shall throw it aside. My next volume shall be as you propose, composed entirely of humorous sketches, and nothing else. I will get to work on it at once and write you at once when it may (positively be looked) for. I cannot understand why Mr. Porter has treated me so shably with regard to my book, if it is because I paid him no compliments in the volume, and I see no other reason, he is not the man I gave him credit for, anyway he has disappointed me. I had reasons to expect much from his paper and have received nothing... I shall trouble you with a letter again in two or three weeks and in the meantime I trust you will perceive I have not been idle in having the "Mysteries" fairly treated at the north. My engagements here give me little leisure but I will make an effort.

Most respectfully yours
T. B. Thorpe

Whatever may have been his reasons, Porter did nothing more to encourage the sale of the Mysteries of the Backwoods, and Thorpe's disappointment and resentment was thoroughly justified, for he had written much for Porter's paper and had received no pay. Certainly he could expect Porter's help in launching his first volume. It is difficult to understand why Porter did neglect the book, and possibly Thorpe's conjecture that he was dissatisfied that no compliment had been paid him in the volume is as good as any. The Mysteries had been dedicated to

14 T. B. Thorpe to A. Hart, New Orleans, La., March 2, 1846.
the artist, Hiram Powers, and Thorpe made no mention of Porter
or the *Spirit of the Times* in his preface or elsewhere in the volume.
This may suggest that Thorpe was not particularly proud of his con-
nection with the *Spirit*, or at least felt that it needed no mention
in a book devoted to polite literature. Such an attitude, which is
of course partly conjectural, would offend Porter. However that may
be, Thorpe's services to him deserved a better reward. Publicly,
neither Thorpe nor Porter ever mentioned the matter, and they con-
tinued to be on good terms with one another in the following years.

The one sketch in the book which Thorpe singled out as representa-
tive of his best effort, "Wit of the Woods," is again suggestive of
what he himself prized in his work. It is a description of the method
of wild turkey hunting, of the habits of the bird, and of the beauties
of the Southern forests. The prose is carefully done in the romantic
tradition, full of descriptive adjectives, and indicative of sensibility
toward animals and nature's beauties. It is a hunting essay written
not for the hunter, but for the lover of Nature and the reader of the
nature essay. Thorpe could do this sort of thing well enough indeed;
so also could most of the successful magazine writers of 1846.

Carey & Hart's proposal that his next volume should be composed
entirely of humorous sketches, which Thorpe accepted, was a sound one.
In writing of frontier and backwoods characters he was at his most
original, and his work was equal to that of the best writers in the
field. Unhappily, he could not feel that it had any respectable
Thorpe also thanked Hart for his continued interest in his welfare, but he did not mention or decline any specific offer from the publishing firm, so that it would appear the house had made him no offer he could consider seriously. His opportunities for making his fortune seemed still to be in the South. He stayed on as senior editor of the New Orleans Commercial Times for a while, and then he made the move he must have been considering when he wrote Hart in December of 1845. On April 2, 1846, the New Orleans Daily Tropic, one of the larger city dailies, announced that one of its former owners, B. F. Flanders, had sold his interest in the paper to T. B. Thorpe. The paper further announced that it would be conducted by its proprietors as a copartnership, the owners being Sawyer, Hall, and Thorpe from April 1.

The Daily Tropic, in which Thorpe had now invested his money, seems to have been a well established daily. It was not as lively a paper as the New Orleans Picayune, nor did it have the many strategically placed correspondents of Kendall's paper, but it did have a fair number itself. Although devoting somewhat less space to the news than the Picayune, it compared favorably in content and format with the large

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city dailies of its time; it was a well printed, eight-column, four-sheet paper with the editorials and news printed on the inside of the first page, as was the custom of the time.  

It was just a little younger than the Picayune, having been established on October 3, 1842, and between that time and April of 1846 it had had several editors and proprietors. It was a Whig paper from its beginning, but after the Plaquemines frauds it began advocating stricter naturalization laws, called for the formation of an American party in Louisiana, and in December of 1844 changed its name to the Daily Tropic and American Republican. In January of 1846, just before Thorpe joined it, it had returned to its shorter title and was subsequently an undeviating Whig organ.

Porter greeted the announcement of Thorpe's affiliation with the Tropic by expressing regret that he did not devote his time wholly to his essay writing and his painting.

T. B. Thorpe, Esq., the senior editor of the New Orleans 'Commercial Times,' since its commencement, has recently

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16 As an example, see the New Orleans Daily Tropic, April 2, 1846.

17 Louisiana Newspapers, 1794-1940, p. 123.


19 Ibid., p. 272.
retired from that journal and bought into the "Daily Tropic" of the same city, B. F. Flanders, Esq., having retired. We wish Thorpe had given up the drudgery of the daily press altogether, and devoted himself to his more legitimate pursuit of dividing his time between essay writing and his art. We are pleased to hear that he is engaged in a new volume to follow his "Mysteries of the Backwoods."20

The notice was kind enough, but it still did not recommend Thorpe's book, which was by now dying aborning.

The Daily Tropic had a daily and a Sunday edition, and Thorpe's interest extended to both. The first issue to be published after his connection with the paper, that of April 2, 1846, contained an editorial supporting the common schools which had been established in New Orleans after the state legislative action of 1841. The piece is unsigned, but it represents one of Thorpe's continuing interests, as his subsequent career was to show, and it may well be his first contribution to the paper of which he was now part owner. For the next few weeks no material identifiable as Thorpe's was printed, as the editorials and news items commonly included no by-lines.

Meanwhile the Mexican War had broken out, and within about seven weeks the Tropic announced that T. B. Thorpe had left for the army which was under the command of General Zachary Taylor, then on the Rio Grande.21 Thorpe, the notice added, went as bearer of dispatches from General Gaines to General Taylor; he would furnish the latest war

20 Spirit XVI, 85 (April 18, 1846).
21 Tropic, May 21, 1846.
news directly from the front for the *Tropic*. He was referred to as Colonel Thorpe, but apparently the title had no real military significance, for none of the items in the paper to follow indicated that he had any military duties.

When the Mexican War began in May, 1846, the telegraph extended south only as far as Richmond, and the journals of the north had to get their reports largely from the papers near the scene of action, in this case from the New Orleans journals. Frank Luther Mott observes that the war actually marked the beginning of the techniques of reporting swiftly and fully the events of international conflict. George Wilkins Kendall of the *Picayune*, who had his own ax to grind with the Mexicans, for he had been a member of the Santa Fe expedition of 1842 which had been captured by the Mexicans and marched overland to Mexico City to be imprisoned, was one of the first to leave for the front, riding four hundred miles across the country to arrive at Point Isabel on the Rio Grande on June 6. Thorpe must have gone by ship from New Orleans, for his first dispatch, with the by-line "Editorial Correspondence," appeared in the *Tropic* of June 6, although it may not have been sent back from the front. The piece was entitled "Episode in the History of Our Army of Occupation / No. 1, 196

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23 Ibid.
Captains May and Walker." The dispatch is really a hastily written essay in praise of the two officers and is rather more of an expression of enthusiasm and sentiment than the dispatches Kendall was sending back for the Picayune.

For the next few weeks the Tropic continued to print a great deal of war news, for although the Whig papers of the North and New England particularly opposed the war, the Whigs of the South, once it was started, supported it with the most extravagant enthusiasm. Other than the items marked Editorial Correspondence, Thorpe's work cannot be identified in this material.

Thorpe did not spend many days at the front, where the Mexican Army of the North had been defeated by Taylor's forces on the 8th and 9th of May, and by June 16, he was back in New Orleans with a pack of notes and sketches for a history of the activities of the American forces leading to the defeat of the Mexican Army on the Rio Grande and the capture of Matamoros. His first letter to Carey & Hart outlining his project is not available, but the second shows the circumstances of the work and his haste to capitalize on the public interest in the war.

Monday June 16, 1846
New Orleans, La

Gent,
Inclosed I send you six more drawings making 12 in all up to this date. The remainder will be 12 or 15 more, most small. I wish the draftsmen on the wood to finish these drawings and take great pains with the drawings of
the battle fields, and they must not be reversed in printing. I can increase the number of drawings in small sketches if you think it best, and will not be expensive beyond publication. The battle fields should be as large as the pages of the book will furnish. There will be plenty of material to enlarge the book to any size you may see fit beyond what I may write for a price of 50 or 75 cuts as the material is plenty and of great interest. The engraver must be bound by some obligation not to have these drawings copied. I would suggest a copyright. If you do not wish for the drawings, please put them in the hands of the engravers, with the best prices for engraving them, as I wish them copied under any circumstances and as promptly as possible. Please excuse my style of writing and want of order, as I write in great haste and trust to your superior business knowledge to assist me in the matter. All I wish is that no delay may be occasioned by waiting for the drawings. With great respect

Truly your most obliged Servt.

T. B. Thorpe

Messrs Carey & Hart
Phil. 25

A few days later, on June 25, Thorpe wrote again to his publishers, enclosing four more drawings and informing them that he was forwarding them manuscript material for fifty more printed pages. He added that the book would be full of stirring incidents, serious and comic, and would be one of the most readable volumes of the season. After his arrival at the Rio Grande, he had gone over the battle fields, conversed with many of the principal officers, and kept a voluminous

journal, all of which would provide material for one of the first books about the events then stirring the nation.\textsuperscript{26}

He wrote again from New Orleans in July, sending eight chapters of \textit{Our Army on the Rio Grande}, as the work was to be titled, and promising six more within a week. He noted that he had been to some expense in buying Spanish documents and getting other material for the book. He gave further instructions as to how he wanted the book got out; he was most eager that it present a handsome appearance.\textsuperscript{27}

Late in June and early in July Porter had announced in the \textit{Spirit} that both Thorpe and Kendall of the \textit{Picayune} were at the front, and he thanked Thorpe for the envelope of an official dispatch from the Mexican Minister of War to the Prefect of Matamoros which he had found in the City Hall there and sent him as a curiosity.\textsuperscript{28} And by September 5 he announced that Thorpe's new work, \textit{Our Army on the Rio Grande}, was nearly ready. About six weeks later he reviewed it.

\begin{quote}
New Publications, etc. From Carey & Hart we have "Our Army on the Rio Grande," by T. B. THORPE Esq, a writer well known to the readers of the "Spirit." Its title alone in these stirring times would insure its perusal, and from a hasty glance at its contents we feel
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, New Orleans, June 25, 1846.

\textsuperscript{27} T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, New Orleans, July, 1846.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Spirit}, XVI, 210 and 234 (June 27 and July 11, 1846).
sure that the reader will be abundantly repaid, not only in graphic descriptions, but new matters of fact.\textsuperscript{29}

As it was finally issued in October of 1846, Our Army on the Rio Grande was a volume of 196 closely printed pages, very fully illustrated with drawings, detailing the events of the American Army of Occupation from the time of its removal from Corpus Christi to the surrender of the Mexican city of Matamoros. It makes use of eye-witness accounts of the battles, the reports of camp newspapers, and numerous official documents, both Mexican and American. Thorpe was given access to the reports of the officers in the field by the kindness of Major General Gaines, who was the United States Army officer in charge of the area at the time, and General Worth, both of whom he thanks in his preface to the book.\textsuperscript{30} The writing shows some signs of haste, and contains a fair number of violations of standard English practice of the time, as did all of Thorpe's work, for that matter, but the narrative generally moves easily, and is lively and colorful.

Henry David Thoreau, James Russell Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and many other New Englanders wrote and spoke against the Mexican War as a scandalous and shameful affair, but the people of the South generally favored it, and the citizens of Louisiana, because of the closeness of the events, had enjoyed a thrill without feeling any very

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Spirit}, XVI, 420 (Oct. 24, 1846).

\textsuperscript{30} The Preface is dated Louisiana, August, 1846.
real danger. The excitement of raising local volunteers to protect the country against the Mexicans had stirred the people, and Thorpe shared the attitude that the war was a romantic and adventurous affair, proclaiming the glory of American arms to the world at large. His description of the opening of the battle of Palo Alto reveals his view of the conflict.

A scene singularly thrilling and sublime, now presented itself—a scene such as was never before witnessed in warlike operations. Two contending armies had met upon a battle field formed by an American prairie. Not a shrub, not the slightest hillock or artificial embankment of any kind intervened to offer protection or give either party advantage over the other. This battle-plain was broad enough for the most extensive operations while the respective commanders could look over their troops in the contest, as upon a moving panorama.

Our soldiers glanced across this richly carpeted prairie, and saw extended before them the Mexican host. Artillery, infantry, and cavalry were placed alternately, the whole forming a living wall more than a mile in extent, of physical strength, of steel, and latent fire. The meridian sun poured down its rays upon breasts heaving with pent-up emotions and fierce passions, soon to be called forth in deadly strife. Six thousand men stood there in battle array.

The gallant little American army saw this front with eyes flashing with enthusiasm, and a proud consciousness of coming victory. At the sight, the regimental colors were stripped of their coverings, and amidst deafening cheers unfurled in defiance, and thrown to the breeze.

Obviously Thorpe's attitude toward the war was thoroughly romantic; he found the battles stirring and sublime, the deaths beautiful and pathetic, and the whole action a fine exercise for the emotions.

31 Our Army on the Rio Grande, p. 74.
The book reveals several others of Thorpe's ideas which help to fill out the pattern of his thought. To the Mexicans he granted bravery if it added to the glory of American arms; otherwise he gave them credit for little more than perfidy and cowardice. Mexico had by this time abolished slavery, and what he could observe of their treatment of Negroes, he put down as trickery or the inability to draw proper social distinctions. In noting some American desertions, he also commented on runaway slaves:

About the time of these desertions, several officers lost their servants. They had been enticed away by the inhabitants of Matamoras, and, for effect, treated with marked consideration. They sat at table with Mexican families, and were otherwise elevated to a high social position. These servants, in every instance, returned by stealth to their masters, save one or two who had been taken into "the interior."  

Thorpe's interpretation of the reason of the Mexicans' acts may have been correct, but it is part of a consistent pattern of granting the Mexicans credit for no moral act. The Mexicans' failure to make social distinctions on the basis of color also offended Thorpe, as he shows in his description of the wounded after the battles of the 6th and 9th of May:

Worere these indeed the brave soldiers of the 8th and 9th, who had about them their ghastly titles that showed they had been in the thickest of the fight? Were these men Mexicans? Were such varities of colors all equal in social condition? Even so. The Castilian with auburn hair, the

32 Ibid., p. 24.
sварthy Indian with straight, and dark negro with kinked, with all their intermediate mixtures, lay side by side, all Mexicans, all of the same sympathies, feelings, language. All moved in their winding sheets, evidently equal in mind and body. To the American, who makes distinction in colors, this strange mixture of races in one people, causes great surprise.33

From this it is obvious that Thorpe accepted color and race as sufficient basis for social distinction, and suggests that he was surprised that Negroes and Indians should fight bravely with the Mexican army. The Mexican himself Thorpe found a silly fellow in his dress and habits, and ridiculous in that in spite of the fact he did not wear the breeches of civilized nations, he was still proud and full of self-esteem.34

The assumption of the inferiority of the dark-skinned people implies the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon, and this, too, Thorpe accepted. The Americans, he felt, could bring a great blessing to Mexico:

Let the northern part of Mexico be once possessed of good laws and an intelligent population, that would call forth the undeveloped resources of the country, and Matamoros would soon grow into a city of great commercial importance. It is not possible for the present inhabitants to accomplish anything.35

The ideas of the worthlessness of Mexican character and civilization

33 Ibid., p. 152.
34 Ibid., p. 134.
and the superiority of the people and laws of the United States meant, in 1846, Manifest Destiny, and Thorpe's explanation of the movement reveals in a striking manner the curious religious content the idea had for him and probably for others who accepted it. The latter part of the book was made up of anecdotes and incidents, and among these he included the tale of a fighting clergyman, the Reverend Captain R. A. Stuart of Louisiana, who commanded a body of volunteers. The date of June 1, 1846, Thorpe predicted, would be a memorable one because on that day the Reverend Mr. Stuart preached a powerful and significant sermon to the veterans on the battlefield.

The Rev. captain took for his text: If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt,

Then I will cause you to dwell together in this place, in the land I gave to your fathers for ever and ever.

Jer. vii., 6, 7.

The comments and illustrations were apposite in the extreme, and suggested by the scenes around the speaker. He dwelt upon the incidents of the preceding month, and of the beautiful spectacle shown to the world by a conquering army, extending over a country its laws, — which were more benign, more liberal, more protecting, than those displaced by the fortunes of war. This, said the speaker, warming with his subject, is carrying out the spirit of the text. . . . It was calculated to shed light over the dark borders of Tamaulipas, — to make the inhabitants embrace the blessings of freedom, — to open their eyes to the degradations of their own government, that enslaves alike their bodies and their minds. The soldier—preacher then passed on to the second part of his text, — "Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land I gave your fathers for ever and ever." It would be impossible for us to give the slightest idea of the conclusion of this remarkable discourse. The Rev. speaker showed most plainly and beautifully, that it was the order of Providence that the Anglo-Saxon race was not only to take possession of the whole North American continent,
but to influence and modify the character of the world, —that such was meant by "the land I gave your fathers for ever and ever." He stated that the American people were children of destiny, and were the passive instruments in the hands of an overruling power, to carry out its great designs. . . .

The idea of Manifest Destiny for Thorpe included the concept of the master race conquering in the name of the Lord inferior peoples whom it was to rule justly (that is, according to the conqueror's laws) and control forever. The rule of the United States was to be extended not only over the North American continent but over the whole world, a destiny to make the British shudder twice. Thorpe found the idea a most exciting one and never for a moment questioned its feasibility or morality as the New England writers were doing. His belief in the superiority of his own ways and the ridiculous peculiarity and impropriety of the Mexican civilization was as simple as a savage's.

The personality emerging from the comparatively small body of writing produced before his thirty-first birthday is that of a man whose standards of judgment in literature, in art, and in politics were no more than the current opinions of his own group. He seems to have been peculiarly sensitive to popular ideas and demands, and quick to add his weight to the weight of the majority. He could state some ideas persuasively and find good reasons to justify them so that he was, in a

\[36\text{Ibid.}, pp. 172-73. Thorpe added at the end of the anecdote that the Reverend Captain Stuart was a clergyman of the Methodist Church and a sugar planter in the parish of Iberville, Louisiana.\]
small way, a public rationalizer. In his writing he had either to follow the popular form, the romantic essay, or the demands of a specific group, such as the readers of Porter's paper. Even his use of humor and realism fit the pattern, for it made possible the artistic presentation of things he enjoyed doing, such as hunting and fishing, and also rewarded him with applause in his attempts to depict the group image — the American character.

Meanwhile Thorpe's hopes for establishing himself through his investment in the Tropic were disappointed, for about August 25 the paper ceased publication, and when it was resumed on September 17, a brief announcement explained that the co-partnership existing under the title of Sawyer, Hall, and Thorpe was dissolved September 16. Another announcement added that F. Sawyer and Charles E. Hall would thereafter conduct the paper as editors and proprietors.

On September 15 Thorpe wrote Carey & Hart stating that he was in some financial difficulty and asking them to forward him a draft of $112 as an advance payment on the forthcoming Our Army on the Rio Grande. He said he had had to borrow money, using the name of a friend as security, and that the note was due. If he did not pay it, his friend

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37Daily Tropic, September 17, 1846. The exact date of suspension is uncertain, for the article under the notice of dissolution of partnership merely says the paper had not been published "for some days." The collections of the Tropic at the New Orleans Public Library and at the Louisiana State Museum both end with the Aug. 25, 1846 issue, and this date for the suspension seems to be the best guess.
would have to, and he intended to avoid however he could harming a friend who had trusted him. He added that the Daily Tropic had failed through mismanagement of the business director, and that he was going to Baton Rouge to establish a weekly paper, which would leave him more time for literary pursuits.38

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During the mid-forties Thorpe's writing continued to be published in collections and anthologies, bringing him to an ever larger audience. Early in September Porter announced that Carey & Hart had nearly ready another humorous anthology prepared under his editorship, entitled A Quarter Race in Kentucky, which was announced as out in mid-December.39

The full title of the book indicated its contents: A Quarter Race in Kentucky, and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Scenes, Characters, and Incidents, Throughout "The Universal Yankee Nation." Porter noted in his introduction that The Big Bear of Arkansas had been intended to illustrate character and incident especially in the South and Southwest, and that the present volume had a wider scope, for it included the whole nation. The book was again an excellent anthology, containing sketches

38T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, New Orleans, September 15, 1846.

by Hooper, George Washington Harris, Robert Patterson, who had been
Thorpe's former associate on the Intelligencer, George Wilkins
Kendall of the Picayune, Sol Smith, Joseph K. Field, "Madison Tensas,"
the Louisiana Swamp Doctor, and various other writers of humorous
sketches. Thorpe's "Bob Herring, the Arkansas Bear Hunter" was in­
cluded, prefaced by a short biography recalling his "Big Bear of
Arkansas" and "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter," and telling that he was also
a painter. The sketch added that Thorpe had visited the front during
the Mexican War,

...and the result has been a very interesting volume,
-containing many illustrations from drawings by himself, made
on the spot. It is called "Our Army of Occupation;" the
publishers were Carey & Hart, of Philadelphia; and the work
may be obtained at the book-store for half-a-dollar, though
worth five times that amount. 40

Porter did not neglect Thorpe in advertising his history.

Porter had also edited another book, announced as published in the
Spirit in December, P. Hawker's Instructions to Young Sportsmen. Colonel
Peter Hawker had first issued his Instructions to Young Sportsmen, with
directions for the Choice, Care, and Management of Guns, Hints for the
preservation of Game; and Instructions for Shooting Wildfowl. To which
is added, a Concise abridgement of the Principal Game Laws, in London in
1814. The book had been quite popular, and Porter's edition, the first
in America, was the ninth edition of the book. The American supplement

40A Quarter Race in Kentucky, p. 130.
which Porter added contained contributions from J. J. Audubon, "Frank Forrester," Judge Haliburton, T. B. Thorpe, and other writers on hunting and the outdoor life.\textsuperscript{41} Thorpe's sketch on "Woodcock Fire Hunting" was reprinted in the section Porter added to the book.\textsuperscript{42}

But more important than these specialised volumes in bringing Thorpe before the genteel audience was Griswold's \textit{Prose Writers of America}, the preface of which is dated May, 1847. Rufus Wilmot Griswold through his \textit{The Poets and Poetry of America} (1842), the prefaces to his various editions of English and American writers, and his editorship of \textit{Graham's}, was, in spite of his deficiencies as a critic, a leader and former of the American literary taste of the 1840's.\textsuperscript{43} The preface Griswold prepared reveals again the preoccupation of the time with the national mind and the national character.

This volume contains a brief survey of our intellectual history . . . . I have not attempted to describe the merely successful writers, but such as have evinced unusual powers in controlling the national mind, or in forming or illustrating the national character . . . .

In introducing the selections of Thorpe's writings he had included, Griswold observed that the nation had the promise of a rich and peculiar literature in the South and Southwest in the work of Morgan Neville, the writers included in William Trotter Porter's two anthologies, the writing

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Spirit}, XVI, 468, 486 (Nov. 21, Dec. 5, 1846).

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Spirit}, XIII, 234 (Aug. 4, 1849).

of J. J. Nepper and others. All of these sketches, he noted, "contain passages of bold, original and indigenous, though sometimes not very delicate humour." He added that he had hoped to include some of the work of Judge Longstreet, William P. Hawes and others, but that as space forbade it, "Mr Thorpe may serve as a type of the class of writers that has been referred to." He included a biography of Thorpe from information probably Thorpe himself provided and ended with an evaluation of his writing:

He has a genuine relish for the sports and pastimes of southern frontier life, and describes them with remarkable freshness and skill of light and shade. No one enters more heartily into all the whims and grotesque humours of the backwoodsman, or brings him more actually and clearly before us. He has fixed upon his pages one of the evanescent phases of American life, with a distinctness and fidelity that will make his books equally interesting as works of art or history.\[44\]

The manuscript from which Criswold's biography of Thorpe was prepared, which was probably written by Thorpe himself, as the handwriting looks like his, is preserved, and, significantly enough, it does not picture him as one who enters "... heartily into all the whims and grotesque humours of the backwoodsman..." Instead, it pictures him (that is, he pictures himself presumably) more as the romantic rambler and quiet observer of the faraway scene.

At 21 his health being somewhat impaired, he sought in Louisiana a more congenial climate and has been a permanent

\[44\]Prose Writers of America, p. 546.
resident of that state until this time. The climate and people both found in him an ardent admirer the freedom of thought and extent of territory a beauty in the scenery all of which are exhibited in a remarkable degree in his writings. The Mississippi, the primitive forests, the vast undeveloped resources of the country, the immigration the early scenes and traditions all afford to him a delightful field of speculation and study and will be the groundwork of a literature heretofore unknown in the United States.\(^4^5\)

At the end of the manuscript a footnote is added which does mention his happiness in the backwoods.

Mr. T. is fond of society, indulges occasionally in story telling, makes a very good speech from the stump and as his happiness is in the back woods he has frequent opportunities of meeting with the characters and scenes which he so happily describes.\(^4^6\)

Thorpe did not identify himself with backwoods characters, but preferred to be the artistic observer, which he was, to be sure.

Griswold printed five selections from Thorpe's writings. "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" was reprinted from *Mysteries of the Backwoods*, and four other pieces entitled "Fat Game," "Dogs and Guns," "A Farm in Arkansas," and "Death of the Big Bear" followed, each of which was a short sketch taken from the one tale "The Big Bear of Arkansas." These vignettes could stand alone, although the most valuable and distinctive part of the sketch,

\(^4^5\) Untitled, undated, and unsigned two-page manuscript biography of T. B. Thorpe. The original is in the Griswold Collection of the Boston Public Library.

\(^4^6\) Ibid.
the character of the Big Bear, was wholly lost. However limited Griswold may have been as an editor, he did introduce Thorpe to a wider and more general audience than had known him heretofore. And though his treatment of "The Big Bear of Arkansas" did not show much discernment of its real value, he did have enough literary judgment to pick out Thorpe's best piece. Had the matter been left to the author himself, he would have offered one of his nature essays.

In his letter to Carey & Hart of September 15, 1846, telling them that he had failed financially with the Daily Tropic, Thorpe also informed them that the new venture of a weekly newspaper he contemplated publishing at Baton Rouge would leave him more time for literary pursuits, and that he was already at work collecting material for a continuation of his history of the war. He planned to record the advance of Taylor's army toward Monterey, and asked whether it should be added to the volume already completed or issued as a separate book.

Two weeks later he wrote them again giving some details of his circumstances in Baton Rouge.

Baton Rouge, Oct. 1, 1846

Dear Sir

... Having failed in my enterprise in the city I determined not again to place myself in a position of so much care and responsibility, and to place myself in a position where I make Literature a part of my business. I have accordingly settled in Baton Rouge, and hope soon to be fairly at work dividing my
time between my books and the conduction of a weekly paper possessed of a fair subscription. To get out of the city I was obliged to borrow some money and among my arrangements I got $250 from a friend who was willing to wait a reasonable time on me and take an order on you for the first moneys due me on my Rio Grande or any other book. . . . But I am now at work on two books which I will soon send in. I allude to my California and a volume for your Library of (one word illegible) humorous American works both of which so far as matter is concerned are already completed . . . .

The collection of humorous sketches was what Carey & Hart wanted from him, but along with work on it, he divided his time between the addition to his history of the Mexican War and the manuscript about California. He was also busy with the purchase of some unidentified newspaper in Baton Rouge.

He did not, however, succeed in buying a paper, for in two more weeks, still at work on his continuation of the history, he was busy preparing to establish his own paper.

New Orleans Nov 1, 1846

Gentlemen,

. . . I have been in this city several days purchasing materials for a printing office for a paper to be established at the future capital of the state Baton Rouge. I am happy to say I have every prospect of doing an excellent business and of course recovering from the losses I sustained in the city . . . .

By this time the sorry results of the last venture and the happy prospects of the future begin to have the familiarity of an old refrain.

So far, all his efforts to establish himself in society, gain a competency and whatever else pertained to a gentleman had failed in spite
of the most strenuous efforts, but the prospects were still excellent, and Baton Rouge had not yet been tried.

On November 7, the Baton Rouge Gazette, also a Whig paper, printed a notice of his plans for a new journal in the town:

Mr. Thorpe.—This gentleman, well known as the author of Tom Owen the Bee Hunter, Our Army on the Rio Grande, and Mysteries of the Backwoods, we understand is about to establish a semi-weekly paper in this town. He is a gentleman of superior talents, and will no doubt aid in promoting the general interests and welfare of our community, among which he intends to reside. We tender him our sincere wishes for his success in his new undertaking.

The Conservator, as Thorpe's newest journal was called, seems to have perished without leaving any extant copies, and its contents and progress can be only approximately reconstructed through references to it in other sources. The Baton Rouge Gazette of December 19, 1846, quoted from the Conservator of the sixteenth. Griswold had noted in his biography of Thorpe for the Prose Writers that the Conservator had been established in November of 1846, which is probably correct.

The January 23, 1847, issue of the Baton Rouge Gazette included a quotation from the Conservator saying that the mechanics of the town were being used by demagogues to get votes for petty municipal offices. The quotation was followed by a letter signed "A Mechanic" saying that Thorpe was opposed to the interests of good mechanics (carpenters,

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47 Baton Rouge Gazette, Nov. 7, 1846.

48 P. 546.
tailors, cabinet makers, and the like) and that if he ever were to run for any public office their opposition would defeat him. The exchange took place about three weeks after Thorpe had been appointed to the Fine Arts Committee for the annual fair of the Louisiana Agricultural and Mechanics Association. Probably his distrust of working people's ability to think for themselves was a part of the pattern of his conservatism. Furthermore, the honest mechanics were members of the Democratic party more often than not.

Thorpe's continuing interest in literary and cultural matters also led him to take an active part in the founding of the Baton Rouge Lyceum. In February of 1847 a meeting of citizens of the town was held at the reading room of one T. B. B. Hatch for the purpose of organizing "an Institution for the dissemination of useful knowledge. The meeting was briefly though eloquently addressed by Rev. Wm. M. Crenshaw and T. B. Thorpe Esq., upon the utility and beneficial results of the organization of the Society now in contemplation." At this first organizational meeting, a series of lectures was planned, and an executive committee was appointed to select other series for the future. Thorpe was elected a member of the Committee. Later, a Lyceum library was established with various state papers and 250 volumes.

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49 Baton Rouge Gazette, January 2, 1847.
50 Ibid., February 27, 1847.
51 Ibid., March 6, 1847.
As he had promised Carey & Hart, Thorpe continued to write while he was in Baton Rouge editing the *Conservator*, although his output was never what he promised it would be.

Nov 27, 1846
New Orleans La

Gentlemen

Your letter containing the six illustrations intended for my book I received yesterday, and I examined them with the greatest pleasure. They are indeed very fine and I think will add much to Mr. Darley's fame, as well as to the interest of the book itself. At the proper time, I will make a detailed notice of their merits, and send you the paper. I spend my leisure time in completing my second book and hope soon to send you the M. S. if it will assist matters any I will forward to Mr. Darley the subject for four of the illustrations. Mr. Norman has printed a circular, and it will be distributed relative to Tom Owen. I shall spare no pains of course to circulate it.

If on receipt of this letter if you will forward to me a check on your city for the amt. due me on the first edition it will oblige me very much. I am paying here heavy interest on money and I wish to obtain all the money in my power to apply to my relief. A note of 30 days would I presume answer, and cover the time of publication. by so doing I should be under great obligations to you. I have in treaty the procuring of an old M. S. which if I can obtain will furnish I think something new and interesting for publication. of this matter I will write in due time. with sentiments of the greatest respect Yours T. B. Thorpe

Messrs Carey & Hart. Phila.

The reference to the six illustrations by Darley and Thorpe's offer to forward the subjects for four more, do not fit the circumstances of the forthcoming history very well, although Darley did make one drawing for

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52 The original is in the Boston Public Library.
it, but this may mean that at his publisher's urging Thorpe was at last seriously at work on a volume of humorous sketches. Felix O. C. Darley had illustrated The Big Bear of Arkansas, the Quarter Race in Kentucky, J. J. Hooper's Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, and Thorpe's own Mysteries of the Backwoods and was well known for his humorous drawings. Thorpe had said in his letter of October 1 that as far as material went his book for the Library of Humorous American Works was completed, and it was in this book that Carey & Hart were most interested. Possibly they were trying to urge him on with evidence of their own preparation for publication. However, as Thorpe rarely referred to his books by consistent titles, it is impossible to be certain what the illustrations were for.

His own interest during the period, as far as his writing went, was in his work on the history of the Mexican War. He wrote Carey & Hart again on January 6, 1847, obviously in answer to a letter from them informing him that the sales of Our Army on the Rio Grande were small, saying he could not account for the book's poor showing, but he was sure the next one, Our Army at Monterey, would be much better. "This book, which will be one of a much happier character than the first, the battles excepted, as it will contain much incidental information of great interest, will form a continuation of Our Army on the Rio Grande."53 Not content to end his contribution to historical writing with this, he

53Letter from T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, dated New Orleans, Jan. 6, 1847.
added that he was also keeping informed of the navy's activities and was busy on a volume which could be entitled *Our Army and Navy at Vera Cruz*. He urged his publishers to hurry on with the picture of Monterey, which he seems to have got from Major Eaton, as he expected that General Taylor would be the next presidential candidate and there would be a demand for the best history of the campaign.54

Among his writings for his paper, Thorpe did at least one hunting sketch, entitled "The Chase" and reprinted by Porter in the *Spirit* from the *Louisiana Conservator*, which may have been the full title of the paper.55 The essay is a hunting sketch and not a humorous tale, and deals with the planter class and not with backwoods characters or frontiersmen. And finally, in January of 1847, Porter got around to reviewing the *Mysteries of the Backwoods*.56 "Who has not read 'Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter?' and who that has but will seize with avidity upon the present work from the same brilliant pen. . .," he asked, but the book had been out over a year, and was not to be revived. Porter kept trying, however, for it is quite possible that his first neglect had been mere carelessness, and the next week he reprinted "The Mississippi" as "From Thorpe's *Mysteries of the Backwoods* just published by Carey & Hart, 54Tbid.

55*Spirit*, XVI, 548 (January 9, 1847).

56*Spirit*, XVI, 572 (January 24, 1847).
Thorpe apparently sent copies of his paper to the *Spirit*'s exchange desk, for during the spring of 1847 Porter seemed to be quite well informed about Thorpe's activities. He noted in April that Thorpe was delivering a course of lectures in New Orleans, and the next month he printed an account of the Baton Rouge races at the Magnolia Course from the *Conservator.*

But the *Conservator* also failed to provide Thorpe with the means of establishing himself as he wanted, for by June of 1847 he had left Baton Rouge and returned to New Orleans to establish another paper — this time the *Daily National.* A consecutive series of issues of the *Daily National* covering the period from September 10 to December 30, 1847, is preserved, bound, in the library of the Louisiana State Museum, and, consequently, it is possible to examine in some detail Thorpe's activities as editor of a city daily during the 1840's.

The issue for September 10, 1847, is numbered volume I, number 83, verifying the date of establishment as mid-June. It was, the editorial

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57*Spirit*, XVI, 576 (Jan. 31, 1847).
58*Spirit*, XVII, 102 (Apr. 24, 1847).
59*Spirit*, XVII, 134 (May 15, 1847).
60*Baton Rouge Gazette*, June 19, 1847.
column head proclaimed, "Published every morning, Sunday excepted at No. 44 St. Charles St., opposite the St. Charles Exchange. Thomas B. Thorpe, Editor."

In format it was a four-page sheet of seven columns, and it was, thus, a little smaller than the Tropic and the Picayune. The first page was devoted to advertisements, as was customary at the time, and the small type and closely crowded notices presented a drab appearance. The third and fourth pages, too, were devoted to advertisements of goods for sale, quack medicines, railroad timetables, and steamboat sailing dates.

The news and editorials were printed on the second page, inside. Immediately under the title at the head of the first column, Thorpe proclaimed the political affiliation of his new paper in bold-face type: "For President of the U. S. / Zachary Taylor." The leading news stories for the September 10 issue were George Wilkins Kendall's dispatches from Yacubaya dated August 27, 28, and 29, 1847, reporting the progress of the Mexican War. Another item showed the timeless interest in crime stories in a notice headed, "Horrible Murder of a Young Woman," which opened, "A very melancholy affair, says the N. Y. Sun, occurred at Mt. Pleasant, near Sing Sing on the 29th inst." The items of local news concerned events or personalities the editor knew at first hand or had copied from other city papers. Another standard practice of the day which Thorpe followed was that of filling part of a column with the daily court reports.

In appearance and content the paper was an ordinary city daily for its time, except, of course, that it included rather more news of artistic
and literary affairs than did its fellows, in this reflecting Thorpe's background. Because of its strong Whig position, it would have to depend for its readers and probably its advertisers on the members of that party.

Throughout the latter half of 1847, the paper was wholly dedicated to General Taylor's candidacy, and quite active in his support. In the issue for September 11 Thorpe noted that the General's popularity seemed to be waning, and he blamed this on opponents who were trying to undermine the "old hero's" popularity by provoking him to write letters giving his opinion on such "inflammable" issues as the National Bank, the Wilmot Proviso, and so forth. It must be inferred from this that Thorpe felt his candidate would be stronger if he took no stand on controversial issues. And, as a matter of fact, this was a point of strength for Taylor. Henry Clay, the logical standard-bearer of the party, had been at all times a national Whig, standing for the settlement of all disputes by compromise, and it was he who laid down the principles of the party. Taylor, however, really had no political interests or beliefs, and finally offered himself on something of a non-partisan basis. Because of his activities during the war he was popular throughout the country as a successful general frequently is, and, moreover, as a Southerner and slave-holder he was acceptable to the South, and would be, it was supposed, a solid champion of the interests of his section. 61

With Clay as the leader of the Whigs and Taylor as the candidate of greater popular appeal, the approaching convention presented a delicate problem. In his issue for September 14, Thorpe noted that the Young Whigs of New York had nominated Mr. Clay. They were, he said, not friends of Mr. Clay but enemies of the Whig party, and he noted with sorrow that the Whigs were not politicians, that is, did not conduct the party strategy wisely. The New York Tribune had also supported Clay, and the next day he wrote with satisfaction that Whig papers all over the country were opposing Clay's nomination.

Of himself he said, "We have fought, bled, and died for Mr. Clay...," adding that he opposed Clay's nomination not out of opposition to the man but because he could never get a majority of the votes. Thorpe continued that he was not a political martyr who would rather be defeated with Clay than victorious under another. He saw himself as a practical politician whose business it was to win for the party, and not to die supporting principles.

On the issues of the day, he supported the position of the South on the slavery question on the basis that the constitution accepted it and it was therefore not to be tampered with. Mr. Dallas and Mr. Buchanan, he said, looked upon the people of the South as poor, miserable devils. "Mr. Dallas knows that a majority of the states

62 New Orleans Daily National, September 15, 1847.
have already declared in favor of the Wilmot Proviso and that
in any change in the Constitution the South alone would suffer."63
A few days after this was published, October 8, he noted that the
issue of Negro suffrage was before the voters of Connecticut. He
added ironically that the philanthropy of abolitionists was usually
for distant Negroes. Other than these references, however, his
paper contained no discussion of the question of Negro slavery.

Among the local problems which interested him was that of the
health of New Orleans. During the yellow fever epidemic he wrote
on September 18 a passionate editorial in favor of some kind of san-
itary regulations for New Orleans. He noted the historical opposition
in the city to quarantine but added that no city of its size was
without laws regulating hygiene. The stacks of decaying cattle hides
on the levee, he thought, might contribute to the general unhealthi-
ness of the place, and he blasted the sale of condemned army provi-
sions. This unwholesome practice might help army contractors or even
the United States Treasury, but it was no recompense for the loss of
human life, he observed. Again, in the October 12 issue he complained
of the filth in the New Orleans streets, saying that it was a matter of
universal remark.

On October 22 no advertisements appeared on the front page of his
paper. Instead the columns were filled with names headed, "Deaths by

63Ibid., Oct. 4, 1847.
Yellow Fever During the Great Epidemic of 1847. Because of popular demand, he said, he republished the list in the next issue.

Another of his local interests was elementary education. The National for September 15 included a short article on the Boston Common School Journal, edited by Horace Mann. This, he said, should be of interest to every friend of education, and now that Louisiana had introduced a common school system, all directors and teachers should be acquainted with the Journal. Horace Mann, he said, was among the "ablest and most useful writers we have on education."

Another edition of the paper included the account of a duel in Tensas Parish, headed "Infamous Affair," and the article condemned the practice. In addition to his opposition to dueling, he expressed his opposition to lynching in one of his issues by printing the tale of a man who had been supposedly murdered turning up after another had been lynched for the supposed crime. He headed this "Horrid Revelation / Warning to Lynchers." His easy-going temperament was apparently offended by any kind of violence except the violence of war.

As he always did in his newspapers, Thorpe continued to write about artistic matters. In the September 23 issue of his paper, he

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64 Ibid., Sept. 30, 1847.
65 Ibid., Oct. 8, 1847.
included a long article on the facile Hiram Powers, whose Greek Slave was then being exhibited in New York, calling the statue the masterpiece of art of modern times. Thorpe liked the portrayal of the rugged and untaught American triumphing over the effete artists of worn-out civilizations, and he wrote that the sculptor, "Mr. Powers, a citizen of the West, uncouth in manner and unacquainted with the details of sculpture, was inspired with the most exalted conception of beauty . . . ." The economic problem of the artist, too, was one with which Thorpe, through his own experiences, could sympathize, and he added in the notice that Powers was poor, had a large family to support, and had to live abroad, and for these reasons the owner's liberality in allowing the statue to be exhibited for fees going to the artist was most commendable.

One of the problems that wrung the souls of American art lovers at the mid-century was the question of nudity in sculpture and painting, and the public exhibition of Powers's famed work kept the controversy stirring. In one of his issues, Thorpe quoted an ingenious solution being offered and commented on it:

The Mobile Herald and Tribune hopes that if Powers's Greek Slave comes to Mobile, that it will be exhibited at stated hours to the gentlemen, and at other hours to the ladies. The idea is a singular one truly, and it would argue to us a want of knowledge of the effect of great works of art upon the human mind.66

66 Ibid., October 7, 1847.
But Thorpe was no liberator of the public taste even in artistic matters, for he continued his argument by admitting that nude statues did strike at the foundations of modesty, but added that Powers, Phidias, and Angelo (mysterious trinity) clothed their forms in moral beauty.

This was the standard argument of the time, and was what Powers himself had offered in exculpation of his daring, adding further safeguards to the strategy of the coy placing of the chained hands of his statue.

As there should be a moral in every work of art, I have given to the expression of the Greek slave what trust there could still be in a Divine Providence for a future state of existence, with utter despair for the present, mingled somewhat of scorn for all around her. . . . It is not her person but her spirit that stands exposed.67

Thorpe hunted with the pack of his time in pursuing the abstraction of beauty through the forests of American propriety.

Thorpe's writing does not indicate that he was personally acquainted with Powers, but his dedication of the Mysteries of the Backwoods, his first book, to the artist showed that he knew something of the ways of the man and admired him greatly:

TO HIRAM POWERS, WHO FINDS TIME IN FLORENCE TO TELL INIMITABLY A WESTERN STORY—WHOSE ARTISTIC GENIUS HAS ANTICIPATED THE FUTURE GLORY OF HIS NATIVE LAND, AND WHO WHILE ENRICHING FOREIGN CABINETS WITH ENDURING MARBLES, IS PROUD HE IS AN AMERICAN.

Powers, then, for Thorpe, represented not only the artistic genius, but also something of the ideal American character, an untutored artist overshadowing by his greater genius all his contemporaries.

Thorpe also inserted occasional notices in his paper of the activities of New Orleans artists. On October 19 he noted that Garbeille had arrived from Monterey with his bust of General Taylor. Garbeille, who was something of a caricaturist, had done a grotesque statuette of Thorpe in plaster which he had given to William Trotter Porter, to the latter's vast amusement. Thorpe's appearance lent itself to caricature.

In his newspaper Thorpe also revealed his curious fascination with the fighting Methodist parson, whose sermon on Manifest Destiny he had reproduced in part in his Our Army on the Rio Grande. The National for September 27, 1847, reproduced the prayer the Reverend Captain had offered before the battles of the eighth and ninth which had ended, "Take old rough and Ready under Thy special charge. Amen. M-A-R-C-H." And again in the issue of November 3 the tale and the prayer were reprinted. The circumstance of a troop-leading minister seemed to embody for Thorpe some of the appeal of the hosts of the Lord smiting their enemies in the name of righteousness.

Thorpe seems never in all of his writing to have referred to the fact that he was a Methodist. The autobiographical sketches he

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68 *P. 7, Spirit XVII, 90 (April 17, 1847).*
prepared for Duyckinck and Griswold both mentioned that his father was a minister, but never did he tell of what denomination. But at least once during his editorship of the Daily National he had occasion to mention one of the religious revivals which periodically took place in the South as elsewhere, and which were generally scorned by the Whig planters as fantastic orgies fit only for poor-whites and Negroes.

Religious Revival.—The Mississippi and Alabama papers are filled with accounts of religious revivals. . . . The impression made in the community, and particularly upon the residents of our town, is great, and we believe will be lasting.69

It appears from this that Thorpe approved of evangelism and the camp meeting and expected them to bring about changes for the good in the communities where they occurred. But quick as he was to accede to social pressure, he probably could not bring himself, in the face of the disapproval of the planters, to be proud of his sect.

Only one frontier story by Thorpe appeared in the National between September and December, and it was actually a hunting sketch without any backwoods characters. It was entitled "Enemy in Front and Bear," and told the tale of one Hapgood, who, out hunting, discovered two bear cubs only to be treed by the furious mother. On examining his position in the tree, he found he had as a companion a huge,

69 Daily National, September 29, 1847.
venomous snake. In the end he succeeded in firing at the bear and killing it, but after the difficulty was all over his bushy black hair, of which he had been quite vain, had wilted and turned white. The story was told, characteristically, in the framework setting of a group of hunters around a campfire, not by Hapgood but by a friend of his. During the tale, Hapgood had apparently slept, but at the end as all were expressing amazement that hair could turn white in so short a time he roused himself to say that the time he was in the tree had not been short at all, but rather felt like a thousand years. The sketch was a slight one, and was not reprinted by Thorpe in his later book.

The Daily National had announced in October that it was expanding by adding editorial assistance and buying new type to improve its appearance. It was Thorpe's fifth attempt in three years to establish himself in some community as the editor of a paper, and outwardly all seemed to be going well. Then in the December 13 issue, he announced, "My connection with The Daily National as its editor ceased on the 10th inst. T. B. Thorpe." Once again, after eleven years in the South, the last five of the most strenuous effort, he had failed to establish the competency necessary to the state of a gentleman. George Wilkins Kendall, who had come down from the North to found the Picayune about the time Thorpe had arrived in Louisiana, was somehow

70 Ibid., October 6, 1847.
managing to do it, for he travelled everywhere, could live elegantly abroad, and was on his way to being a great landowner in Texas, but Thorpe had tried again and again (possibly too many times) and was still no nearer the success he sought than when he started.

6

During the time he was editing the National, Thorpe was still busy with his historical writing. He wrote to Carey & Hart from New Orleans on July 6, 1847, to say that he was still busy on his *Buena Vista*, which, he added, he conceived of as a part of the manuscript the publishers already had. He felt that little could be added to his history of the campaigns. "My third and last book will be a splendid one...", he noted hopefully, saying the three would be a complete record of Taylor's movements from Corpus Christi to Buena Vista. Shortly afterwards, he wrote again to acknowledge receipt of a second title page, which he thought was better than the first, and he also asked them to add a note to the preface of the book saying that the author was engaged in writing the details of the campaign up to the battle of Buena Vista.71

The book *Our Army at Monterey* probably appeared in November, for early in December he wrote again, expressing dissatisfaction at the

71T. B. Thorpe to Carey & Hart, New Orleans, July 6, 1847.
delay and giving some details of his plans, for he was by now aware that he had nothing to hope for from the Daily National.

New Orleans, December 3, 1847

Gent.

I received your letter of the 24th this morning and while expressing my sense of obligation to you for your strict attention to my business, I must regret that any remark of mine should have delayed the publication of Monterey. I have had so many business and other difficulties that I have I presume neglected my promises. Col. Taylor I saw yesterday at his house and immediately after our meeting he mentioned incidentally the subject of the promised life. I shall be able to write you something positive about it the moment I can meet with him in private. I would say incidentally that my success in Newspaper publishing has not been commensurate to my anticipations and that I shall in all probability soon be so circumstances as to devote my whole time to Literary pursuits and I have in the last few years accumulated an immense amount of material. I have also had for many years an historical novel nearly finished which I think would attract considerable attention as it is original in its design and story. I perceive a number of unimportant errors in Monterey. I will mark them and if you publish a second edition I trust it will be found convenient to correct them. I am sorry that my friend Mr. Griswold has been provoked into a newspaper controversy. . . .

Although the record of disappointments of the past few years had been sorry enough, his letters to his publishers continue to promise an increased output and look forward to great success with something -- a life of General Taylor, an historical novel, unusual in design and story, something, in any case.

Our Army at Monterey, which had just appeared, was somewhat less elaborate in format than Our Army on the Rio Grande, but still was a
neat companion volume. A single illustration for the title page had been done by Darley, but there were only two other illustrations and one map in the book, compared to the many in the preceding work. Also it was a bit shorter, having only 123 pages of text, but it was supplemented by over 20 pages of obituaries of officers who had been killed at Monterey, numerous official reports, and a final set of statistics of killed and wounded, making in all a volume of 204 pages.

Its content and method of dealing with the material was like the book which preceded it. The country through which the American army marched was described in some detail, with much appreciation of nature; the bravery with which the American soldiers fought, which was, in fact, remarkable, was everywhere noted and praised; and no opportunity was lost to express the greatest admiration for General Taylor and to defend his strategy at the battle, which was less remarkable than the valor of the soldiers who fought under him. The ubiquitous Fighting Parson, the Reverend Captain R. A. Stewart of the Andrew Jackson regiment of Louisiana Volunteers, appeared again, this time for having preached the sermon which was "the first preached by a Protestant clergyman in Mexico, and in the history of the religious movement in that country, will ever be one of interest."

72 Our Army at Monterey, p. 10. The name was spelled Stuart in Our Army on the Rio Grande.
Because of the fierceness of the battle at Monterey, Thorpe generally conceded the Mexican soldiers' obstinacy and frequently real valor in their action against the American troops. However, the mixture of blood in Mexico continued to repel Thorpe, and he wrote that the private soldier in the Mexican army was at best "a degraded being -- a strange representation of different races, where the evil qualities of each particular one is alone retained." The Mexican women, however, Thorpe had found attractive at Matamoros, and he had more to say about them in his second volume.

The Mexican women of every class are brave and humane. They resented the surrender of Matamoros, and denounced the members of their own army to their faces. At Monterey, the women wrote letters to different departments, charging their own troops with cowardice. They have always shown every disposition to make any sacrifices in the defense of their country; and there is an almost certainty that a woman commanded a body of Lancers at Monterey, and was distinguished for her bravery . . . .

In the whole of Mexico, in fact in all the Spanish American countries, the women are superior to the men, both in body and mind. Comparatively uneducated, they perform their social duties with a higher regard to virtue than the moral standard of the nation demands . . . . The peculiar relation of conqueror and conquered, makes, save in extraordinary cases, a proper appreciation of Mexican society impossible. It seems, however, to be in the order of Providence, that these women, so justly to be admired, are to become wives and mothers of a better race.

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73 Ibid., p. 64.
74 Ibid., p. 96.
75 Ibid., pp. 121-23.
Thorpe's exemption of Mexican women from the general inferiority of the nation was gallant, although perhaps the last sentence quoted is inconsistent with his objections to racial mixtures. The Manifest Destiny seemed to have promised all sorts of fine things for the bearers of civilization to the backward peoples.

Thorpe's revelation of some of the odd facets of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny is interesting for the light it throws on the primitive appeal the idea apparently made to many people. That such a doctrine should be supported on patriotic and religious grounds only made it the more outrageous. Thorpe's concept of the idea also showed again how sensitive he was to certain emotions and desires of the popular mind, but his talent, which seemed so practical, still had not brought him success.

Between the fall of 1845 and the end of 1847 Thorpe had been connected with four different papers in two cities. He had, during the period, established three newspapers himself, and written a two-volume history of Taylor's campaigns in the Mexican War. In addition, he had laid plans for several other literary enterprises. Thorpe's writing during the period, however, was subordinated to his work as a newspaper editor and owner. He knew, of course, that authors did not often grow wealthy from writing books, and his primary aim during the feverish mid-forties was to establish himself with a competency and all else that pertained to a gentleman. Somehow, in spite of his tireless
activity, the financial success he sought through his newspapers escaped him, and at the end of 1847 he abandoned his career as an editor to devote his time to writing. Always hopeful, he had great expectations for the literary projects he had begun. Possibly, with leisure and sufficient energy, he could make his way as a writer with Carey & Hart. He had plans for two more volumes on the Mexican War, an account of California, a new historical novel, and the collection of humorous sketches for which the publishers had long been asking.
CHAPTER VI

POLITICS AND POLITICIANS

In his letter of December 3, 1847, to Carey & Hart, Thorpe had written that as his success in newspaper publishing was not what he had expected, he intended to place himself in such circumstances that he could devote his whole time to literary pursuits, for he had, he said, an immense amount of material to work on. Thus, after having failed in attempts with five newspapers to establish himself as an editor and publisher, he left New Orleans and returned to Baton Rouge, where he set up a studio and turned again to painting to support himself and his family while he channeled his energies into new fields which might supply the competency and position in society he desired. At his studio he continued his writing, but, more important, during the following four years he attempted to make a career for himself in politics. First he sought, through his support of General Zachary Taylor in the elections of 1846, to gain some kind of government post in the victorious Whig regime. When he was disappointed in his expectations and received nothing from Taylor, he himself became a candidate for political office, and was defeated in the election which saw the virtual collapse of the Whig Party in Louisiana. Thus by the end of 1853 he had spent his time and energy to sell every talent he had, and still had not succeeded in making his fortune in the South.
After he had left the Daily National and returned to Baton Rouge, however, he was busiest working on his third book of the Mexican War. From that city he wrote Carey & Hart on March 8, 1848, sending them three drawings by Major Eaton, and informing them that a map was following of the Buena Vista battlefield which could serve for a frontispiece. These were to be the only illustrations for his closing work of the campaign, which, with his usual optimism, he expected to be the finest of the series.

I am aware that I have [one word illegible] delayed Buena Vista but I will make it more complete. I am now completing it in this time and I have daily intercourse with Maj. Eaton, Capt. Garnett and Genl. Taylor and I will send you on a work replete with unusual interest. I have it now so far advanced that I shall soon be able to place you in possession of the M. S., and I flatter myself it will be in a degree at least worthy of the great battle it records. I am told that my two books already published meet with great favor in the army. I will as soon as convenient or rather as soon as possible, get some testimonials relative to my work if they will assist in the sale of the work. The three volumes will be entitled Taylor's campaigns as it must now appear to be certain that his services will no longer be needed in Mexico.¹

The history of the Battle of Buena Vista was not his only project, however, for within a month he had written his publishers again, enclosing a manuscript of 313 short incidents for a volume to be called Anecdotes of the War. He suggested that they be well spaced in the printing and on thick paper so that they would make a fair

¹ To Carey & Hart from Baton Rouge, March 8, 1848.
volume. As for his *Army at Buena Vista*, it was becoming a much more elaborate work than he had at first supposed, but it would be of great interest, he assured Carey & Hart, because he had many valuable documents as well as opportunity for frequent conversations with Major Eaton, Captain Garnett, and General Taylor. He added in a postscript that he would henceforth have more time to devote to writing and would soon be able to give them a volume for their Library of Humorous American Works if they wished it—and indeed this was the one book Carey & Hart really wanted from him.

Then in May, while he was busy finishing the third volume of his history of the Mexican War and contemplating a life of General Zachary Taylor, he received a letter from the publishers telling him that the first two volumes, like his *Mysteries of the Backwoods*, had been a financial failure and informing him that they could publish no more of his work. On March 16, 1848, he answered, saying that he was mortified to learn of their losses and directing them to send the manuscript of the war anecdotes to a friend of his.

With their rejection of the *Anecdotes of the War* and their refusal of *Our Army at Buena Vista*, Carey & Hart ended their relationship with Thorpe. His last letter to them shows no rancor,

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2 To Carey & Hart from Baton Rouge, April 5, 1848.

3 To Carey & Hart from Baton Rouge, May 16, 1848.
and apparently whoever wrote him did so in kindly terms, for his
reply does not express the disappointment he surely must have felt.
He never succeeded in having the third volume of his history
published, thus leaving incomplete a project he had rather naively
hoped (for he was neither scholar nor historian) would be the de-
finitive work on Taylor's campaigns in the Mexican War.

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But the Associates of the Bay, as he had proposed they be titled,
were not lost labor, for he found them useful in support of General
Zachary Taylor's campaign for the presidency, which he had support-
ed since the time of the Ironia and the Daily National. Thorpe
had discovered that he could not expect much in the way of financial
rewards for his books, and so he turned with increased attention to
political activity. In mid-July the Whigs in Baton Rouge met to
ratify General Taylor's nomination "by the people at large," and
Thorpe was one of the two secretaries elected for the local orga-

ization.

Meanwhile, after Carey & Hart had rejected his collection of
war tales in March, he had submitted them, probably through a friend
in Philadelphia, to D. Appleton and Company, who published them as

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To Carey & Hart from New Orleans, July 6, 1847. See above, p. 230.

5

Baton Rouge Gazette, July 15, 1848.
The Taylor Anecdote Book. With very few changes in his manuscript, Thorpe had found himself able to capitalize on Taylor's popularity and at the same time offer his work as a kind of campaign document for the coming elections. The full title of the book reflected its general purpose: The Taylor Anecdote Book / Anecdotes of / Zachary Taylor / By Tom Owen / the Bee-Hunter / With a Brief Life.

It was made up of a large number of anecdotes, most of which had nothing to do with Taylor, and an appendix, probably added as part of the changed plans, of eleven pages of Taylor's campaign letters.

The preface, dated July, 1848, reveals something of Thorpe's attitude toward the use of history.

There are two kinds of history, one of which comprehends events of vast and extended importance, while the other treats of the individuals who have, in these events, acted a conspicuous part. The former addresses itself more particularly to the philosopher and moralist; the latter interests all classes alike. The war with Mexico has added a most interesting page to American history; it has called forth new energies, and unexpected displays of exalted character. Many of the most interesting details of great events are lost in the succeeding ephemeral excitement; and examples of patriotism, of bravery, and of fortitude, worthy of all emulation, are engulfed in oblivion. A happily-told anecdote, or a trite saying have kept men in remembrance when those of higher claims have been forgotten.... The author of this little work, being aware of this principle of human nature, and having great facilities for accomplishing his purpose, determined to gather up such anecdotes and incidents of the campaign as were most worthy of preservation, and by placing them in durable form, rescue many acts of devotion for the admiration of the future.

The book opened with a biographical sketch of Taylor, whom the Mexican War had called forth to the admiration of the world to
exhibit his "untiring firmness of purpose, clear judgement, strict
integrity, and warm humanities." This biography had obviously
been written as a piece of campaign propaganda, and furthermore, it
referred to the Whig national convention, which had assembled at
Philadelphia on June 7. It too had been added to the book after
Appleton's had accepted it.

The anecdotes themselves are all short, often of only a few
lines, unconnected to one another and with no apparent order in
their arrangement. None of them has any complexity of structure,
or shows any attention to its presentation other than that given the
hastiest kind of journalism. One sample will indicate the quality
of the whole:

A very brave soldier in the ranks, was in the habit
of drinking too much. His colonel remonstrated with him:
"Tom," said he, "you are a bold fellow and a good soldier,
but you will get drunk." "Colonel," replied Tom, "how can
you expect all the virtues of the human character combined,
for only seven dollars a month!"

Other sketches tell of Mexican barbarity, American bravery, and of
course the anecdote of the Reverend Captain R. A. Stewart was included,
with the sermon reprinted from Our Army on the Rio Grande. Altogether
the work is no more than a shoddy pot-boiler.

The Baton Rouge Gazette reviewed the book on August 19 without making any reference to Thorpe as the author. Echoing the book's preface, the Whig reviewer recommended it as a book of reference and history, preserving for posterity tales of bold daring and indomitable courage. The review does not, however, mention the book as a campaign document, which it had become by the addition of the biography and the letters at the end.

Thorpe's activity in support of Taylor's candidacy extended even to the New York papers. The Courier and Enquirer for October 10, 1848, announced, "We commence today the publication of a brief life of Gen. Taylor by T. E. Thorpe, Esq., who is a resident of Baton Rouge, and of course, has had an opportunity of collecting materials for the work, not always in the reach of Gen. Taylor's Biographers." The material Thorpe had collected for the biography he had proposed to Carey & Hart was finally used as campaign matter, after he had turned his attention to helping make a president.

Thorpe's friends, and possibly himself, attempted to attach his fortunes to Taylor's in another way by starting the story that he had been the first to mention Taylor as a candidate for the presidency. In a lengthy letter to the Baton Rouge Gazette some anonymous citizen tried to set the matter straight by saying that it was

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9 Quoted in Fayette Copeland, Kendall of the Picayune, p. 158.
ridiculous to give the credit to any one person, for officers with the army along the Rio Grande had mentioned the possibility in the winter of 1845-1846, and the New York Mirror had been the first newspaper to suggest Taylor as a candidate. But the writer did give Thorpe credit for being an early supporter.

T. B. Thorpe, Esq., then editor of the Times, was the first person in New Orleans who in a newspaper, mentioned Gen. Taylor's name in connection with the presidency. This was done immediately after his (Mr. Thorpe's) return from Mexico. On the 24th of June an article appeared in the Jeffersonian highly abusive of Genl. Taylor's conduct in the battles of the 8th and 9th, commencing the next day (the 25th of June) on said article Mr. Thorpe closed his remarks as follows:

"We say again that any attempt to persecute Genl. Taylor or lessen his high standing before the people of the United States, will most certainly make him president of the United States. Let 'Old Rough and Ready' alone, he is a hero, and he cannot be slandered out of his position by all the presses in the world." 10

This letter settled the matter as far as the debate in the Gazette was concerned, and Thorpe was assured of his recognition as an early and ardent supporter of Taylor.

Toward the end of January, 1849, a group of the townspeople called on General Taylor to pay a parting tribute of their respect to Baton Rouge's most distinguished citizen, the President-elect. After a few minutes of conversation, Thorpe stepped forward to say that he had been deputed by the group to speak for them, saying that the citizens were reconciled to his loss only by the knowledge that he

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Baton Rouge Gazette, Nov. 25, 1848.
was needed elsewhere, assuring the General that he left only friends behind and wishing him all health and prosperity. With this little speech, Thorpe’s personal contacts with Taylor ended. He had tried, during the preceding few years, to form as many ties between himself and General Taylor as he could. In his two histories of the war he had been extravagant in his praise of the man as a general and as a leader. In his editorials for the *Troyer* and in his dedication of the *Daily National* to Taylor’s candidacy he had lent his public support as a newspaper publisher. Through his proposal to write a biography for Carey & Hart he had begun to establish a personal intimacy with the General, and he had turned his collection of war anecdotes into a piece of campaign propaganda. Just before Taylor left for Washington Thorpe had begun a portrait in oils of him. He had done what he could to tie his fortunes to those of General Taylor, and as the General was successful, he expected some reward. He received nothing.

His activity in support of Taylor’s candidacy, and probably also his own hopes would have been known to his friends, and some nine years later one of the editors of the *Baton Rouge Const* wrote an article about Thorpe’s disappointment, beginning, “There is only one case of glaring ingratitude in President making that we know of; and

that is the case of our old friend, Tom Owen." The article continued that Tom, that is, Thorpe, was publishing the New Orleans "Trenda" when the war with Mexico broke out, and repeated the story that Thorpe was the first to suggest Taylor for President. Incorrectly the writer added that Thorpe sold the "Trenda" to go to the Rio Grande to write the history of Taylor's campaign, and further, that when the General returned to Baton Rouge, Thorpe left New Orleans to follow him and paint his fine portrait of Old Rough and Ready.

How was all this rewarded, gentle, kind, philanthropic, and forbearing reader? Why, T. Owen, instead of getting an "Envoy Extraordinary" or a "Minister Plenipotentiary," was rewarded for all his labor with pen and pencil with the office of "Inspector of Live Oaks."13

Thorpe was a practical party politician, as he himself had observed, writing in the Daily National in support of Taylor's nomination instead of Clay's, and he had supported the General not as a matter of principle, but in the hope of a substantial personal reward. Again he was disappointed.

However, Thorpe seems to have taken a genuine delight in political activity for its own sake, and, furthermore, his was not the kind of

12 Quoted in the Spirit, XXVIII, 41 (March 6, 1858).

13 Ibid.
temperament easily disillusioned. America at mid-century was an optimistic nation, and a man's hopes for his fortune were less a matter of statistics or even experience than a matter of the prevailing mood, the general exuberance of a young and fearfully growing nation, to echo Calhoun's uneasy words. Thorpe could still hope for something from Louisiana politics, and by the time of Taylor's death Thorpe's friends in Louisiana were beginning to say that the state should give him some high position so that he would have leisure to pursue his artistic and literary endeavors.

The biographical essay in which this wish was expressed contains a good deal of material about Thorpe's life in Baton Rouge and his reputation in the summer of 1850. It was written for Porter's paper and appeared as "Men and Things of Louisiana / No. I, "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." / Written for the New York 'Spirit of the Times.'" It was dated from Thibodaux, Louisiana, June 27, 1850.

A few days since, I left my residence on the banks of the beautiful and winding Bayou Lafourche, to attend to a business call in Baton Rouge, the capital of our State. Knowing that the "Bee Hunter" resided there, I determined to visit this distinguished gentleman, and wended my way along in search of Mr. Thorpe's residence.

At the extreme end of "the Boulevard," I found a neat and beautiful white cottage, shaded by trees of a rich foliage. A garden in the rear of the house, slightly visible through the open palings, was filled with flowers of rare beauty and delightful odor. The neatness and taste

14 *Spirit*, XX, 270-71 (July 27, 1850).

15 Ibid.
everywhere displayed, convinced me of the truth of what I had heard of the refined and accomplished Mrs. Thorpe.

Unhappily, the writer had nothing more to say about Mrs. Thorpe, for this is one of the extremely rare references to her in print. The census for 1850 was taken in Baton Rouge about three months after the sketch was written, and it reveals a little additional information about Thorpe's family during these years. His age at the time was thirty-five, and his occupation was given as portrait painter. His wife's name was given as Mariah, and her age as thirty or thirty-one, and her birthplace as Missouri, apparently, although the reading is uncertain. Two children, Anna, eleven, and Thomas, six, completed the household. The census also listed the value of real estate owned by the persons enumerated, and for the family only the head of the house was noted as owning any property, and Thomas Bangs Thorpe's real estate was estimated at $1,500, which probably meant he owned his own home. The sum is small and indicates a modest scale of living.

After leaving Mrs. Thorpe, the writer of the Spirit's biography turned back to town and found the painter's studio under a modest sign.

I beheld the "Bear of Arkansas," armed with a pellet and several brushes, and deeply absorbed in his occupation. Mr. Thorpe is a person rather thick-set and appears, in sitting, to be much taller than he really is. This peculiarity has been most amusingly and happily taken advantage of by Garbeille, formerly of New Orleans and now of New York, in one of his last caricature statuettes... His face is very remarkable—in it is noticed a striking resemblance.
to that of Hogarth; he has a very intellectual blue eye, in which the scintillations of genius are clearly visible; his forehead is high and broad, and phrenologically well developed; his countenance beams with benevolence and humor.

Among the paintings the visitor from Thibodaux noted was "Simeon in the Temple" from an engraving after Rembrandt, whose characteristic of lighting up brilliantly the important part of a picture Thorpe followed. Such a technique Thorpe might well have learned from his teacher, John Quidor, who himself showed the influence of the Dutch masters. Also in the studio was a portrait of Jenny Lind, done from an engraving. The singer had achieved immense popularity in the United States under the management of P. T. Barnum, and a painting of her even from an engraving might sell. Two original paintings were noted, both of wildcats, one at the mouth of a hollow rock, waiting to pounce on a wild turkey, and the other severely wounded, glared from the branch of a tree. Thorpe had continued his work in animal painting and his efforts to reproduce the local scene.

Following the description of the paintings, the writer gave a short sketch of Thorpe's background and education. He quoted Griswold's observation that Thorpe had a genuine relish for the sports and pastimes of the backwoods and was one of the writers who had created "a rich and peculiar literature in the South-West and South." The history of the sketch "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" was given with the observation that it had been translated into French and Italian and
had been widely reprinted in England. The concept of Thorpe as a reporter of the Southern scene was expanded beyond what Griswold had offered:

The other productions of Thorpe have also met with great success—he delights in the scenery of the South, and in the habits of the people—he intuitively comprehends the simplicity of the Western backwoodsman, and describes it in vivid colors—he equally well conceives that of the Southern hunter, and delineates it with skill and beauty. Mr. Thorpe has been pronounced the best writer of the present day, of Western sketches and back-woods life.

Again Thorpe was seen as the observer of nature and the student of quaint backwoods ways.

The writer noted that although Thorpe was literary in his tastes, he was also fond of politics, and that during his career as an editor in New Orleans and later through his histories of the war he had helped to turn the attention of people to Taylor as a candidate for the presidency.

Mr. Thorpe found, however, in time to his sorrow, as have many other men of genius, that literary talent, political knowledge and tact, however eminent, not conjoined with command of large pecuniary means, are not sufficient to insure success in the expensive enterprise of publishing a city paper, and after having labored for years with all his energy, he was obliged to give way to others.

In further comments on the Taylor campaign, the author of the essay recorded some of the characteristics of Thorpe as an orator.

His speeches, illustrated by pathetic and humorous anecdotes, were characterized by sound sense. His opponents and friends equally desired to hear him.... In his speeches were manifested the best elements of a popular orator, originality, brilliancy of expression, amusing and graphic illustrations, invested them with
great power and beauty, and the audience were impressed with his sincerity from the deep feeling and honesty of purpose always characteristic of his oratory.

The qualities enumerated are suggestive of what the popular orator of the time was supposed to be. Anecdotes both humorous and pathetic were proper, and speeches should show originality, deep feeling, and honesty of purpose, thus impressing the audience with the speaker's sincerity. The object of the popular orator, Thorpe himself wrote, was to convince an assembly of the truth of the speaker's principles and infuse it to accept them. In this practical quality, Thorpe considered his ability eminent.

As for his political beliefs, the writer had nothing to say specifically other than that he was a Whig, but "not ultra," and that his mildness served to advance the party's cause. The observation that Thorpe was not an ultra Whig probably meant in 1850 that he was a Union man and did not support secession as a remedy for the South's grievances. The Whig party generally throughout the South was the party of the great planters, the established interests who stood to lose most in any revolution, and while the Southern Whigs insisted on the right of the South to maintain its peculiar institution, they were not secessionists but favored the continuance of the Union.

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16 Duyckinck MS. Original in the Duyckinck Collection of the New York Public Library.

Not a few of the Southern Whig papers spoke out against the lengths to which some of the region's politicians were going in Congress and did not forbear to call them demagogues and to characterize their speeches as gaseconade. Such great Whig leaders as Alexander H. Stephens and Robert Toombs of Alabama had called on Taylor early in 1850, in an attempt to get him to agree to Clay's compromise measures and to give up his own plan of allowing the entrance of California with a constitution prohibiting slavery. When the president refused to change his own policy, they threatened, in their anger, to withdraw from Congress and spoke of dissolving the Union, whereupon Taylor replied that he himself would head the armed forces of the nation to put down any such attempt. The radical policy of fire-eating speeches and threats of secession was sometimes called ultra-ism in the Whig party, and it is probably safe to assume that when the author of the biographical sketch of Thorpe characterized him as not ultra and as mild in his address he meant that Thorpe stood with the conservative wing of the Southern Whig party and was not a secessionist. Later events in Thorpe's career support this supposition.

18
Ibid.

19
Ibid., p. 166.

20
Ibid., p. 174.
The essay concluded by saying that Thorpe had been mentioned as a candidate for Congress from the Third Congressional district, and would have been nominated if he had been willing. It would please the people of Louisiana, the writer continued, if he were placed in a position to give him leisure for his painting and writing, because he had talents "that might yet produce works creditable to the nation and particularly to Louisiana." Through him, the world might see that the American intellect not only was fit to found a nation of free men but could be "equally illustrious in the paths of literary pursuit, and in the tranquil halls of philosophy."

The picture of Thorpe at mid-century, thirty-five years old, was of a man who had met a disappointment in newspaper publishing, but one still active in his writing and painting, and still hopeful of some political appointment which would free him of financial worries. The biographical sketch may have had some political significance in itself; it may have been intended to keep Thorpe in the public eye, for although its title suggested that it was the first of a series on Louisiana, nothing followed it. Furthermore, Thorpe had not been writing at the time for Porter, but it was followed the next week by a piece of his entitled "Reminiscences of
Sergeant [Sig] S. Prentiss of Mississippi."

Prentiss had died on July 1, and Thorpe's tribute was written within a week. Prentiss was a famous orator and an eminent Mississippi Whig. He had opposed the Mexican War, but like Thorpe had campaigned for Taylor. Had Thorpe been seeking a chance to discuss Whig policies and principles or his own political beliefs, Prentiss's death would have provided him a ready opportunity, but the sketch showed no interest in ideas at all; instead, Thorpe discussed his personality and his ability as a popular orator.

Prentiss was born in Portland, Maine, in 1808, was educated at Gorham Academy and Bowdoin, and, after studying law with Judge Wright in Cincinnati a short while, went South and became a tutor at the Bateson home of Mrs. William B. Shields. Like Thorpe, then, he had moved to the South as a young man to make his fortune, and for this reason Thorpe's comments on his first experiences in Mississippi are worth noting.

In his early career, I consider Mr. Prentiss both fortunate and unfortunate. I have often imagined the shrinking but proud boy living unnoticed and unknown among the wealthiest citizens of the South. Buried in the obscurity of his humble school, he looked out upon the busy world and measured the mighty capacity of his own soul with those whom society had placed above him. I think I see him brooding over his position, and longing to be free, as the suffocating man longs for the boundless air of heaven. His hour of triumph came, and surpassed, perhaps, his own aspirations.

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21 Published as "By the Author of 'Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter,'" and dated Baton Rouge, July 9, 1850. Spirit, XI, 283 (Aug. 3, 1850).
Thorpe’s imaginative reconstruction of Prentiss’s keen consciousness of his inferior social position and his brooding desire to be accepted by the great through his own superior qualities surely reflects in some degree an experience Thorpe himself had undergone as a young painter among the great planters of the Feliciana.

Prentiss’s eventual triumph he recorded with unconcealed delight.

The era was one of extravagance, the virgin soil of Mississippi was pouring into the laps of her generous sons untold abundance; there were thousands of her citizens, full of health and talent, who adorned the excesses of living by the tasteful procurements of wealth, and the highest accomplishments of mind. Into this world Prentiss entered, heralded by naught save his own genius. The heirs of princely fortunes, the descendants of heroes, men of power and place, of family pride, of national associations were not more proud, more gallant, than was Prentiss, for “he was reckoned among the noblest Romans of them all.”

Thorpe, too, hoped in his heart to be accepted through his own accomplishments by “the men of power and place, of family pride,” and during the years in Baton Rouge when he was seeking the goal through political activity Prentiss’s career must have seemed to offer some hopeful parallels with his own. The pleasant hunting companion, minor painter, and teller of humorous tales of the frontier was moved by the secret desire to be reckoned among the noblest Romans of them all.

During the years he lived in Baton Rouge, Thorpe wrote other magazine articles, among them one he called “Incidents in the Life of Audubon.”
which was done for Godey's Lady's Book, and published in the May, 1851, issue. It shows clearly the marks of preparation for the audience of women, for Louis Godey's magazine specialized in pointedly moralistic and sentimental articles and stories for apparently childless females. Thorpe's sketch, which is not one of personal reminiscences, for he did not know Audubon, opens with the kind of prose he considered suitable for Godey's readers, who were always pictured with doll-like faces, immense skirts, and little feet like rice.

No department of natural history presents a more pleasing view than ornithology. All the associations connected with it are beautiful and inspiring. It takes its votary into the green fields and dark forests, leads him to the mountain tops, and furnishes excitement in the quiet retreats of the sequestered valley. Upon the feathered race have been expended the richest ornaments of nature. There are no precious metals, no choice gems, no rare flowers, no rainbow tints that cannot find a rival counterpart in the plumage of birds; and to this transcendent beauty are added a varied but always attractive form, a physiognomy of love, of power, of unshrinking bravery. They have also voices almost human in their tones; voices that are associated with every pleasing recollection of innocence and youth because of their sweetness—and voices that startle because of their ferocity.22

Like the age of Victoria which nourished it, the prose shows much taste, and all of it quite bad.

22 "Incidents in the Life of Audubon" by the author of Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter, Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book, XLII, 306-309 (May, 1851).

23 Ibid., p. 306.
In order to satisfy his audience, Thorpe showed another habit which he was later to indulge in more—that of constructing his own quaint natural history, which he used for its own curious sake and also to point up some moral he wished to advance.

The habits of birds present examples of well-regulated, almost Christianized society. They are married, and are given to marriage; they set up a comfortable establishment, which is the result of their own industry. They provide plentifully for their offspring, and educate them in the way they should go, and when they are old they never depart from it. The birds rise early to procure food, and retire with the setting sun; as husbands they are gallant, as wives loving. All that they do, or say, or look may be said to interest and form universal theme for admiration. Birds rejoice in creation. In the solitary fastness and eternal solitudes where the eye of man never penetrates or his mind worships, the voice of the bird is heard caroling forth praise.

The fact that this was bogus natural history would have troubled neither Cede nor Thorpe; it served to support a moral point, and that was sufficient. A naive, if not a fraudulent, piety was one of the prime characteristics of the magazine.

In the article Thorpe recalled a few stories he had heard of Audubon while living in the Feliciana. As the climax of the piece, he revealed that Audubon's wife had been a teacher and governess in the home of one of the planters in West Feliciana and that her industry had made it possible for the naturalist to continue his work. "It was her example, and her voice of encouragement, and her power to help

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Ibid.
that enabled Audubon to triumph, and thus did she identify herself and her sex 'with the most splendid work which art has erected to the honor of ornithology.'" Thorpe revealed the fact with great delicacy that Audubon's wife had worked, and in the end turned a pretty compliment for his readers. In his ability to gather a little first-hand material, fill it out with a little research, and point it to a specific audience, he was not unlike today's writers of feature articles.

It seems likely that during this time Thorpe also had some connection with the Baton Rouge Gazette, one of the local Whig papers, although the exact nature of his relation to the paper is uncertain. In 1914 Captain John McGrath wrote a series of reminiscences for the Baton Rouge State Times, and he said in one of the pieces that sixty-four years earlier, which would have been 1850, he had entered the office of the Gazette to learn printing.

The Gazette was an ably edited and conducted paper, ranking high throughout the state as an exponent of the principles of the Whig party. T. B. Thorpe, a portrait painter and writer of nation-wide reputation, was our editor, and was credited with having been the first to mention General Taylor, through the columns of the Gazette, as the only Whig who could defeat the Democratic candidate for the presidency.... Thorpe and the hero of Buena Vista were the closest of friends and looked as much alike as two peas, except in face. They were of about the same height, same shape, and it would have been difficult to tell one from the other by a distant back view.

25

Ibid., p. 309.
Thorpe's studio was located on Lafayette street, the business street of Baton Rouge at that time, and it fell to me to go there frequently to secure copy and take proofs of Thorpe's editorials. Extant copies of the paper for the period do not list Thorpe's name as editor, and it is possible that he was merely employed to write editorials and had no other connection with the journal. Captain McGrath's recollection that he worked at his studio and not at the office of the paper lends some support to the conjecture, but in any case Thorpe continued to write for the newspapers.

As a minor local celebrity, Thorpe continued to take his part in the affairs of his town and state. In the spring of 1851 he was elected by the Literary Societies of Centenary College to address them at the next annual commencement. Thorpe's invitation to speak at Centenary College may have been a tribute not only to his reputation as a writer but also to the fact that he was a Methodist, for the institution had been established in 1839 by the Mississippi and Louisiana Conferences of the Methodist Church, and opened at Brandon Springs, Mississippi, in 1841. In 1846 it had moved to Jackson, Louisiana, in East Feliciana, not far from St. Francisville,

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27  
Spirit XII, 181 (June 7, 1851).

28  
John Donald Wade, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, pp. 292-93.
where Thorpe had spent his first years in the state. Judge Longstreet, the author of *Georgia Scenes*, who was also a Methodist, had been president of Centenary for five months a little less than two years before Thorpe addressed the student body there in 1851.

Early in 1832 Thorpe's association with General Taylor did bear fruit of a sort for him, for in March the Louisiana House of Representatives, on a motion introduced by Mr. Rivers of Concordia Parish, appropriated $1000 to buy his portrait of the General. Some of the Democratic members charged that the acquisition was a political reward rather than an honest purchase. The newspaper report of the reception of the motion by the House gives some idea of the passion it aroused.

A resolution to purchase this "Thorpe's" beautiful portrait of Gen. Taylor being before the committee of the whole House, Mr. Rivers in a truly eloquent, and feeling speech urged an appropriation for the purchase. Fifteen hundred dollars was the value placed upon it by Mr. Rivers, who was willing though, to leave the amount blank to be filled up by the wisdom of the House. In the course of his remarks, Mr. Rivers said that in addition to the many reasons why, this portrait should be the property of Louisiana, was the fact that the artist who painted it was a native of the country, and one whose pen had done much to elevate General Taylor to the Presidency. The fact that an allusion had been made that native talent should be encouraged and that General Taylor had been and at the

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time of his death was President of the United States, was too much for Mr. Ryan.——He denounced everything and every person that encouraged native talent, thanked his God that he had not voted for General Taylor, and considered the fact that the artist who executed this work, (which he admitted to be very good,) was a native of the country and a political and personal friend of General Taylor a good reason why, this Legislature should not pay the full value of the work——say, should not purchase it. He insinuated that the only reason why the whigs wished to purchase the picture, was to reward Mr. Thorpe as a partisan, and not as an artist. We are proud to know that Mr. Ryan's views are not sympathized in by the democrats of the House, and that many of them promptly stepped forward, and advocated the purchase of the picture, as a compliment to the artist, and a monument to General Taylor, one of Louisiana's most distinguished citizens.

The resolution passed fifty-seven to ten, purchasing the picture for $1000, an excellent price for a portrait at the time. Thorpe declared for the benefit of the public that he had placed no price on the picture, but had only offered it to the state at the solicitation of several members of the legislature, and would accept whatever the House would be willing to give. The purchase had obviously been discussed outside the legislature, and it was, of course, a kind of reward for Thorpe, but it was also a legitimate purchase and certainly not an unreasonable one.

During the summer of 1852, Thorpe spent several months in

30 Baton Rouge Gazete, Mar. 6, 1852.

31 Ibid., under "Legislative Proceedings, House, March 2, 1852."

32 Ibid.
New York, conferring with publishers about the feasibility of a revised and enlarged edition of his sketches. He also took the opportunity to speak with various northern Whigs concerning the coming presidential election for which the party would be faced with the problem of nominating a candidate. The Whig national convention met at Baltimore on June 16, and immediately a contest between the Northern and the Southern wings of the party began.

The leading contenders for the nomination were Millard Fillmore, Daniel Webster, and General Winfield Scott. Fillmore, during his term of office after Taylor's death, had pleased the Southern Whigs by his acceptance of the Compromise of 1850, particularly in his execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, and a large part of his support was from the South. Webster, too, had declared his acceptance of the compromise, but the movement for Scott had originated entirely in the North, and he had refused to make known his position on the Fugitive Slave Law, which was, of course, a necessary strategy if he were to retain the support of the Northern Whigs, who were largely antislavery. Privately, various Southern Whigs were

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33 See letters from T. B. Thorpe to Henry C. Baird, dated Baton Rouge, May 23, 1852, and New York, Aug. 31, 1852. Originals are in the Edward Carey Gardiner Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, as are the following letters to Baird.


assured of Scott's acceptance of the compromise measures, and, further, they won unexpected victories at the convention in the matters of committees, credentials, and most important, the platform, and in return they finally conceded to the Northern wing of the party in the matter of the candidate and Scott was chosen. To many old and loyal Whigs, Scott's nomination was a bitter disappointment; after he had secured his place on the ticket two of the Louisiana delegates to the convention refused to act and had to be replaced. To a state not wholly satisfied with the Whig candidate Thorpe, the staunch party man, returned in September, and late in the month made his first address.

Mr. Thorpe at the solicitations of many Whigs of this place consented to address the citizens upon what he had seen during his visit north—and on Tuesday evening last, the Court House was densely crowded by those who were anxious to hear what he had to say. We will not attempt a description of the happy effort, but will say his speech spiced with so many illustrative anecdotes had a most desirable effect.

Mr. Thorpe left here entertaining opinions very prejudicial to General Scott, but in his travels he visited the General and had every prejudicial sentiment dissipated.

Once the nomination was made, the Whigs in the South generally followed the policy of supporting him actively in the interest of party unity. Thorpe was a member of a group of speakers who toured central Louisiana early in October trying to arouse enthusiasm for

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General Scott. A barbecue was held at Greensburg, a village in St. Helena Parish, northeast of Baton Rouge, and there gathered the local Whigs, as well as others from St. Tammany Parish, Washington, East and West Feliciana parishes to be addressed by D. F. Kenner, G. W. Watterson, Thorpe, and other hard-working Whig stump speakers.

A few days later a barbecue was held at the town of Plaquemine, across the river from Baton Rouge and a few miles downstream. Here, too, the indefatigable Thorpe spoke.

At an early hour this city was almost vacated, such was the tremendous rush for Plaquemine, steamers, carriages and busy's /sic/ were employed as conveyances to the great Barbecue. Baton Rouge was represented by the godly round number of five-hundred....

The rain continued unabated, when in the evening the delegations repaired to the Court House, where the ladies were protected from the falling elements, and the sterner sex unimindful of wetten were attentive to the sound arguments of Messrs. BENJAMIN, KENNER, and TORPE.

The local Whig party was doing its best to whip up some enthusiasm for the Scott-Graham ticket.

But they were without success, and early in November the elections were over and Scott's defeat was known. He had carried only two Southern states—Kentucky and Tennessee. In spite of the efforts of the party regulars to arouse interest in the contest, many voters in the South did not take the trouble to go to the polls at all, and

36 Ibid., Oct. 9, 1852.

the fact was seized by various Whig editors to explain the defeat. Scott's defeat did not mean, they said, that the voters had renounced the Whig principles of internal improvements, development of natural resources, spread of industry, preservation of the Union, and the like, but lacking interest in the candidates, had not turned out to vote. The state of Louisiana had just adopted a new constitution, which the Whigs claimed was their production, for as the party of the principal slave-holders they had advocated the apportionment of representation on the basis of the total population, including slaves, and had won the point, which they expected would assure them political control of the state. The state elections were to be held in less than two months from the national elections, and the Louisiana Whigs looked forward to them as a chance to show the real party strength and to reorganize after the recent defeat. Thorpe's long years of work in the party and his untiring support of Scott during the past months were now to receive their reward, and in the November 14 issue of the Baton Rouge Daily Comet an advertisement appeared advocating his candidacy:

Mr. Editor—The numerous friends of T. B. THORPE, Esq., would respectfully suggest his name as a Senatorial candidate for the next Legislature.

40 Ibid., pp. 273-74.

41 Ibid., p. 276.
To be the candidate from the district for senator was no small honor, and following the card, the *Gazette* published its editorial in his support:

It will be seen above that our friend and fellow citizen, Thomas B. Thorpe, Esq., is thought of, as senatorial candidate for the next Legislature.

Mr. Thorpe is well known all over the country. He is Author, Artist, Editor; in this last capacity, he has given the world satisfaction and we cannot see why he will not do well on the floor of the Senate. We have always thought, that any man who can please the world as an editor, ought to pass current without a murmur from the factions.

The advertisement supporting Thorpe's nomination as candidate for the senate continued in the *Gazette* from November 14 to 27, 1852, and on November 30, the *Gazette*, which was a weekly, printed an editorial in his support.

But in the next issue, the *Gazette* referred its readers to a letter printed in its columns suggesting that Thorpe be nominated instead for the position of State Superintendent of Education. The editor continued that he did not know whether Thorpe would decline to run for the senate or not, but he was of the opinion that the new office suggested would be more suitable for Thorpe, considering his tastes and interests. Elsewhere in the same issue the editor observed that the letter he had printed, which was signed "A Voter," had been written by one of Mr. Thorpe's best friends and one of the oldest and

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*Baton Rouge Gazette*, Nov. 27, 1852.
most respected citizens of the town.

The letter said that Thorpe would decline the honor of being candidate for state Senator in favor of some distinguished citizen of an adjoining parish, and went on to suggest that if his friends did desire to compliment him he be named at the convention as candidate for the office of Superintendent of Public Schools.

He was among the very first citizens of our State who attempted to introduce a useful system of Public Schools, and his plans and suggestions as presented years and years ago, must finally be adopted. Mr. Thorpe has a literary reputation which eminently fits him for an office that is connected with literature and not with politics. His pen has won him a wide reputation throughout the Union, and he is today the selected correspondent of the highest literary journals in this country and Europe, and is ranked by Griswold as one of the most original prose writers of America. Mr. Thorpe's election as State Superintendent would be a compliment, and we are sure all who have read his sketches of Louisians and the West over his favorite signature of "Tom Owen the Bee Hunter," will say that he has done more than any other Southern writer to give an original character to the literature of the South.

The letter does appear to have been written by a friend of Thorpe's, and the change suggested may well have been an effort to find a more suitable office for him, although, of course, it may have been dictated by considerations of political expediency. However, the office of state superintendent of public education was an important one, and the suggestion of his name for the post was a recognition of his services to the party.

The Whig State Convention was held at Baton Rouge on November 29,
with the eminent local Whig, J. M. Elam, presiding. During the
course of the meeting, Judge Elam, who was a resident of Baton Rouge,
nominated Thorpe for State Superintendent of Education, and
H. C. Castellanos nominated L. Flacide Canenge of New Orleans.
Upon his nomination, Thorpe was called upon for a speech. He rose
and said that "although he had made some speeches for the Whig cause,
it was rather a novel thing with him to have to speak of himself, and
he must, therefore, be excused. He would only say that after doing
all they could for the ticket, if there should be an opening for him
to go in he would do so." This was a modest speech, and probably
a politically wise one. In the balloting which followed, only the
seventh of the ten New Orleans districts voted for Canenge; all the
rest of the districts and all state parishes voted for Thorpe. Such
unanimity was indeed a tribute from the state Whig party.

The short time between the nominations and the election did not
give the candidates much time to make speeches, and they resorted to
printed circulars and letters in newspapers to express their views.

43
The Baton Rouge Daily Crescent, Nov. 30, 1852.

44
Baton Rouge Gazette, Dec. 11, 1852.

45
Ibid., Dec. 4, 1852.

46
Ibid., Dec. 11, 1852.
Thorpe's letter, published locally in both the Gamette and the Daily Comet, stated his belief that a common-school education should be made available to all and that Louisiana's mistake had been in endowing universities when there were no primary schools to prepare students for higher education.

The election followed late in December, and by the twenty-eighth the Daily Comet could record returns from four local precincts showing that Thorpe had carried the town of Baton Rouge against his Democrat opponent, J. J. Carrigan, by a vote of 344 to 293, but had lost in the outlying precincts. Five days later the Daily Comet sadly recorded, "Sufficient is already known of the recent State elections to make it certain that the Executive officers under the New Constitution will all be from the Democratic party." The Whig party, as an effective political organization in the state of Louisiana, was all but annihilated in the election, and Thorpe's greatest political opportunity perished with it. With his party's defeat, died whatever hopes he may have had for an elective office in the state of Louisiana.

By the time of the 1853 election, Thorpe had been active in local politics for at least ten years and probably longer. His own conservative nature, his desire to establish himself in society as a

47 Ibid. See also the Daily Comet, Dec. 8, 1852.
48 Daily Comet, Jan. 2, 1853.
gentleman, and his association in the Feliciana with the Whig planters of the area may well have all been factors in determining his allegiance to the Whig party. Furthermore, the pro-union party would logically appeal to a man with ties in both the North and the South, but Thorpe's actions within the party seem to have been motivated not only by matters of principle and of concern for the national interest but also by considerations of political expediency and personal ambition. A few principles, such as the necessity for the union of the states, he held above party, but generally he was a party politician, supporting Whig policies and Whig candidates before the public and always willing to do what he could for party victory. It is probable that behind his dedication to party lay not only concern for the national welfare but also the hope of personal advancement, and during the years immediately after his failure with newspaper publishing his political activities had followed two broad patterns. During the Taylor campaign, he had attempted to form as many ties to the General as he could, expecting as a reward some kind of political appointment. When Taylor failed him, he continued his activity in state politics with unabated vigor and was rewarded by his party with the nomination to an elective office, which was as much as the Whigs could do. His second failure to establish himself politically was bound up with the party's failure. Nonetheless, he had missed another goal, and he was forced once again to reconsider his position and decide what other ways lay open to him by which to achieve the competency he desired.
After Carey & Hart refused his last book on the Mexican War, the painter's studio in Baton Rouge did not see a great deal of writing other than the few feature articles and the editorial work for the *Gazette*. Early in 1852, Henry C. Baird, a Philadelphia publisher who had acquired the plates of the *Mysteries of the Backwoods* as part of the financial settlement after the book failed to sell, wrote Thorpe about them, and he replied that he expected to be in New York in the spring and would visit Philadelphia to discuss the disposition of the type of his sketches at that time. Apparently Thorpe planned some kind of a reissue of the book, for on August 31, 1852, he wrote Baird from New York saying he had learned that even if he should publish his sketches the plates would be of no value to him and he would, therefore, have to obtain them for less than the price asked, and offered seventy-five dollars for them. His statement that the plates would be of no use to him apparently was merely a bit of careful trading, for within three days he wrote again, wondering why he had received no reply, and revealing that he was planning to issue all of his sketches, and repeating that although the plates would be of no use to him, except perhaps the engravings, he would give seventy-five dollars for them.

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50  
To H. C. Baird [sig] from Baton Rouge, May 23, 1852.

51  
To Henry C. Baird from New York, Sept. 3, 1852.
Baird would not release the plates for this amount, and shortly afterward Thorpe returned to Baton Rouge, where he was busy with the presidential and state elections through the remainder of the year.

In the summer of 1853, Thorpe was again in New York and in September he wrote Baird once more saying that he had completed arrangements with a New York publishing house to issue a volume containing all the sketches he had written, about one-third of which would come from the volume *The Mysteries of the Backwoods*. He repeated his statement that he could not pay Baird's price of one hundred dollars for the plates, but offered a draft on a New York banking house for that amount to be paid out of the first money he should receive from the new volume. A week later he wrote again, acknowledging Baird's letter, repeating his offer, and threatening to go ahead and publish his sketches without Baird's cooperation if his proposition were not accepted. His next letter, written over a month later, shows a change from an angry to a pleading tone.

New York Oct. 27th, 1853

H. C. Baird Esq

Dear Sir

Since I have received your last epistle I have endeavored to obtain the facilities to meet your demand with regard to the purchase of the plates of the "Mysteries of the Backwoods" but

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52 To H. C. Baird from New York, Sept. 15, 1853.

53 To H. C. Baird from New York, Sept. 23, 1853.
find it impossible at present to do so. The book was publish-
ied from H, S, which I got copied from my own, by a clerk of a
park. I did this as I thought as I could not read the proofs,
that such a course would secure the book against mistakes.
The very opposite was the consequence. The copyist filled his
H, S, full of errors not in the original, and upon some of the
pages in the work, there are from five to eight errors, and
sorely a page but has one or more. These mistakes were the
accident of circumstances over which perhaps no control could
be had as I was in Louisiana at the time of the publication
of the work, but these mistakes nevertheless, destroy the
literary as well as the commercial value of the book, and it
is in no hope of realizing any recovery advantage that I
wish to publish the sketches, but to bring them out correctly
before the public. The Messrs Appleton, kindly consented to
publish all my sketches complete, if I would furnish them
the mysteries form /sig/ about one-third of the whole, if
that little volume was correctly printed I should not care to
have them included. If you will accept my offer, I shall
very soon have the means from the volumes publication to pay
you principal and interest, and you will have the full se-
curity of all my sketches to realize the money from, instead
of an imperfect volume. I have no other resources at present
and I trust you will give my proposition a favorable consid-
eration.... If you do not consent I will probably loose /sig/
a favorable opportunity of realizing money to meet your
demand....

Appleton, then, had offered to publish a complete volume of Thorpe's
sketches only on the condition that he provide the plates of The
Mysteries of the Backwoods, and he found himself in the unhappy position
of being unable to pay the hundred dollars the owner demanded for them.
By the end of 1853, however, Baird decided to accept Thorpe's note for
the amount and shipped the plates to him.

But planning for the publication of his sketches was not the most
important project Thorpe had under way during the latter months of 1853,

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To H. C. Baird from New York, October 27, November 2, and
December 25, 1853.
at least as far as his financial arrangements were concerned. After his defeat in the election of December, 1852, he was again faced with the necessity of making some plan for himself and his family, for he was not satisfied to remain a poor painter in the little town of Baton Rouge. He had tried during his years in Louisiana to establish himself as a writer, as a newspaper editor, and finally in politics, but had failed in each endeavor, and now it seemed that the South had no more to offer him. Consequently, he turned again to the city of his boyhood, and made arrangements with the Harpers to publish a series of articles on life and business in the South in their popular 55 

**Harpers New Monthly Magazine.** The first of these, "Sugar and the Sugar Regions of Louisiana," appeared in the November issue, and was over twenty pages long. The article was plainly the result not only of personal knowledge but also of rather extensive research, for it recapitulated the history of the use of sugar, its introduction into Europe and America, the characteristics of the different varieties of cane, and gave some specific information about the economics of the industry as it was conducted in Louisiana.

Porter reviewed the article at length in the *Spirit*, and greeted

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55 *Spirit*, XIII, 457-58 (Nov. 12, 1853).

with delight Thorpe's return to writing. He recalled Thorpe's early work for his paper and credited him with being the first and most successful writer from the South to give the North a "true idea of Southern life and pursuits." Porter's sketch hinted that Thorpe was considering making New York his permanent residence.

Probably Thorpe did not move his family north until late in 1853 or early in 1854, and he apparently made the change quite unobtrusively for the Baton Rouge papers had only rumors to print about his activities. On November 17 the Daily Coast printed a notice that it had learned "by private intelligence" that Thorpe was located in Albany, publishing a newspaper. The story repeated the anecdote of Thorpe's having had a daguerreotype taken of himself to finish painting the legs of Taylor's portrait after the president-elect had left for Washington. Over a month later, at the end of

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Spirit, XXIII, 457-58 (Nov. 12, 1853). Porter's knowledge of Thorpe's plans suggested in this article probably indicates that the two had met and talked together.

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The Duvalinek MS. states that Thorpe moved with his family to New York in 1853. This was first written 1854 and then the 4 was marked over heavily with a 3.

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The item was picked up by Porter and reprinted in his column "On Dits" in the Spirit, XXIII, 498 (Dec. 3, 1853), but he did not reprint the Coast's correction.

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The story was repeated innumerable times in newspaper items concerned with Thorpe's activities, to call attention to the physical resemblance between the painter and his subject. It will be recalled that it was repeated in Captain McGrath's reminiscences written in 1914.
December, 1853, the Compton corrected itself by saying that Thorpe was not living in Albany, but was on his way back to his residence in Baton Rouge after having spent some months in New York. A little less than two months later, the weekly edition of the Compton included a notice that Thorpe was just getting out of the press a new book to be called Scenes and Characters From the Mississippi, adding it could not be sure how correct the information was, because much of what it had had to say about Thorpe had been incorrect. Thorpe had quietly left Louisiana, his and his family's home for seventeen years, to start again and try to make a living in New York.

While Thorpe was in Baton Rouge, his reputation as a humorist and as a reporter of the Southern and Western scenes had continued to grow, but less by what he had produced during those years than by the spread through republication of his earlier work. In the absence of any effective copyright, the newspapers reprinted frequently whatever they liked of the frontier tales, but more important for Thorpe's national and international reputation was his inclusion in the two collections of American humor edited by the Nova Scotia Supreme Court judge,


Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Haliburton himself was the creator of the Yankee pedlar, Sam Slick, and his two three-volume collections of tales, printed in London for English audiences, were the most thoroughly representative and by far the largest collections to be printed during the years their vogue still lasted.

The first of these collections, *Traits of American Humor*, was published in 1832, and in his preface Haliburton noted that the geographical sections of the East, the West, the North, and the South were so different that the people of the various sections were dissimilar in their speech and habits. Of the frankness of language of some of the sketches, particularly the Crockett narratives, the editor observed, "As they were designed for 'the million,' among whom the scenes are laid, rather than the educated class, they were found to contain many expressions unfit for the perusal of the latter, which I have deemed it proper to expunge."

Although Haliburton was deficient in taste in choosing some sketches for inclusion which had very little merit, he was attentive to the language of the tales and noted that in the new parts of the country the word coinage had been rapid and extensive. Haliburton was also

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indifferent to the authorship of the sketches, but for the one of Thorpe's he reprinted, "The Big Bear of Arkansas," he did include the author's name.

Haliburton's second collection, *The Americans at Home*, was also published in three volumes, in London, 1854, and was designed as a companion to *Traits of American Humor*. In the introduction, he commented on American frontier conditions and the character type it was producing.

In the country, and especially that portion situated on the confines of the forest, men, on the contrary, is under no such restraint. He is almost beyond the reach of the law, and altogether exempt from the control, or utterly ignorant or regardless of those observances, which public opinion demands and enforces. The only society he knows or acknowledges is that of his own family. He enacts the laws that are to regulate his household. He governs but owns no obedience. His neighbors, if these can be so called who live several miles from him, aid him in those emergencies for which his individual strength is insufficient, or sustain him in those trials that require the sympathy and kindness of his fellow-creatures, while they occasionally unite with him in hunting, fishing, drinking or carousing.

These pioneers do not, as might be supposed, so much present samples of a class, as a collection of isolated independent individuals, whose characters are distinguished alike for being both strongly developed and yet widely dissimilar. Nevertheless there are many peculiarities that pervade the entire population. They all have the virtues and vices inseparable from unrestrained liberty. They are bold, hardy, manly, hospitable, generous, and kindhearted; while, at the same time, they are violent and vindictive in temper, reckless, improvident, often intemperate, and almost always without local attachment....

The outskirts of civilization wherein they dwell, and the newly settled territories of which they are in advance, present a wide field for the picturesque delineation of men and character, and the Americans have availed themselves of

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_Ibid._, I, 42-65.
it with more skill, freedom, accuracy, and humour, than any strangers who have attempted it.

Haliburton realised what the writers of frontier sketches were trying to do, and he had a lively appreciation of their accomplishment in recording and preserving the characters and types the new social conditions were forming. He included from Thorpe's work his sketch "Bob Herring, the Arkansas Bear Hunter," without this time giving the author's name—a general practice in his second collection.

Another widely circulated collection of American humorous tales published during Thorpe's Baton Rouge years was one edited by Porter's friend T. B. Burke, entitled *Polly Peablossom's Weddings and Other Sketches* (1851). The volume did not include any tales by Thorpe, although the editor used his name in connection with one he did not write. As the introduction to *Mike Hooter's Bar Story,* Burke wrote, "We should hate to swear that 'Tom Owen, the Bee-hunter,' alias T. B. Thorpe, had not a hand in inditing the following capital sketch. It is one of a series which have appeared, we believe, in the New Orleans Delta...." Why Burke should hint that Thorpe was the author of the piece is difficult to say, unless he hoped that Thorpe's name might be worth something in attracting attention to the story. The tale is one of a bear who, finding a hunter's gun against a tree, blew the powder out of the pan, removed

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the flint, and then allowed the hunter to snap the gun at him, whereupon he thumbed his nose and ambled into the brush. It is one of the best examples in frontier literature of the attribution of human intelligence and cunning to the bear. Thorpe, however, did not write it; it was one of a series of tales subtitled "Yanoe Sketches" concerning the hunter Mike Hooster which had been reprinted in the *Spirit from the New Orleans Delta*, as Burke well knew. It was one of the best tales in Burke's collection, and his connecting Thorpe's name with it was a compliment, if nothing else.

A complete book which had been generally attributed to Thorpe and which he probably did not write might be discussed at this point, for it was published during the years Thorpe lived in Baton Rouge. *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography* edited by James Grant Wilson and John Fiske and published in 1893 includes a short bibliography of Thorpe's work, and among the titles is *Yanoe Hooster: An Autobiography*. This seems to be the earliest ascription. The work is also included in the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* as by Thorpe; it is listed as Thorpe's in the catalogue of the Library of Congress, and is included among his books in the bibliography at the end of the article on Thorpe by Franklin Hoiness in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

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69 See also V. L. O. Chittick, *Ring-Tailed Roarers*, p. 307, for a discussion of the authorship of the *Yanoe Sketches*.
The book, Lydie Neiss: An Autobiography, published by Lippincott, Grambo and Co., of Philadelphia in 1852, however, has an author’s name on the title page, which reads, "By Geo. H. Throop, Author of Nag’s Head, Bertie, Etc., Etc." A foreword to the reader on the following page is signed "Gregory Seaworthy, Philadelphia, February, 1852." Nag’s Head and Bertie, published in 1850 and 1851, were both novels of North Carolina, and in each case the author is given as Gregory Seaworthy. In addition to the fact that the three novels are connected by the pseudonym Gregory Seaworthy, they are further connected by the internal evidence that the author of all three knew ships and sailing. This is most pronounced in Lydie Neiss, which includes the tale of a long sea voyage taken by the protagonist during which the ship touched at the Azores and searched for whale off Rio de Janeiro. This material is characteristic neither of the matter Thorpe used for his writing nor of his background.

Numerous minor observations as well as the major theme make the book seem most unlike Thorpe’s work. The little boy, Lydie, about whom the story is told, has lost his mother, and his father, an shipwright, has placed him in a foster home where he is quite happy. "There," he wrote, "a hearty smile, a kiss, an embrace, or, what is better, a genuine maternal hug (that’s the good old Danish word for it,

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Lydie Neiss: An Autobiography, pp. 120, 124.
worth a thousand classical substitutes) was ever my welcome." No reference to a knowledge of Danish is to be found anywhere in Thorpe's work. There is nothing either in the style and mode of treatment or in the subject matter to connect it in any way with Thorpe; on the contrary, both the matter and the manner of the book point to a personality and background quite different from Thorpe's.

Why the declaration of authorship on the title page is not acceptable, it would be difficult to say. There was a man named George H. Throck alive at the time. Furthermore, he wrote, and he lived in the South, for the _Spirit_ for January 7, 1854, reprinted from the _Savannah Daily Morning News_ a six-stanza poem of his entitled, "Fixing up for Christmas." But whatever the authorship of _Lydia Koep_ is, it is most unlikely that Thorpe wrote it.

When Thorpe left newspaper work in New Orleans at the end of 1847, he had hoped to be able to devote his time largely to writing, and for this reason had returned to painting to provide himself and his family with an income. But after Carey & Hart had refused his third volume of the history of the Mexican War, he had turned his energies to politics in the hope of gaining for himself the position

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72 _Spirit, XXIII_, 554.
in society which was his continuous goal—the never-changing aim of his painting, his writing, his editorial work, and his political activity. This goal had set patterns which dominated his activities far years at a time as he shifted his strategy from one mode of approach to another to achieve his end. The theme of the Baton Rouge years had been establishment through politics. Through personal attachment to Taylor, by making himself useful to his party, and even by running himself for political office he had sought the security and recognition that a good income and a place in society would have given him, but with painful regularity his plans were defeated.

How much his political preoccupations were motivated by personal objectives and how little by matters of principle is revealed in the fact that, with the minor exception of his letter on the schools, neither his own writing nor the reports of his speeches show any concern with issues that were dividing the nation. He accepted what his time and place accepted, attaching himself to personalities and movements rather than to ideas, not only because this was expedient, for in the end it never had been for him, but because it seems to have been his nature to live actively and concretely rather than in the abstract realm of thought. He paid no honor to tranquility; he sought a concrete reward. Nor did he seek passively, for his activities were so various and so strenuous that it is bewildering to contemplate them. But each in turn failed, and no matter what he offered of himself, the South did not give him what he most desired,
and after seventeen years he returned to the North with little more than he had brought with him as a young man, fresh from college. However disappointing the continual failure of his hopes must have been, he never once expressed in his writing the gloom and melancholy that Field had professed to see in the character of the mad little Irishman who satirized Sir William's expedition in the Far West Letters. It was a hopeful age, and Thorpe was not yet forty years old. Possibly New York would give the fortune Louisiana had refused.
CHAPTER VII

NEW YORK AND THE NATIONAL MAGAZINES

During the winter of 1853-1854, Thorpe continued to write for Harper's, meanwhile settling his family in New York and continuing work on his volume of sketches for Appleton's and also on a novel he was to publish in a few months. After his article on "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," his next piece was a curious work entitled "The Case of Lady Macbeth Medically Considered: A Western Sketch," which appeared in February, 1854. It was another attempt to set forth life and character in the Southwest, the tale of a country doctor whom Thorpe represented as having an unusual interest in Elizabethan literature in general and in Shakespeare in particular. The doctor was asked to read a paper before the county medical association which turned out to be an examination of the character of Lady Macbeth. He suggested tentatively that the strange and unnatural ambition of Lady Macbeth was a result of her never having had a child, but, he concluded, her doctor was at fault in not doing anything for her.

Why did he not express confidence in his ability to cure? Why did he not prescribe with seeming promptness? Why did he not confuse the waiting gentlewoman with dark letter and unmeaning terms? Why did he not, in short, as in duty bound, make an impression and make a bill?

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1 Harper's, VII, 391-98 (Feb., 1854).
The doctors attending not only missed the satire of the paper, but were even unacquainted with the deranged gentlewoman and enquired whereabouts she lived.

The piece was the only attempt Thorpe made to create a humorous Western character for the brothers Harper, who were waxing fat through the republication of bargain-rate English novels and did not print much fiction they would have to pay for. Furthermore, their own melancholy sense of humor, as indicated by the monthly "Editor's Drawer," probably would not have appreciated the gross and extravagant frontier characters Thorpe had created for the *Spirit* and the *Concordia Intelligencer*.

In writing for them, Thorpe was writing for a truly genteel magazine.

The next month, March, he wrote an article entitled "Cotton and Its Cultivation," which was again an attempt to describe for the Northern reader the economic and social life of the South. In it Thorpe again expressed his admiration for the planter and his society:

The cultivation of the soil being the earliest as well as the noblest of pursuits, it seems to create a manliness and patriotism in those who follow it. The Southern planter presents the agriculturalist in the most dignified form. He directs, he plows, he sows, he reaps, and yet he does nothing of mere physical labor.

The planter was, in short, a gentleman.

Thorpe followed the delineation of the planter with a description of life among the Negroes on the plantation during the Christmas holidays,

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3Ibid., p. 457.
showing them as happy, carefree, and apparently pleased with the patriarchal nature of the relationship between master and slave.

On such occasions, the "stately mistress" and her "aristocratic daughters" may be seen assisting, by every act of kindness, and displaying in the most charming way the family feeling and patriarchal character of our Southern institutions; while the negroes, on their part, never feel that they are duly and affectionately remembered unless the white family, or most of its members are present, to witness and participate in their enjoyments."

For his Northern readers, Thorpe described the life of the Negroes in the Southern plantation in its most attractive light, without, however, expressing approval of slavery. He himself was pleased particularly with the social forms and manners which flourished along with the peculiar institution.

Returning to the subject of the cotton economy, he examined superficially the economic relationship between the planters and the English manufacturers, and hoped to see the United States spinning its own cloth some day. He noted that Georgia was beginning to industrialize, and hoped to see the movement extended until the South should become an economically independent section.

After the article on cotton Thorpe wrote no more for Harper's until in November of 1854, when he published a short piece on "General Taylor's Residence in Baton Rouge." During the middle of the year he was busy preparing his books for the press.

The first of the two books published was the collection of his

sketches, about which he had been corresponding with Henry C. Baird since the spring of 1852 in an attempt to buy the plates of the *Mysteries of the Backwoods*. The book appeared early in the spring, entitled *The Hive of the Bee Hunter*, and its subtitle, *A Repository of Sketches, Including Peculiar American Character, Scenery, and Rural Sports*, indicated its contents. In his preface, Thorpe observed that he hoped to give "to those personally unacquainted with the scenery of the southwest, some idea of the country, its surface and vegetation." More important, he added again the formulation which he among the realists and humorists of the Old Southwest tried hardest to see and explain in the new American character as he observed it, and which was to be repeated by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner and by Bernard DeVoto, among many others:

Here, in their vast interior solitudes, far removed from the trans-Atlantic influences, are alone to be found, in the more comparative infancy of our country, characters truly *sui generis*—truly American.

What man would be, uninfluenced by contact with the varied associations of long civilization, is here partially demonstrated in the denizens of the interior of a mighty continent.

The discovery of America—its vast extent,—and its developing destiny,—present facts, which far surpass the wildest imagery of the dreamers of the olden times.

There are growing up, in these primitive wilds, men, whose daily life and conversation, when detailed, form exaggerations; but whose histories are, after all, only the natural developments of the mighty associations which surround them.

Again the idea was reiterated that the West was the most American part of America, and that out of the conditions of the frontier a new and superior man was being created whose destiny Thorpe only hinted at.
The contents of the volume revealed that Thorpe had actually not added anything to the body of his sketches, for the pieces were all reworkings of earlier writing. But the book did differ from the *Mysteries* in two important ways—in the quality of its writing and in the emphasis of its content. Thorpe's first book had been largely a collection of nature essays, omitting his best character portrayals, but *The Hive of the Bee-Hunter*, on the contrary, left out a good many of his more rhapsodic pieces and shifted its emphasis to the humorous sketch. He included the "Summer Retreat in Arkansas," "The Big Bear of Arkansas," and a few other pieces which, until this collection, he had not published in book form.

The quality of the writing, too, was better than that of the earlier volume, although it still had a rather large number of gross blunders. The sketches republished from newspapers were revised extensively in many instances, and usually with more or less care. "The Big Bear of Arkansas," for instance, had appeared in the *Spirit* and had been reprinted in Porter's anthology with immensely long paragraphs and without separation of the conversation from the descriptive writing. For his own collection, Thorpe broke up the matter into shorter and more logical paragraphs. Furthermore, he corrected various proofreader's errors. The *Spirit* version of the tale had had the New Orleans sharpers laugh at the Big Bear for his reply to their question about game in Arkansas. He had told them that the principal game was poker, mistaking their question, and when they laughed he had added that perhaps
they preferred "chickens and roulette," which did not make much sense.
In the revised version Thorpe changed the phrase to "checkers and
roulette," making the play on the word "game" as he originally intended
and probably wrote in his manuscript. He made his meaning clearer by
rewording a few sentences, and generally attempted to improve his
style when it could be done by the change of a word or two.

Porter reviewed the book enthusiastically in the *Spirit*, praising
Thorpe for his clearness and simplicity of style, his close observation
of nature and character, and his dry humor, which Porter always found
particularly captivating. The *Harper's* review, too, was laudatory:

*The Hive of the Bee Hunter*, by T. B. Thorpe. These characteristic
sketches fully sustain the brilliant reputation of the author as
an effective delineator of American scenery and social peculiarities.
The work stands in the very highest rank of its kind, and no one
who reads it will dissent from our opinion.

The book received general approval and rather wide notice, for it was
reviewed not only by *Harper's* and the *Spirit*, but also by *Graham's
American Monthly Magazine*, *the Southern Literary Messenger*,
and *De Bow's Review*, among others. Through good reviews in the magazines of general
circulation and through the emphasis of the book on his humorous and de-
scriptive sketches of the Old Southwest, Thorpe's position in the literary
scene of mid-century America was more clearly and accurately defined

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5 *Spirit*, XXIV, 111-12 (April 22, 1854).
than had been possible after the publication of any of his other work. He had emerged, with *The Hive of the Bee-Hunter*, as an effective humorist and an accurate reporter of scenery, social customs, and character in the South and Southwest.

Thorpe's next book, published by T. L. McIlrath within less than three months of the appearance of his volume of sketches, was a novel, issued under a pseudonym, probably because he expressed his opinions on a number of controversial topics in it. *The Master's House: A Tale of Southern Life*, by Logan, was a romantic and sentimental novel of reform, revealing again his interest in the society and institutions of the South. His one novel, like all of his humorous sketches and most of his magazine articles, arose from the experiences of his years in Louisiana.

As a structure the novel is poorly done. It has no progression of plot nor does it have any unifying theme. Thorpe had no ability to complete any form more complex than the short story or anecdote, for even his histories, simple reportorial narratives as they are, always end indelicately, trailing away into obituaries, anecdotes, letters, or other material only loosely connected with the central movement. The novel depends for its interest on a series of incidents not related to a central plot, but rather intended to reveal various Southern character types and to comment on Southern social institutions.

Following *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as it did by about two years, the work was influenced by that novel of propaganda, but as Thorpe was no abolitionist
and at the same time did not believe the institution of slavery was eventually a desirable one, he did not—he could not—offer a remedy for the evils he saw. His conservative and cautious approach he expressed in the final paragraph of his preface.

This volume is dedicated to the lovers of mankind—to those who desire the highest development, and would, by having the evils of society exposed, learn where to commence the necessary reform. There are defects in our social and political systems that are working evils, which, if not checked, and finally eradicated, must accomplish universal ruin. The remedies, if of the right kind, are neither instant, nor revolutionary in their character; the first advancement, is the admission that reform is needed, and then the manner of its accomplishment will readily suggest itself.

The statement that the initial step toward correction was the admission that faults existed in the social system was certainly not directed toward the abolitionists, who did more than admit faults, but almost sounds as if it were addressed to Southerners. The novel itself seems at times to have been directed to the citizens of the South almost in spite of Thorpe's intention, which was to present, according to the preface, a truthful picture of Southern life for a national audience. The book represents Thorpe's most extensive effort to set forth his opinions and observations about the area where he had spent the first seventeen years of his life as a man, where he had begun his career and where he had married and started his family.

The central plot of the novel is a sentimental love story, the account of the life of a young North Carolinian, Graham Mildmay, who was educated at a northern college where he fell in love with a New
England girl. She appointed two years of probation for him, which he spent moving to Louisiana and establishing himself on another plantation. Then he came north to marry his fiancée and return with her to finish their life in the South. The girl is largely a nonentity—pious, beautiful, delicate, and given to fainting under stress. Graham is brilliant, the valedictorian of his class at college, wealthy, handsome, charming in his manners, but without the recklessness that frequently characterized Southern youth.

He was popular with all who knew him for his manliness, and seemed to happily combine industrious habits with the cultivated manners and easy bearing, so peculiar to the youth of the South. There was a sense of innate worth, and pecuniary ability about Mildmay, that so frequently distinguishes the highly educated planter from the mere business man... 10

Numerous traditions of the Southern novel were repeated, among them the casual acceptance by the young men at college that they were the descendants of cavaliers. 12 Throughout the book, the character of Graham Mildmay is thoroughly admirable.

In his presentation of other planters who are Graham's and Annie's neighbors in Louisiana, Thorpe always showed his high regard for the type, but attempted to show also that the social life bred certain weaknesses of character. He noted they were not infrequently indolent, high tempered and restive under contradiction, 12 always gallant

10 The Master's House, p. 17.
11 Ibid., p. 19.
12 Ibid., p. 148.
with men, and proud of their ancestry, and lavishly hospitable. Their quick temper and inability to accept reproof perpetuated the code of conduct which required a duel as the only redress for any kind of insult. Dueling Thorpe disapproved of thoroughly, and he made a duel between Mildmay, who did everything he could to avoid it, and his neighbor Moreton the catastrophe of the story. Mildmay killed his opponent, and the result was that Mrs. Moreton was driven mad, Mildmay was tortured by remorse the rest of his life, and Annie fell into a decline and died.

Thorpe's expression of his attitude toward slavery was sufficiently ambiguous to present a problem to American scholars, for Jennette Tandy in her "Pro-Slavery Propaganda in American Fiction of the Fifties," and Francis Pendleton Gaines in The Southern Plantation both list the work as a proslavery novel, while Shields Mollwaine says that "Thorpe was essentially the early anti-slavery man of the Old South." Thorpe did express admiration for the planters, and he did see the Southern Negro as a creature in need of the patriarchal guidance of his master, but he did not accept the institution of slavery as a good.

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13 Ibid., p. 149.
14 Ibid., p. 153.
15 Ibid., p. 368.
16 The South Atlantic Quarterly, XXI, 48-69 (Jan., 1922).
18 The Southern Poor-White, p. 23.
19 The Master's House, p. 72.
During the course of the story, Thorpe pointed out several evils which the institution fostered. One of the villains of the piece, Major Dixon, was a slave trader, and Thorpe made of him not only a person disagreeable to Southern gentlemen because of his business but also a brutal and degraded creature. In describing his attitude toward Negroes, Thorpe wrote, "He delighted in crushing those in his power, when they resisted, and yet he was equally savage upon those who were passive to his will." In one scene, a young Negress is returned to Dixon by her new purchaser who found her not a good servant because she has been parted from her child. She swears to Dixon that she did not tell she had a child, but he prepares to whip her, saying that afterwards, "if I sell you to a sausage-maker you will cry out to be cut up into mince meat before you will come back again to my hands." 

As further characterisation of Dixon, he is made to tell the tale of a man who had such a prejudice against educated Negroes that he would go to great lengths to buy such servants just to be able to mistreat them.

He occupied a log-cabin, ate corn pork, and amused himself drinking whiskey, running horses, and hunting niggers. He was a real spirited gentleman, but rather imprudent in whipping, for he used to lay it on when he got mad; so that the nigger never got over it, and that is a foolish wasting of property, for you see Mr. Deputy, there is no feeling in a nigger's hide below the skin and if you will take time, you can get it all out of his body without touching a vital—but however, the man had a right to kill 'em if he could afford to, for a person should do as he pleases with his own.

In recalling Dixon's background, Thorpe pictured him as a man who had been taught by his mother, a strict Methodist, that even to hold slaves was a sin, and once during a sermon the trader was almost converted from his evil ways when the minister's speech caused him to recall the things his parents had taught him as a child. He returned to church again, full of good resolutions, only to have the minister defend slavery—defend even the right of the master to beat his slave to death—defend dueling, and, in short, defend everything Southern and attack every criticizer of the South. Dixon had gone to church almost prepared to change his ways, but the sermon relieved him of his guilt and even made him feel like a missionary of the gospel, an instrument in the hands of Providence to Christianize the heathen. The sermon is given fully and represents a good satire on the minister who has no moral purpose and whose only aim is to get along in whatever society he finds himself.

As another instance of the cruelty and brutality which the institution of slavery fostered, Thorpe advanced the example of the relationship between overseer and slave. Mildmay himself is loved by his slaves and is always careful of their feelings, even buying or selling Negroes in order to avoid breaking up families, but he is forced by the circumstance of the size of his plantation to employ an overseer. In spite

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23 Ibid., pp. 202 ff.
24 Ibid., p. 209.
of his care, and quite unknown to him, his overseer, Mr. Toadvine, is a gross and brutal drunkard. His cruelty causes one of the slaves to run away, but the boy is arrested and Toadvine calls at the jail to pick him up and return him home. He leads the boy by fastening one end of a rope around his neck and the other end to his saddle horn, and, on the trip back, lashes his horse into a run and drags the slave to death.

Toadvine's killing of the boy Jack gave Thorpe an opportunity to move from the moral to the political evils of slavery and discuss the problem of the poor-white in Southern society, although he does not argue that the institution was responsible for the rise of the poor-white class. As soon as it is learned that Toadvine has killed Jack, several respectable citizens, and some not so respectable, decide to lynch him, and he is saved only by Mildmay's arriving on the scene and insisting that the law must be observed. Therefore Toadvine is jailed and tried for the murder of Jack, but his lawyer succeeds in packing the jury with town loafers whose sympathies are with creatures like Toadvine, and who hate Negroes and dislike planters. The result is that the

25 An example of how fully Thorpe used his experiences in Louisiana for his literary work is the fact that the name Toadvine, so appropriate for a villain, is taken from life. The manuscript book in which the Police Jury Records, West Feliciana Parish, were kept records that Anthony Toadvine was appointed overseer of the Fourth Road District on September 20, 1841.
overseer goes free, much to the disgust of the respectable gentlemen at the trial. Thorpe implies that the administration of justice in small Southern towns was frequently in the hands of the most ignorant and vicious class of citizens, and he disapproved of their political activity.

One of the episodes of the novel treats the campaigns for election to the state legislature waged by the planter Moreton and the opposition candidate, Duffy White, who is supported by the "Piny woods" people of Possum Hollow. Mr. Moreton, although quick-tempered, is an honest and high-minded gentleman, and he begins his preparation for the election by studying "Jefferson's Manual" and arranging his ideas on the new constitution contemplated by his state. Duffy White is represented as an ignorant and illiterate man, wholly unfit for the office of a lawmaker. Mr. Moreton's overseer, Colonel Price, travelled through the back country to observe Duffy's campaign, and reported that it was being carried on in such a way as to prejudice the voters against Moreton and quite without mention of issues.

He related, among other things, that there had been "an extra" printed and circulated, that represented Mr. Moreton as a man that wouldn't let his overseers, or any other poor men, come into his presence, unless they held their hats in their hands, and behaved like niggers; that he would not allow said poor men, particularly

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26 The Master's House, pp. 326-331.

27 Ibid., p. 330. It will be recalled that at the time Thorpe ran for office in Louisiana the state had just completed a new constitution. Other parallels suggest that much of the description of the campaign was drawn from personal experience.
"if they were from the piney woods," to sit down at his table, but rudely drove them away from his house, or if particularly kind, would send them to the negro quarters, to get something to eat. It was furthermore asserted, that he had started on an electioneering tour, with a suit of clothes on he had borrowed from his overseer; that he had a silver cup and "old brandy," to treat the "aristocracy" with, and a gourd and "sixteen cent whiskey," for the common people; and finally and lastly, that Mr. Moreton's body servant, who accompanied him in his travels around the parish, was present, merely to do the shaking hands with the poor folks, he, Mr. Moreton, being afraid to do it himself, lest he would get the itch, or some other contamination.28

The spread of the franchise to the poverty-stricken and the ignorant, Thorpe felt, caused the control of both local and state affairs to fall into the hands of the worst elements of society. Moreton had earlier observed to Mildmay that "we have not sufficient power to protect our rights against these irresponsible poor whites."29 The curious phenomenon of the passionate defense of slavery by those people unable to own slaves and even probably harmed by the institution was noted by Thorpe, and he caused his enlightened planter to reject any allegiance with the group. "I see hypocrites at our doors," said Mildmay, "for I mistrust the sincerity of all men, who, owning no negroes themselves, are violent in defense of our peculiar institution."30 Although Thorpe did not offer any specific remedy for the institution of slavery, he apparently felt the planters, once they recognized the need for reform, as some of them did, were competent to work out some reasonable solution.

28 The Master's House, p. 335.
29 Ibid., p. 281.
30 Ibid., p. 151.
But some of their most passionate allies he saw as their worst enemies, for he felt that the poor whites were the element contributing the greatest amount of instability to Southern society. "Upon such wretched social materials, upon such a moral volcano, do we slaveholders exist," Mildmay concluded by observing in his conversation with Morton.

Among other political ideas that Mildmay voiced was the conviction that the union of the states should be preserved and that the South could strengthen itself by diversifying its economy, both good Whig tenets. To maintain the Union and to preserve slavery as a purely domestic and local institution, Thorpe had Mildmay even advise that the enforcement of the fugitive slave law be given up. Thoroughly conservative, he urged everywhere the virtues of caution and forbearance.

As a novel of the time, the book is an unusual work, for it is a mixture of the sentimental novel and the novel of reform, with an addition of realism. The treatment of slave traders and overseers is aimed to expose the same evils Mrs. Stone dealt with, but as Thorpe did not believe that the remedy of the abolitionists was the answer to the problem, did not, in fact, offer a specific remedy, the reform elements lack the point and direction of a true propaganda novel.

\[^{31}\text{Ibid.}, p. 152.\]
\[^{32}\text{Ibid.}, p. 283.\]
\[^{33}\text{Ibid.}, p. 282.\]
\[^{34}\text{Ibid.}, p. 286.\]
The central love story of Mildmay and Annie is wholly in the tradition of the sentimental novel. Annie is dazzlingly fair, full of sensibility, not strong physically, but mentally resolute in virtue of a limited kind. Mildmay, too, is conventionally developed as a character except that his political philosophy is more elaborately set forth than would have been necessary in a purely sentimental novel. Toadvine and Dixon are melodramatic figures, villains unalloyed. The court scene at the trial of Toadvine, and the political contest between Moriston and Duffy White are developed with some realism, and are based obviously on Thorpe's personal experience. The treatment of the piney-woods characters, who are not presented as frontier hunters like the Big Bear of Arkansas and Bob Herring, is limited but realistic in its approach, although it arises from political presuppositions as well as from direct observation. Had the mixture of types been done skillfully, Thorpe might have achieved his aim of writing a popular novel setting forth the difficulties of a complex situation, but the workmanship is awkward and the final effect ambiguous in spite of the fact that it represents an intelligent approach.

Deficient as the book was as a work of art, it achieved a fairly wide circulation, and within a year a third edition had appeared, with Thorpe's name on the title page. The Master's House; A Tale of Southern

\[35\text{See George Boas, ed., }\textit{Romanticism in America, p. 63.}\]
Life was the last book Thorpe was to publish, and although he continued to write through the rest of his life, his work was all for the periodical press or contributions to the books of others. Thus by 1854 his own small addition to the growing body of American literature was complete.

His position as a writer was indicated again in 1856 when the brothers George and Evert Duyckinck issued their two-volume, ten-pound *Cyclopedia of American Literature*. Thorpe's "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter" was included after a short biographical and critical sketch. As his representative work, the Duyckincks accepted *The Hive of the Bee-Hunter*.

This miscellany of sketches of peculiar American character, scenery, and rural sports, is marked by the simplicity and delicacy with which its rough humours are handled. The style is easy and natural, the sentiment fresh and unforced, showing a fine sensibility.

*The Master's House* and *The Hive of the Bee-Hunter* coming together in 1854 served not only to define Thorpe's position as an author in his own time but also to summarize his contributions and his abilities as a writer. The collection of sketches contained almost all the work he had ever done in frontier humor with the one large exception of the *Far West Letters*. Along with the work of George Washington Harris, Johnson Jones Hooper, Joseph Clover Baldwin, and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, his sketches represented the most memorable productions of the frontier humorists. Thorpe, more than any of the others, was close to the romantic
tration, and his work represents the best effort to reveal the admirable, even the heroic, in the Western American character. As a reporter of the South and West of his time, he had sought to be sans and to be honest. In his novel he had not pretended that he had any veritable solution to a monumental problem, and the result was that the book remained an indecisive production. The citizens of both the North and the South would have profited had they been willing to proceed with equal caution in solving the problem presented by slavery.

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Late in the year of 1858 Fletcher Harper suggested to Thorpe that he do a series of articles on natural history which he could illustrate himself, and in December the first of these, "The Alligator," appeared.36 The following year he published six more in the series: "The Rattlesnake and Its Congeners" in March, "The Dog, Described and Illustrated" in April, "The Lion and His Kind" in May, "The History and Mystery of Tobacco" in June, "Beare and Bear Hunting" in October, and in December "Remembrances of the Mississippi." Like the articles on sugar and cotton, these pieces, too, were made up of some personal observation and some research. The

essay on the alligator, for instance, quoted Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* on the crocodile, Herodotus, whom Thorpe called the most delightful of historians, Pliny and Strabo, and among modern scientists, Geoffrey Saint-Hilaire, Sir J. Gardiner Wilkinson, von Humboldt, and Sir Charles Lyell. Interpersed with the scientific and literary references to alligators were numerous anecdotes of personal recollection and some pseudo-scientific stories from the daily press. The essays were easy and pleasant in style, popular in approach, and always profusely illustrated. Fletcher Harper, who was the real editor of the magazine, addressed it to "all readers of average intelligence," intending that they should be both entertained and instructed. Thorpe's research, half literary and half scientific, and his presentation of his facts in the casual manner of the personal essayist helped set the tone for the serious popular magazine intended for family consumption.

In 1896, Thorpe did six more articles of the same nature for *Harper's*. Four of these were concerned with natural history—the horse, the centipede, the whale, and the rodentia—and the fifth was a review of *The Life and Adventures of James F. Backworth*.


which Harper and Brothers had recently published. The review
of the autobiography of the mountaineer gave Thorpe another chance
to return to his interest in the effect of the wilderness on human
nature, and of the book he wrote, "This intense desire of the imag-
inative and enlightened mind to know something of human nature in
its wild estate has been most strangely and unexpectedly gratified."60
The true quality of the new American character fostered by the life
of the mountain had never been satisfactorily captured for literature
Thorpe felt.

From the very nature of things, every department of human
existence is better illustrated in books than that which re-
lates to frontier or savage life; just in proportion as our
facilities increase for understanding them, just in that ratio
the real charm, the absorbing mystery is weakened. No observ-
ing and able writer ever followed the sturdy hunter through
his life of adventure in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains; no
one who could wield the pen has banished himself for years
among our savage tribes and thus been enabled to learn the
truth regarding the habits and customs of these children of the
forest. Almost all we know concerning these things comes to
us dimmed by the scot of the consuming midnight oil; the fresh,
free air of heaven are wanting; the sublime simplicity has
perished; the inherent poetry of such associations is gone, and
the gross and natural alone remains.61

Thorpe's own observations of the backwoodsman of Louisiana and the
frontiersmen of Arkansas and Texas had not revealed to him precisely
the kind of Western character he sought, and he continued the roman-
tic quest in the literature of the 1850's for the elements to complete

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60 Harper's XXXI, 455-72 (Sept., 1856).
60 Ibid., p. 455.
63 Ibid., p. 455.
the picture of the ideal American.

By the end of 1856 Thorpe had produced seventeen articles for *Harper's*. A few of the pieces were over twenty pages in length, and most of them were between fifteen and twenty pages, and Thorpe himself illustrated them. They were generally carefully prepared and represented a great deal of research. *Harper's* paid for original material at the standard rate of from three to ten dollars a page, which was good for the time, and, consequently, it is safe to assume that Thorpe's income from his work for the magazine represented a fair amount. However, writing articles for the magazines at the mid-century was scarcely a satisfactory way of making a living for a man with a family.

Late in 1857 Thorpe became a member of the editorial staff of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Leslie, whose real name was Henry Carter, was a wood engraver who had come to the United States from England in 1848 where he had been chief of the engraving room of the London *Illustrated News*. He found work in New York as an engraver, and by 1854 had founded *Frank Leslie's Ladies' Gazette of Fashion and Fancy Needlework*. But his real ambition was to found a

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42 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, III, 6 (Dec. 6, 1856).
44 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, IV, 358 (Nov. 7, 1857).
weekly miscellany to be illustrated by news pictures like the London paper for which he had first worked, and finally after organizing his art staff, he established Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper in December of 1855. The paper was a small, sixteen-page folio issued weekly. Its most striking feature was the large illustrations which accompanied the news stories. Its contents were miscellaneous; it had departments devoted to music, drama, the fine arts, the turf, sports in general, army sketches, book reviews, and serial fiction.

The news stories Leslie featured were for the most part sensational, but his interest in drama, music, the arts, and the outdoor life in general was more continental than that of most of the editors of the time. Too, the interest in horse racing, hunting, sports, and military life had been part of the pattern of Southern living which Thorpe had enjoyed. Editorial work for such a journal suited Thorpe's abilities. He remained a member of the staff for over a year.

When Thorpe joined Leslie's in the fall of 1857, he was a

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widower, although just when he lost his wife is not clear. In February of 1855, the winter following his move to New York, he had mentioned in a letter to E. C. Baird that he and his whole family had been prostrated by the change from a Southern to a Northern climate. The phrase "whole family" may mean that his wife was still alive at that time. However that may be, early in November of 1857 he married a Miss Jane Fosdick of New York City.46 His oldest daughter, Anna, would have been about eighteen at the time, and his son Thomas thirteen.

Thorpe's associations in the New York of the 1850's seem to have been with sportsmen, artists, actors, and magazine writers. Henry William Herbert, the English writer on hunting and fishing who had been an early contributor to Porter's Spirit under the pen name "Frank Forester," was also a member of the staff of Leslie's when Thorpe joined it, conducting a weekly "Sporting Chronicle."47 He continued his friendship with the artist Charles Loring Elliott, and mentioned spending an evening at dinner with him at the home of the actor Burton in the mid 1850's. He visited Elliott in Poughkeepsie while the latter was painting Mr.

46 Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper IV, 358 (Nov. 7, 1857).
Vassar's portrait "for his contemplated ladies' seminary," and was the medium for bringing Elliott and John Harper together when the publisher decided to sit for his portrait.

With other friends he continued his hunting and fishing trips, and in 1859 visited John Brown's Tract, a wild and isolated area in upper New York State, afterwards writing an article for Harper's on the excursion. With his two companions and their guides, he spent several days hunting deer and fishing, which was for him the keenest of pleasures, and he described with infinite gusto the beauties of the scenery and the taste of simple food eaten outdoors after hard exercise.

He continued some political activity, apparently, in the transitional period from Whiggery to Republicanism, and was a joint author of A Voice To America; or, The Model Republic, The Glory or Its Fall. The book was published by Edward T. Walker in 1855, and in his preface the publisher observed that he had for some time planned to publish a volume "devoted to the national interests," and that he had selected different gentlemen to write the separate chapters. The preface continued that the book was not the product of any political group, but its tenets were those of the American Party, as it called itself, or the Know-Nothing Party as its enemies called

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*Harper's, XIX, 160-78 (July, 1859).*
it. It is not clear what Thorpe's actual connections with the Know-Nothing party were while he was in New York. The party had grown rapidly in Louisiana with the disintegration of the Whig organization, and Thorpe may have considered it a potent and increasing force. It is also possible that his contribution to the book does not indicate any formal connection with the group. Finally, it is not clear what part of the work Thorpe did. The chapters were all done anonymously, and, furthermore, have enough likenesses of style to indicate that the book was reworked by an editor after all the contributions were made.

The first chapter is a survey of the past of the United States and a prediction of its destiny, which was, according to the author, to establish a mighty empire, not by violence, but by showing the world what could be done under free laws and with an enlightened and self-governing people. 50 The history of the ancient republics is examined and the moral drama that the prerogatives of the Federal government must be maintained, 51 and religious beliefs of the population must be continued. 52 The doctrine of racial purity was one of the prime

50 A Voice to America, pp. 24-25. The third edition of the book has Thorpe's name on the title page as joint author with Frederick Sanders.

51 Ibid., p. 50.

52 Ibid., p. 62.
tenets of the book. "There cannot be a doubt that Providence has selected the Anglo-Saxon race to spread the blessings of liberal institutions throughout the world," wrote the anonymous author of the sixth chapter. Of the immigration of the Germans and Irish he observed. "The last fifty years witnessed the influx of hordes of Celts and of inferior German tribes. The effect has been trouble and annoyance." Once the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon stock had been clearly explained, it was followed with a long attack on the Irish, the atheistical Germans, who were generally also clod-hopper socialists, the Dutch, the French, and the Italians. Of Europeans in general, one of the authors wrote, "They are bigoted, false, selfish, cunning, and revengeful." The Catholic church was offered as the second great enemy of America.

The book ended with a defense of secrecy, which was one of the practices of the American Party offensive to observers of the time. Secrecy was necessary, it argued, during the growth of a party bent on reform—as the American Party clearly was. Altogether the work was a scandalously illiberal collection of writings.

53 Ibid., p. 95.
54 Ibid., p. 89.
55 Ibid., p. 209.
Frederick Saunders is given by the Library of Congress catalogue as the principal author. He was an author and a copyreader for the publishing house of Harper and Brothers, a job which would have provided a reasonable chance of acquaintance with Thorne. Some of the ideas of the work are connected with the belief in manifest destiny, but others of them—such as the attack on the Catholic church, and the violence of the opposition to foreigners—seem not characteristic of him. But in the absence of positive evidence of the authorship of the various chapters, it is mere speculation to try to separate Thorne’s ideas from those of other writers of the book, but at the least the book shows that he, like many another disappointed Whig, flirted with the American Party for a while after his return to New York.

After over a year on the editorial staff of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Thorne made another attempt to establish himself economically, this time by buying a part interest in the New York Spirit of the Times, in which his first published work had appeared. The Spirit was an old and well established weekly, and it dealt with matters which had always been of interest to Thorne. Altogether it

57. Merrell R. Davis, Melville's Murdil.
seemed to promise an ideal arrangement. This was his most ambitious attempt to become an independent publisher.

Thorpe had not written anything specifically for the Spirit during the first few years after his return to New York, but had apparently maintained friendly relations with Porter. The magazine had republished from Harper's his essay on the alligator in December of 1854, and in 1855 had republished "The Dog, Described and Illustrated," and also "Deers and Deer Hunting." But Porter was only the editor of the paper, for he had sold the managing interest to John Richards in 1841, and, as the two did not get along well, he left the journal in September of 1856 to found Porter's Spirit of the Times. The original Spirit continued under the editorship of Edward E. Jones, who had been with it for over twenty years, assisted by Richard Baye, a veteran of seventeen years with the paper. The two also continued to edit the American Turf Register for Richards. The first number of volume twenty-seven of the journal listed the correspondents, but Thorpe's name was not included. However, Jones continued to republish his natural history articles from Harper's. "Something About the Horse" appeared in November of 1856, and "The American Deer" in October of 1858.

58 *Spirit*, XXV, III-12 (April 21, 1855), and 459-61 (Nov. 10, 1855).
59 *Spirit*, XXI, 354 (Sept. 6, 1856).
Some of Thorpe's unusual history included in the latter piece gave rise to a controversy which threatened to result in a duel in the South. After it appeared, a reader from Darien, Georgia, who signed himself "Mark," wrote to comment on Thorpe's statement that the doe gave out no scent while she was suckling her young, this being part of the divine order to protect the species, which also, Thorpe claimed, caused the buck to lose his scent when he lost his horns. "Mark" wrote that this was a beautiful theory, but that the hounds could trail the doe from the moment she dropped her fawn, and as for the bucks losing their scent, he observed, "by the Lord Harry I believe I can tell a half mile off if my dogs jump an old buck by their excited cries, whether in velvet or clean rubbed."62

In the same issue another reader wrote to say that the power of the doe to control her odor during fawning time was not owing "to those benevolent dispensations of Providence that provide for the helpless, as Mr. Thorpe suggests, but to those dispensations of Providence that do not give to some writers a sufficient share of observation of the habits of wild game to make them safe instructors of the public."63 Six weeks later, the letter of "H. of L." of Black River, Louisiana, was printed, defending part of Thorpe's article, but admitting that the doe

63 Ibid.
could be trailed during the fawning season. As soon as he could get his letter in, the Georgia reader replied that he did not want his remarks construed as a rudeness to Mr. Thorpe, but observed belligerently that he did disagree with H. of L., whom he accused of being deficient in courtesy and good breeding. Ominously, after the insult, he signed his name to his letter—^Randolph Spalding. To this H. of L. replied as soon as the mails would allow saying that he intended no discourtesy to Thorpe—^nobody intended any discourtesy to Thorpe, whose nonsensical science had started the whole affair—but added in a postscript darkly that he wished the editor to give Mr. Spalding his name if the latter desired it. With this letter, the matter dropped, and if any blood flowed over whether does have an odor in fawning season or not, the Spirit failed to record it.

Porter lived less than two years after establishing his own paper, and Thorpe’s connection with the old Spirit was only the casual one arising from the paper’s reprinting his essays. But late in January of 1859 John Richards, too, died. The issue following the announcement of Richards’ death, February 5, informed its readers that the

64 Ibid., p. 517 (Dec. 11, 1858).
65 Ibid., p. 517 (Jan. 8, 1859).
66 Ibid., p. 613 (Feb. 5, 1859).
67 Ibid., p. 606 (Jan. 29, 1859).
Spirit would continue its weekly publication, and printed a letter from Thorpe about Richards. The next week the first number of the twenty-ninth volume appeared, announcing that the owners now were Edward Jones, T. E. Thorpe and Richard Hays. Jones and Thorpe were to edit the paper, with Jones as the senior editor. Thorpe was re-introduced in the editorial to those readers who might not have known him.

But our reminiscences of early associates do not yet cease. Twenty-one years ago, there was taken from the postoffice, by "Dick" a large and neatly folded letter, postage one dollar and fifty cents, prepaid. The envelope was opened, and in it was found a contribution to "The Spirit," headed "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." This communication we superintended while it was being put in type. Upon its publication, it instantly became one of the most popular sketches ever given of South-Western life. It inaugurated not only a new style of writing, but subsequently, through innumerable Southern and Western Correspondents, brought together the most truly original and genuine American humor that the literature of the country can boast. The author of "Tom Owen" followed up his success with the "Big Bear of Arkansas," and through succeeding years he made the columns of this paper genial by his ability, and always claiming, by adoption, a large place in the affections of "The Spirit" readers. By a singular train of circumstances the two persons so long associated in the immediate business of conducting "The Spirit" and one of its earliest and most popular correspondents, and always warm personal friends, unite to carry it on....

To credit Thorpe with inaugurating the sketches of Southwestern life was not accurate in view of Longstreet's accomplishment and the popularity of the Crockett books, but Thorpe more than any other writer had given literary respectability to the type. Griswold, the first of the greatly influential anthologists, had chosen Thorpe as the representative of the new writers, and Duyckinck had followed by
reprinting "Tom Green, the Bee Hunter" in his collection. Jones was of course "puffing" his new co-editor and co-partner, but in so doing he was adding to the tradition that Thorpe was the first important practitioner of the humor of the Old Southwest.

The reminiscent mood Jones had struck in his editorial set the tone for the months to follow. Neither the Spirit's editors nor its regular correspondents were young men any more, and they began recalling palmer days and anecdotes of the journal's earlier life, all with an eye to effecting a thorough revival in the new investment. In the issue for February 26, Thorpe wrote a long, three-column article entitled "Reminiscences of Tom Green the Bee Hunter" in which he did a character sketch of the real Tom Green of East Feliciana, and recalled the circumstances of the composition of his first literary production. He noted that he was indebted to the partiality of his Southern friends for his first incitement to write, and to the kindness of his reception by the Spirit for his continuance.

A month later the lead editorial observed that the number was made up almost entirely of original material, a claim Porter used to make proudly in his early issues. The same issue contained a long article on Frank Hunteverde's Public House, and in pointing it out,

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68 Spirit, XXX, 121 (April 23, 1879).

69 Ibid., pp. 123–24.
the editors nostalgically recalled the good old days. "As one reads over the names of the noble sons of genius, the warm-hearted friend, the pleasant companion, they come crowding into our presence, and, alas! smile sadly and disappear. How few remain of the busy throng that once made their headquarters at 'Frank's,' all of the olden times." Frank's, located in Barclay Street near the Spirit office, was a point of congregation for literary men, gentlemen sportsmen, and all visitors from the far West, but the essay was concerned less with the patrons of 1859 than with the crowds of twenty years earlier.

A few weeks later the editor noted that the paper was "constantly in receipt of evidences of a 'thorough revival' among the old friends of the 'Spirit.'" At the end of the twenty-ninth volume, Jones and Thorpe announced that their subscription list had increased, and that amidst the excitement of the times, they were going to continue to exclude all political discussion "that could be construed into sectional feeling. By this course, the old 'Spirit' has been for years the only truly conservative paper of the North, the favorite journal, through which good men, large-hearted men, the real cream of the country, have usually exchanged ideas, and held happy conversations...." The hopes for the thorough revival were growing a

70 Ibid., 169 (May 21, 1859).
71 Ibid., 541 (Dec. 24, 1859).
little uneasy.

Under the editorship of Thorpe and Jones, the *Spirit* continued its interest in the South and the West as areas productive of the materials of an unusual literature. In a review of Randolph B. Marcy's *The Prairie Traveller*, which was a handbook of travel information and routes between the Mississippi and the Pacific, the editors observed that the "most original literature of the day is that which relates to the comparatively unwritten about 'Far West," including the adventures of our soldiers, hunters, trappers, and Indians." The *Prairie Traveller*, like the autobiography of James P. Beckworth which Thorpe had reviewed for *Harper's*, showed that the West was no longer Arkansas, Texas, and the lands immediately beyond the Mississippi as it had been when Thorpe first went to Louisiana, but now extended all the way to the Pacific.

The most elaborate serious attempt to analyze the new American character which the *Spirit* ever printed appeared in two parts in the summer of 1860 under the title "The Western Mind, Its Manifestations, Eloquence, and Humor." No author was given for the piece, nor was any credit given if it was reprinted from another magazine. The essay opened by recalling the *Edinburgh Review*’s question of forty years.

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72 *N.Y.L.,* 473 (Nov. 12, 1859).

73 *Spirit,* **xx,** 172 (May 19, 1860), and 195 (June 2, 1860).
earlier, "Who reads an American book," replying that the author would no longer be willing to concede that the United States did not have a national literature. That such a literature had been slow in coming was an inevitable result of circumstances, for the new nation's first task was physical; it had a wilderness to subdue, the economic necessities to provide, and a social structure to establish before it could turn its attention to broader intellectual activities. The first product of the new nation had been its system of government, the author recalled, and if it had produced nothing else it need not have been ashamed of this one offering to the world's achievements.

The constant warfare of the frontier existence made necessary the militia masters, and at these attended the politicians, the formers of local governments who developed the first and most prominent manifestation of the Western mind—the oral political address, the stump speech as it was called locally. The orator was often of the people himself, and he always used their language. Because he had to appeal to the feelings of his audience, the manner of his speech was more important to him often than its intellectual content. By strict literary standards his language was ungrammatical and un-rhetorical, bristling with odd phrases and border lingo, but it expressed the Western mind. It was singularly inventive of words and metaphors to express the new conditions of life and the new modes of thought, and it was characterized by an almost omnipresent humor, the
author noted. Thus through oratory the new frontier life received its first literary expression.

In explaining the presence of humor in the frontiersmen's characters, the writer noted the difficult conditions of their lives and their sombre and even sorrowful manner, but added that whatever their circumstances, "they will have, from time to time, a season of such utter heartfelt relaxation as sometimes to border on license...."

Both the Indian and the Negro contributed elements to the frontier's peculiar humor and added some of their own terms to the border language, so that the Western character felt the impact of various civilizations.

The essay concluded with a brief examination of "a few writers whose works embody most of the peculiar traits and oddities, fun, humor, and wit of the Southwestern United States." Thorpe, Hooper, and Longstreet were offered as the writers whose work contained the fullest and most accurate delineations of the thought, actions, and speech of the Americans of the distant regions. The frontier, the author felt, had produced and was producing the specifically American character and the specifically American language, and it was the authors of the humor of the Old Southwest who had done most to isolate and define the frontiersman for literature.

The inclusion of such a full examination of the Western American character and language was, in all probability, Thorpe's work. Jones never speculated editorially on the development of the American type,
nor did he have Foster's literary interest in odd types and humorous anecdotes. Thorpe's careful attention to frontier language in his early sketches and his continuing interest in the American character were neatly and fully summed up in the essay, and his own contribution to American literature accurately explained. Surely he must have included the long article in his paper with much satisfaction.

During the years Thorpe was with the Spirit, it bore other evidences of his personal interests and activities. He wrote a good many essays on art for the paper, and in the six-week period beginning April 30, 1859, he did a series of five essays on the National Academy of Design, commenting somewhat at random on the function of the organization and the work of the artists exhibited. His interest in writing about the South and West had always been accompanied by an interest in painting the region, and occasionally his criticism reflected his preoccupation. The genre painters of the time who painted scenes which told a story with picturesque figures were often painstaking in detail but sentimental in treatment. 74 Eastman Johnson, however, an early practitioner of genre painting, remained rather more cooly realistic and reserved in his work, and in his first National Academy of Design paper, Thorpe revealed something of his own taste and inclination for genre work.

74 Alan Burroughs, Lippera and Lippeness, p. 169.
A long residence in the extreme Southwest, joined with the absolute excellence of E. Johnson's picture of "Negro life in the South," No. 321, naturally caused us to stop before this painting, and the first agreeable impression we received has been confirmed by many subsequent examinations. We hold it to be very difficult to present Negroes pleasantly on canvas; no phase of their life is really agreeable, but their simple hearty enjoyment, and its expression suggests a feeling which, if it makes us not wondrous kind toward them, at least causes agreeable emotions, and calls forth our cordial sympathy. The figures are natural and naturally occupied....

The observation concerning the difficulty of presenting Negroes pleasantly suggests that Thorpe himself had tried it with no success. His attitude toward Negroes was not that of the active reformer, but apparently one of ordinary human sympathy. In other papers of the series he praised Barley, the illustrator of his first book, for his illustrations of Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans and The Pioneers. The cause of his friend Charles Loring Elliott was advanced whenever he had an opportunity.

In the National Academy of Design papers for the spring of 1860 he had something to say about the general function of art in American society. He noted that most of the Academicians seemed "to be disposed to cultivate what may be termed pleasing episodes rather than grand conceptions of artistic power," adding that this was the result of the demand for small pictures. The houses of the people of America, he continued, were not suited for large canvases, for the nation

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had no absolutely leisurely class. But there was nothing wrong with this or anything bad for art in the fact.

...artists, if successful, are as a matter of course sensible, and they must paint what the multitude demand, and in so doing will reap a substantial reward, and reach their highest possible excellence. But all of us forget...that the now classic works of Greece were to the Athenians the popular expressions of everyday life....76

Generally his art criticism reflects the reasonable observations of a practical man, always with much faith in the American experiment and what it could produce.

Thorpe himself continued painting during his New York years, and among the subjects he tried was a view of Niagara Falls. The spectacle was a favorite for American artists, having been painted by John Trumbull and John Vanderlyn, both of whom had tried to offer an accurate transcription of the scene. Later, as the romantic taste for stupendous and melodramatic spectacles developed, Frederick Church painted a view of the falls which was sold in 1857 for $4,000.77 Alan Burroughs, however, offers Church's Niagara Falls as an example of how "coldly scientific" the man could be.78 Thorpe's picture was done in 1860, after the Hudson River school had popularized landscape painting in America, and was, apparently, an attempt to reproduce the scene with much fidelity of detail. The picture was called Niagara As It Is. It

76Spirit, XXX, 181 (May 26, 1860).

77Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, III, 414 (June 3, 1857).

78Limmers and Likenoses, p. 150.
was exhibited at N. W. Darby's, where the press was invited to see it before it was sent to England to be reproduced by chromo-lithography. The reviews from the various New York papers were reprinted in the *Spirit* for June 9, 1860, and they all showed much friendliness toward Thorpe and little appreciation for his picture. The *Harold* called him an enthusiastic amateur, the *Harp* praised the picture as a transcript of minute fidelity but declined to discuss its artistic merits, and the *Sylvane* observed mildly that viewed "strictly as a work of art, it might not stand the test of severe criticism." The papers were all aware that the picture was being sent to England to be engraved, and it would appear that Thorpe's plan was to have it reproduced for sale as a commercial venture. Six months later, on December 12, the *Spirit* reprinted a note from the *Harold* that the picture was back from London, where it had been for copying.

Another phase of Thorpe's interest in romantic scenery was revealed in a series of essays printed in the *Spirit* in 1860 entitled "A Search for the Picturesque." The concept of the picturesque had been defined by Uvedale Price as early as 1794; its attributes placed it neatly between Burke's Sublime and Beautiful, and among its qualities were variety, intricacy, freedom from constraint, and the possession of rough and sudden imperfections.79 The romantic delight in old ruins,

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quaint buildings, old persons, and unusual scenery expressed appreciation for the picturesque.

Thorpe's series of essays began in mid-August of 1860 when he wrote a letter to the senior editor, Edward Jones, explaining (for the readers) that he could not be with the paper for a while because he was ill.

My dear senior -- Many, many days of ailing, as you are aware, culminated last week in the necessity of retiring, for a few days at least, from active life, and with a painful heartiness I at last consented to be an invalid. It is none of my business, nor does it accord with my taste, to imitate my friend E. P. Willis by making bodily infirmities subjects of editorial gossip; in fact, I shall never forgive the "Sage of Miswold" for lacerating my feelings week after week with his symptoms, while all the while he was as hearty as a buck, and no more out of order than the earth's axis. In that as it may, "I was off my feet," at home, and, like a fainting fish, turned upon my back....

Although he rarely alluded to the fact, Thorpe was apparently ill a good deal of the time all his life. But the week following the announcement that he was confined to his house, "A Search for the Picturesque" appeared, dated Altoona, Blair County, Pa., August 7, 1860.81 After four essays had appeared, another notice was printed in the Spirit saying that Thorpe was still confined at home by his illness. Either the trip to Pennsylvania was an imaginary one, or, what is more likely, the essays were written from material collected from some earlier excursion.

81 Ibid., 329 (Aug. 18, 1860).
The essays described the reminiscences of a painter in search of subjects in the hills and forests of Pennsylvania. The pieces were familiar essays, casual in organization and heterogeneous in content. In addition to the description of picturesque views, Thorpe also observed the quaint appearance of the Dutch communities and their odd customs, and even recorded a visit to the railway workshops at Altoona which called to his mind the advantages of a republican form of government.

What struck me with most force was the wonderful facilities, purely American, to relieve the laborious mechanics from all unnecessary labor, for we found that by a judicious use of moveable cranes placed everywhere that the ponderous masses of iron were swung around without the least physical exertion.... In fact, one of the most important, yet seldom noticed evidences of a Republican Government, is displayed in the care which is bestowed upon the comfort of those who toil. The self-respect created by political equality inspires pride, and encourages and enlightens the instinct of self-preservation; here labor is honorable, and it is in its associations, honored.82

Thorpe accepted not only the romantic belief that in a state of nature men would be good and that frontier conditions were producing a new and admirable character, but also the idea that the right social institutions would improve the condition of all men.

Another trip Thorpe recorded for the Spirit was one he made in the fall of 1859 to Canada. He visited Toronto and Montreal, where he

attended the Church of Notre Dame and expressed admiration for the Catholic service, and returned by way of Burlington, Vermont, and Saratoga Springs. The series of letters describing the trip began on October 1, and continued through the November 12 issue. The northern lakes and mountains he described with a painter's eye, alert for unusual and picturesque combinations, but he also poked a little fun at the artist who could "see no beauty except in foreign airs and graces." The various character types he saw pleased him, and he wrote of Scotch fiddlers, a runaway darkie banjo player, healthy English children, robust old Frenchmen, and a dreamy Normandy girl. The streets of Montreal reminded him of the streets of New Orleans, and he seemed to take pleasure in all he saw.

The time for leisurely trips, however, was drawing to a close, for the growing national conflict demanded more and more of men's attention, and it was destined to swallow up Thorpe's most promising venture as proprietor and editor of a journal. Porter had never allowed anything to be printed in the Spirit which concerned itself in the slightest with political matters. As political stands began to be determined increasingly on a sectional basis, the paper's position became steadily more difficult. It circulated nationally, and,

83 Spirit, xiii, 421 (Oct. 15, 1859).
84 Ibid., 469 (Nov. 12, 1859).
although it was published in New York, probably had more subscribers in the South than in the North. But the paper's attempted neutrality was not simply a matter of good business. While there were many things in Southern society which Thorpe did not approve of, his criticisms had been the mild ones of a sympathetic observer, and he had always admired the planter class. And the senior editor, Edward Jones, was an active defender of the South. The *Spirit* was doomed by the times.

In March of 1859 Thorpe wrote a biographical sketch of Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia. The essay recalled with pleasure that Stephens had been a Whig and had approved the Whig doctrine of the necessity for internal improvements. But Stephens had supported the annexation of Texas, which was not the party position, and finally in 1855 he had fought successfully the Know-Nothings, Thorpe noted with approval. His attitude suggests that if Thorpe had had any alliance with the Know-Nothings, it was ended by 1859. The essay did not express approval or disapproval of the North or South, but it did praise Stephens as a brilliant politician.

Then in December of 1859 the *Spirit* printed a review of Dion Boucicault's play which it headed "The Octoroon, a Disgrace to the North, a Libel to the South."85 The plot of Boucicault's work, which

85 Ibid., 329 (Dec. 17, 1859).
was adapted from Wayne Reid's *Quadrats,* was melodramatic and romantic. The beautiful Lee is loved by a young Southerner, who is presented in a most attractive light, and pursued by evil incarnate in the person of the villain Mitchell. In the end she drinks poison rather than fall into the hands of her degenerate pursuer. The *Spirit* reviewer was disgusted with the play and with its enthusiastic reception. The love story between a Negro woman and a white man he rejected along with any kind of equality of the races. He continued with the standard criticism (irrelevant to the play, of course, but a general rejoinder to all criticism of slavery) that the poor of the North were treated worse than the slaves in the South. The piece was unsigned. In accepting it the *Spirit* was defending the Southern point of view.

As the months advanced, the *Spirit* continued to decry sectionalism, noting that it had become ecclesiastical as well as political, and its account of John Brown's raid was contributed by "Nicholas Spicer," a colonel in the Virginia Militia. When Edward Jones took a trip for his health in January of 1860, he went to Charleston, and the notice of his absence mentioned the fact (one is tempted to say pleadingly) that he had done twenty-four years of hard work for


87 *Spirit,* XXIX, 584 (Jan. 14, 1860).
the Spirit.

On February 25, 1860, the paper printed a letter giving an account of a speech Tharp had delivered at Jamaica, Long Island, to the Young Men's Literary Association on cotton and its cultivation. He had shown the intimate connection between the North and the South and had encouraged "love for the Union." From the days of his verdant Whigcy Tharp had opposed secession and insisted on the necessity of the Union. He continued to the end to interpret and explain the South and to oppose radicalism in both sections, but there could not be much doubt as to what his position would be if the final choice had to be made.

At the end of the year Richard Bays disposed of his interest in the paper to Jones and Tharp, who announced that they would continue it as joint owners and editors. Together they continued also the American Turf Register.

The editorial for the first number of Volume XXXI defended the function of the Spirit in the crisis of the times and drew a moral for its readers. After the struggle for independence, the editors pointed out, the United States had been so absorbed in practical affairs that the people had no time for recreation. Especially in

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the North, the "severest and most acquisitive, and most soulkilling of Poor Richard's proverbs were the rules of life." The editorial concluded by pointing out that the troubles of the time arose from the absorption of the mass of the people in the pursuit of gain and their neglect of their intellectual self-governing responsibilities.

One month later another notice appeared in the paper,

I have this day sold to Edward L. Jones, Esq., my interest in the "Spirit of the Times," who will hereafter conduct it on his own account.

Thomas B. Thorpe

New York, March 6, 1861.

Like Richard Bay, apparently, Thorpe saw there was nothing more to be hoped for from the Spirit, and thus closed his last important proprietary and editorial venture.

In the same issue announcing Thorpe's departure from the paper, Jones made a plea to his readers to pay their past-due accounts, which amounted to over $50,000. The plea, as usual, was in vain. Shortly afterward, Jones's Northern readers began to attack him as a Southern sympathizer. In the June 22 issue he announced that the suspension of mail communication with the South by the United States government forced him to cease publication for a time. He made another plea for the past-due accounts, saying that he was far

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90 *Spirit, XXX, 1* (Feb. 9, 1861).

in debt for the publication expenses of the paper and could not even arrange his affairs temporarily unless his subscribers paid something of what they owed him. With this number ended the original New York Spirit of the Times.

Thurpe's selling his interest in the paper rather than clinging to the reluctant end probably indicates that he neither had formed any important emotional attachment to it nor considered it his last chance to establish himself financially. Such was not his temperament. Probably, sniffling the battle from afar, he left in great excitement to join the Union Army, expecting new adventures and better successes.
CHAPTER VII

NEW YORK AND THE NATIONAL MAGAZINES

During the winter of 1853-1854, Thorpe continued to write for Harper's, meanwhile settling his family in New York and continuing work on his volume of sketches for Appleton's and also on a novel he was to publish in a few months. After his article on "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," his next piece was a curious work entitled "The Case of Lady Macbeth Medically Considered: A Western Sketch,"¹ which appeared in February, 1854. It was another attempt to set forth life and character in the Southwest, the tale of a country doctor whom Thorpe represented as having an unusual interest in Elizabethan literature in general and in Shakespeare in particular. The doctor was asked to read a paper before the county medical association which turned out to be an examination of the character of Lady Macbeth. He suggested tentatively that the strange and unnatural ambition of Lady Macbeth was a result of her never having had a child, but, he continued, her doctor was at fault in not doing anything for her.

Why did he not express confidence in his ability to cure?
Why did he not prescribe with seeming promptness?
Why did he not confuse the waiting gentlewoman with dark letter and unmeaning terms?
Why did he not, in short, as in duty bound, make an impression and make a bill?

¹Harper's, VII, 391-98 (Feb., 1854).
CHAPTER VIII

NEW ORLEANS AND NEW YORK AGAIN

After the appearance of The Hive of the Bee Hunter and The
Master's House in 1854, Thorpe published no more books, and when
he sold his interest in the Spirit of the Times in the spring of
1861, he ended his last important editorial connection. The
remainder of his career, then, will be sketched only briefly.

Even after the fall of Fort Sumter, Thorpe seems to have con-
tinued hopes for good relations between the North and South, and
as late as November, 1861, he wrote an article for Harper's
entitled "About the Fox and Fox-Hunters," praising the Southern
sport and recalling with pleasure his early days in the Felicianas.
Among the anecdotes he included was one telling of his first fox
hunt, which took place near Jackson, Louisiana, and the recollection
showed nothing but good will for the planters with whom he had
associated and praise for their charming wives and daughters. Most
journals north and south were busy denouncing their enemies by the
fall of 1861, but Harper's Magazine remained aloof, and the senti-
ments Thorpe's expressed were not out of place in its pages. But
Thorpe was not the man to stay out of a battle, and after his essay
on fox hunting he wrote no more for Harper's for seven years.
Instead he apparently managed to obtain for himself the rank of Colonel in the Union Army, \(^1\) and accompanied General Butler's forces to New Orleans, which had fallen to Admiral Farragut late in April of 1862 without any serious defense by the Confederate forces. Thus early in the war, Thorpe found himself once again in Louisiana. By the end of May he had received an appointment as temporary clerk in the Port of New Orleans at a salary of \$1,600\ annually.\(^2\) It is not clear that he accepted the appointment, however, for there is no record in the National Archives of his resignation, and, furthermore, by early June he had been appointed to another position by General Butler.\(^3\)

On June 4, 1862, Butler addressed a directive to General Shepley, who was Military Commandant of the city, and the City

\(^1\)The records of the War Department are not available for public inspection in the National Archives, and no information on this matter has been forthcoming from the Adjutant General of the Army. However, Thorpe was generally referred to as Colonel Thorpe, and a letter from General Banks, Commanding officer of the Department of the Gulf, dated New Orleans, 19 July 1864, is addressed to Colonel T. B. Thorpe. The original is in the archives of the New York Historical Society.

\(^2\)Letter from the National Archives and Records Service, October 6, 1952, reporting the results of a search of the records of the Treasury Department.

\(^3\)\textit{Ibid.}\
Council of New Orleans observing that the city was full of starving poor and there was no work for the men. Further, the city streets were dirty, and the council was directed to employ the poor at the rate of fifty cents a day, and as its part the Union Army would issue from its commissary a day's rations for a soldier to each person employed. Thorpe, who had also received the appointment of city surveyor, was designated by General Butler to represent the Union Army in the distribution of the food, and to him fell the management of the thousands of laborers employed in cleaning the city. Butler, in his autobiography, paid tribute to Thorpe by saying that his life's work as an author and artist had been far different from what he found himself called upon to do in New Orleans, but that he had inaugurated the system which distributed food to thirty-one thousand families who could not otherwise get it. James Parton, Butler's biographer and apologist, said that no one could have done the work better than Thorpe did, for he tore away shanties, filled up hollows, purged the canals, cleaned the streets, repaired the levee, and kept the city in such perfect cleanliness


5 Ibid.

as extorted praise from the bitterest foes of his country and his chief."

A correspondent of the New York Times wrote to the paper July 21, 1862, to say that Thorpe had organized the distribution of the food in such a manner that it was given only to the women of the families assisted so that the men could not sell it and buy rum.

In addition to providing work for the unemployed, Butler organized another relief program for the gratuitous distribution of food to the families of Union recruits, widows and the friendless destitute, and the families of Confederate soldiers. The management of the program was under the control of a commission of relief consisting of a president, B. F. Flanders, a long-time resident of New Orleans and the owner who had sold his interest in the Whig Daily Tropic to Thorpe, and four members, one from each of the four city districts. Again Thorpe was one of the members from one of the city districts.

On December 17, 1862, General Nathaniel P. Banks arrived in New Orleans from New York and relieved Butler of his command, much to the

7General Butler in New Orleans, p. 306.

8Ibid.

latter's surprise, and instituted a command as notable for its mildness as Butler's had been for its harshness. In little more than a month after Butler left, Thorpe wrote him from New Orleans to say that his departure was regretted even by some of his former opponents, "among respectable people," because it had "paralyzed business, destroyed hope, and set things to the backwards generally." Thorpe also praised the general for his thorough "Union practices," and of his enthusiastic greeting in the North said, "I have watched your progress north with pleasure. Your reception was no more than I had expected." Obviously Thorpe was keeping his eye on Butler as possible future political candidate. He had not forgotten Zachary Taylor.

In May and June of 1863, Thorpe travelled north to Norfolk and Washington, and among other things sounded out the people he met on the possibility of running Butler for the presidency. He returned to New Orleans, and on August 25, 1863, wrote Butler to say that his

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friends in New York and elsewhere were moving quietly to bring
him out as a presidential candidate, as the country needed a
man of administrative ability and a will of his own, which
Butler certainly had. He felt the laboring classes and the mass
of the people would support Butler, and, remembering Zachary
taylor, he called the general the "true hero of New Orleans."13
Thorpe was again attempting to help make a president and attach
his own fortunes to a man who was rising. But he seems to have
learned shortly that he had the wrong man in Butler, and he wrote
him no more letters.

General Banks's mild policy seems at first to have encouraged
some disorder in New Orleans,14 as Thorpe had observed in his letter
to General Butler, but his attitude was not only to make possible but
actively to encourage the citizens of Louisiana who were loyal to the
Union to reorganize their own civil government. The first step in
reestablishing a state government had been taken under Butler, who
had called an election which resulted in the choice of B. F. Flanders
and Michael Hahn for congressmen from the first and second districts,
then under control of the Federal forces. Meanwhile Lincoln had been

13Ibid.

14John Rose Ficklen, History of Reconstruction in
meditating on some feasible plan for returning the seceded states to the Union, and on December 6, 1863, he issued a rather cautious proclamation which has come to be known as the Lincoln Plan of Reconstruction. The plan provided first for the return of the control of the state to the loyal element by enfranchising certain citizens who would take an oath of allegiance to the United States government, and second, for the acceptance of the state government by the United States after at least one-tenth of the voters had established such a government. Hereupon General Banks called for an election of a governor, lieutenant-governor, secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general, superintendent of education, and auditor to be held the following February. He further called for an election of delegates to be held on the first Monday in April, to revise the Louisiana Constitution of 1852. Michael Hahn was elected governor and when Banks announced the date for the choice of delegates to the constitutional convention as March 28, he confirmed it, thereby giving the approval of the new state government to the convention.

Thorpe, who apparently again considered himself a resident of New Orleans, succeeded in getting himself elected as a representative

15Bragg, Louisiana in the Confederacy, p. 282.
16Ibid., p. 283.
17Pickens, History of Reconstruction in Louisiana, pp. 55-56.
18Ibid., p. 67.
from the Second Representation District, and it was he who called
the convention to order on April 6, 1864, at Liberty Hall in
New Orleans.19 During the seventy-eight days that the convention
sat, Thorpe took an active part in its proceedings. He attended
the sessions regularly, although he was frequently late and had to
be called to his seat by the sergeant at arms, just as he had been
often late to the meetings of his debating society at college.
Apparently it was his custom to stand on the sidewalk with a group
of men and talk as the meetings were being called to order.

Nineteen of Louisiana's forty-eight parishes were represented
in the assembly, the delegates distinguished generally by their anti-
secessionist beliefs. Among them were such men as Christian Roselius,
a distinguished member of the Louisiana bar, and Judge James G.
Taliaferro, who as delegate to the state convention of January 1861
had been the most vocal and able of the opponents of secession.20
But the backgrounds of others of the members were less clear, and
one of the delegates alleged he had heard that one-half of those
present were "copperheads."21

19Journal of the Convention for the Revision and Amendment
of the Constitution of Louisiana, p. 3. Cited hereafter as Journal
of the Louisiana Convention of 1864.
20Bragg, Louisiana in the Confederacy, pp. 30-31.
21Pickland, History of Reconstruction in Louisiana, p. 69.
Thorpe's voting on the various problems that faced the assembly generally repeated the pattern of ideas expressed in his novel, *The Master's House*. Throughout the convention he expressed his belief in the desirability and necessity of the Union. On April 21 he was appointed chairman of the Committee on Federal Relations, and two days later offered a brief report saying only that the Constitution and laws of the United States "shall be the supreme laws of the land."*22*

In his disapproval of slavery, he was not unusual in the assembly, for the convention finally adopted a constitution abolishing the institution. Thorpe also by this time was in favor of extending the vote to a limited number of Negroes. On May 10 a resolution had been offered recommending to the President and Congress of the United States that a fair compensation be paid to loyal citizens of Louisiana for the loss of their slaves, with the additional provision that "the Legislature shall never pass any act authorizing free negroes to vote." The latter provision Thorpe voted to table. Later, on June 23, the question of suffrage came in another form when a resolution was offered authorizing the Legislature to pass laws extending the right to vote to such persons, "citizens of the United States, as by military service, taxation to support the government, or by intellectual fitness

*22 Journal of the Louisiana Convention of 1864, p. 81.*
may be deemed entitled thereto."  

Thorpe voted for this limited extension of suffrage, as did a majority of the assembly, and it became a part of the new constitution.

Thorpe also had several opportunities to express his ideas about public education at the convention. General Banks had provided for the education of freedmen by issuing a general order on March 22, 1864, and in the assembly Mr. Abell offered a resolution that the order's basis of taxation was improper and that the convention should adjourn until the matter had been adjusted with the general.  

Thorpe voted with the majority to table the resolution, and eventually the constitution provided for the education of all children between the ages of six and eighteen at free public schools without regard to race. In the debate on public education, Thorpe himself offered a resolution that schools under the charge of the Roman Catholics should receive money from the public treasury equal to that granted the public schools. The motion probably represented the desires of part of Thorpe's New Orleans constituency, but in any case it was tabled and appeared no more.

On July 26, 1864, the convention adopted a preamble to its new constitution affirming that the ordinance of secession had been based

23 Ibid., p. 130.

24 Ibid., p. 23.

25 Ibid., p. 127.
on an unfounded assumption of state sovereignty, maintaining that
the primary allegiance of the citizens of the state was due the
government of the United States, and recommending that having
legally abolished the institution of slavery in the state, "as an
evil in itself and a constant source of national disturbances and
danger . . . we, the people of Louisiana) are in favor of amend-
ing the constitution of the United States to abolish it."26 The
constitution was submitted to the popular vote within the Federal
lines and approved by a vote of 6836 to 1566.27 The auspicious
beginning made by the constitution of 1864 for the reestablishment
of civil government in Louisiana leading to readmission to the
Union founderd, however, on Congress's opposition to Lincoln's
plan, and Louisiana was later to experience the same mode of re-
construction as the other Southern states.

With the adjournment of the convention in the summer of 1864,
Thorpe ended his first and last service as an elective officer, in
a post which had taken a bloody war to achieve for him. Thorpe
seems to have found life in New Orleans during the period a
depressing and unhappy experience, for eager as he was to advance
himself financially, he was, as always, sympathetic toward the

26 Ibid., pp. 168-69.
27 Ficklen, History of Reconstruction in Louisiana, p. 81.
local people. In June of 1864 he wrote to an acquaintance in
New York saying that he had enjoyed receiving a letter recalling
Brooklyn life and associations, which were a "pleasant contrast
to life in Southern Louisiana." Within a year after the adjourn­
ment of the convention he left the state to spend the remaining
thirteen years of his life in New York.29

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After his return to New York City, Thorpe continued to paint,
to write for the magazines, and to make speeches for the Republican
Party, meanwhile holding some kind of position or other in the New
York Customs House from 1869 until his death in 1878.

At the time of the death of his friend Charles Loring Elliott,
Thorpe wrote a long biographical sketch of the artist which was
printed in the Evening Post of October 2, 1868. The piece was later
reprinted as a pamphlet of eleven double-column pages with the title
Reminiscences of Charles L. Elliott, Artist. The essay recorded

28 To Gordon L. Ford, from New Orleans, June 14, 1864.
The original is in the collection of Thorpe papers of the New York
Public Library.

29 The time of Thorpe's departure from New Orleans is not clear.
In April 18, 1871, he wrote E. C. Mills, President of the Brooklyn
Art Association, requesting reinstatement of his membership. In the
letter he said he had gone South at the rebellion and was away
"nearly three years." This would indicate that he returned late in
1864, or early in 1865. The letter is in the collection of Thorpe
papers of the New York Public Library.
Thorpe's friendship and admiration for his fellow artist and contained numerous anecdotes of the student days of the two during their study of painting under John Quidor. Thorpe had also spent much time with Elliott during the close of the latter's career, and he praised the man for his ability as a portrait painter and for his good sense, his simplicity and modesty.

Thorpe did not write anything for Harper's immediately after his return from New Orleans, and it was not until August of 1868 that he had an article in the magazine. "Duels and Duelists," as the essay was called, again rose out of his experiences in Louisiana and expressed his disapproval of the practice, which he attributed to the conditions of frontier life.

Thirty-five years ago in the Southwest it was difficult to find one's self in a group of six or eight prominent citizens without soon learning that one or more of them had been an actor in a duel. . . . There were many reasons for this. The country at that time was newly settled and very prosperous. The enterprising, the adventurous, the unscrupulous, all came together on the same level, and soon acquired comparative independence. There were none of the restraints peculiar to long-settled countries. The very necessities of these frontiersmen made them physically brave and ruthless. . . . The disagreements among those who held positions as gentlemen, if leading to open rupture, were settled in a street fight or according to the code of the duelist.

The essay continued with some personal anecdotes and the accounts of several famous duels. Obviously Thorpe's years in the South had been the most stimulating of his life, and he never lost his interest in the influence of the frontier on the American character.
Between this article and the last he wrote for Harper's, which appeared in the issue for March, 1874, and was a biographical sketch of Lewis Gaylord Clark, who had been editor of Knickerbocker Magazine for thirty years, Thorpe did nine articles for the journal. These were of a miscellaneous nature: some were anecdotes of politicians, others were natural history sketches, and three were historical accounts of political affairs or institutions. In general they were well done but ordinary feature articles, quite suitable for the serious family magazine which Harper's was.

One of the most sumptuous publishing ventures of the period was a pictorial work issue in twenty parts, illustrated by well-known artists of the day, with texts by good writers accompanying the pictures. Nominally under the editorship of William Cullen Bryant, the work was sold on subscription, and in 1872 was collected and bound in two immense volumes under the title Picturesque America. The book was another phase of the discovery of the American scene, a joint work by authors and artists to illustrate and explain the physical setting of the new nation, with romantic emphasis on the unusual and the picturesque in the beauties of nature.

Some of the articles had first appeared in Appleton's Journal, which, in its varied content, offered one of the best pictures of the

Among the artists who contributed to the work were Felix O. C. Darley, A. F. Bellow, J. F. Kensett, and W. Whittredge, while the writers included Constance Fenimore Woolson, D. H. Strother, Oliver B. Bumee, editor of *Appleton's*, and Thorpe. Bryant, in his preface, stated that "It is the design of the publication entitled *Picturesque America* to present full descriptions of the scenery characteristic of all the different parts of our country."

Thorpe's first contribution was an essay on the "St. John's and Oklawaha Rivers" of Florida, which he described as he had seen them on a hunting trip. His observations about the Florida Crackers repeated to a certain extent the attitude he had expressed in his first published written work, "Tom Owen, the Bee Hunter." He saw their ragged existence from the point of view of an urbane and artistic observer pleased with the quaint and the unusual.

But their hut was a very model of the picturesque, and the smouldering fire, over which their dinner-pot was cooking, sent up a wreath of blue smoke against the dark openings of the deep forest that gave a quiet charm and a contrast of colors, difficult to be sufficiently admired, and impossible to be conceived of in the mere speculations of studio-life.

The romantic mode of address overbalances Thorpe's realistic powers of description throughout the essay, but in this he was being

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consistent with the tone set by the book as a whole.

The second essay Thorpe did for the collection was "The Lower Mississippi," which described the river as one would see it entering from the Gulf and proceeding upstream. Some of the details of the river's history he reused from his article for Harper's called "Remembrances of the Mississippi." The scenes he had to deal with did not fit the definition of the picturesque, and consequently the details are more realistically presented.

For a while in the 1870's Thorpe served as dramatic editor of Forest and Stream. The journal, established in 1873, was a superior weekly devoted to sports and the outdoor life. It was active in founding the Audubon Society and wielded an important influence in game conservation reforms. Like the Spirit of the Times, the magazine combined an interest in sports with attention to the theatre, and was thus suited to Thorpe's temperament and talents. About 1875 Thorpe began contributing to a curious magazine called Baldwin's Monthly. O. C. Baldwin was a New York clothier who published 50,000 copies of his magazine each month for free distribution as an advertisement for his wares. He published work by

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33 XII, 25-41.


36 Ibid., III, 35.
Walt Whitman, Paul H. Hayne, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith, the wife of Seba Smith, author of the humorous Jack Downing letters. Of the unusual little magazine, Mrs. Smith wrote in her autobiography that it "was conducted in a fine manly way by Mr. Baldwin, who paid reasonable prices for his articles."

Thorpe continued his painting after his return to New York, and exhibited pictures at the National Academy of Design and the Brooklyn Art Association. Among the pieces he showed were I'll Fight it Out on This Line, Palmetto Swamps, and Banks of the Mississippi. In his art work, as in his writing, he continued to utilize the experiences he had enjoyed in the South.

From 1869 on, although he was painting pictures for sale and writing for Harper's, Appleton's Journal, Forest and Stream, Baldwin's Monthly and probably other magazines, Thorpe was not dependent on such work alone for his income. In July of 1869 he received an appointment in the Office of Compilation of Statistics and Imports in the New York Customs House. The post was a minor political appointment and the salary was $1400 yearly. Within seven months he was promoted to the office of clerk, and in April of 1873 was appointed Weigher at a

37 Ibid.
39 From undated blank forms and notes in the Thorpe papers of the New York Public Library.
salary of $2500 a year. He continued in this position for over four years, until he was removed in December of 1877. He returned to the Custom House in July of 1878 as an Assistant Adjuster of Warehouse Bonds at the greatly reduced salary of $1200. In a little over three months he died and the office was abolished.40

Thorpe died of Bright's disease on September 20, 1878, at the age of 63, in New York City's Roosevelt Hospital.41 The New York Times reported that his two daughters were with him at the time and that the recent death of another daughter had contributed to his decline. His son was a minister at Hot Springs, Arkansas.42 The obituaries generally recalled that he had been writer, artist, and politician. George Wilkes, editor of the Spirit of the Times which had been continued after Porter's death, wrote "He was proficient in many things, a first-class chess player, an excellent painter, and a superior writer on art subjects."43 The genteel magazines such as Harper's, whose respect he had sought and achieved through his

40The information concerning Thorpe's employment at the Port of New York is included in a letter dated November 4, 1952, from Mr. Thad Page, Chief Archivist, Legislative and Fiscal Records Branch, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

41*Spirit of the Times, Sept. 28, 1878.* This magazine was not a revival of the original Spirit, but one of its numerous offsprings, edited by George Wilkes.

42Sept. 20, 1878.

43*Wilkes' Spirit of the Times, Sept. 28, 1878.*
pleasant and carefully done informative articles, did not mention "The Big Bear of Arkansas," or "Bob Herring, the Arkansas Bear Hunter." The boisterous humor and coarse language of the type had never achieved any widespread acceptance in genteel literary circles, but Thorpe died an honest if rather obscure gentleman who had helped to add a little respectability to the genre.
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

The examination of Thorpe's life in broad outline reveals that his constant goal was to establish a career for himself, and this he sought in three ways -- as newspaper editor and politician, as artist, and as writer. From early in his life until his death he moved from one to the other of these activities, never quite realizing his expectations but always hopeful of success with each new venture. The goal he sought in each of these three areas of activity was social and financial success. He was thoroughly practical in his aims. In politics and in his editorial work he was no militant reformer; most of the principles he held were generally accepted by his time, and the few which were controversial he sought to advance through his party and through popular candidates. In his writing and in his art he accepted as a young man the romantic mode spreading through the literate society of his time, and against its background he worked in a new and unusual tradition of realism and humor, but he never labored under the burden of a great artistic vision. Rather he worked optimistically and vigorously, expecting the recognition and approval of the men of his time, seeking through whatever he did a financial reward and a position in society as a gentleman. He did many things well, but nothing with finality; he remained throughout his life the gifted amateur.
His experiences within his family were those of a child who had lost his father before he could know him, but the memory of the father preserved within the home was that of an unusual mind and a dedicated spirit. The family continued in the emotional religion of Methodism, and Thorpe maintained the connection throughout his life, although neither militantly nor fervently. Reared by a widowed mother in a household of limited means, he had, nonetheless, a happy childhood, and he recalled his earliest days in New York as bright and pleasant times. His art training, begun at the conclusion of his public school education, introduced him to the mildly bohemian atmosphere of the city's struggling young artists and surely added to his tolerance and breadth of sympathy. His ambition, at fifteen, to be a historical painter already showed his interest in his nation and its past, and shadowed forth his later preoccupation with the American character and the American mind. His first picture to be exhibited, *The Bold Dragoons*, reflected the influence of his teacher, John Quidor, in its literary inspiration and in its use of humor. The knowledge of Irving also meant that Thorpe was aware of the romantic tradition of the wandering artist sketching and writing of the quaint and the local and the picturesque.

His first desire for a career was to continue abroad his art training, but his family did not have the means to support him in the venture. Instead, he was sent to Wesleyan, where he spent two years as a happy student and an indifferent scholar. The college
education, narrow as it was, was a useful experience in the back­
ground of a gentleman. In his work in rhetoric he was introduced
to the principles of oratory, and his activities in his debating
society gave him good training for the political stump speaking he
was to do the remainder of his life. Probably, too, his later
knowledge of the science of Aristotle, Strabo, and Pliny and the
history of Herodotus was begun at Wesleyan, along with some introduc­
tion to the science of his own day which was later to serve him in
his writing for the national magazines. Finally, it was at college
that he formed the friendships leading to his residence in the South,
a period of time which was to provide him with the stimulation and
experience for the most productive years of his life.

He first established himself independently as a painter of
portraits and animals for the wealthy planters of the Felisiana
parishes of Louisiana. The knowledge he gained of their lives was
the basis for a lifelong admiration for plantation owners and quickened
his own desire to achieve for himself in society all that pertained
to the state of a gentleman. But although he was not satisfied to re­
main a poor limner keeping a bungalow at St. Francisville, painting
remained for him one of the primary interests of his life. During his
own time his work was praised for its fidelity and technical compe­
tence. Beyond this, the critics accorded him only the status of the
gifted amateur, and if he sought more than this, he left no record
of it.
His work as a painter was in the tradition of the romantic exploration of the American scene. His genre piece, *Border Inquest*, was remembered by S. G. W. Benjamin in 1880 as peculiarly American in its humor. His animal pictures for the planters, *The American Deer* and *The Wildcat*, are examples of early work in a neglected field and are also reports of the American scene. His landscape works, such as *Niagara as It Is*, *Palmetto Swamps*, and *Banks of the Mississippi*, are not only reflections of the romantic interest in unusual landscapes but also a part of the inventory of the new continent. The former represents Thorpe's work in the tradition of recording stupendous spectacles and scenes of grandeur, and the latter two his work in the tradition of the picturesque, both aspects of the romantic approach. Obviously he remained in close contact with the artistic movements of his time and was sensitive in a practical way to the demands of the public.

His experience in the Felicianas also brought him into contact with politics, for most of the planters took an active part in public affairs. It was a socially acceptable activity, and it also offered him an opportunity of achieving the recognition and the competency he desired. He had received a minor appointment as postmaster at Vidalia, Louisiana, in 1843, and later, by strenuous work in Taylor's campaign for the presidency, he hoped for a more important reward. Disappointed in his expectation, he himself ran for office but was defeated in the collapse of the Whig party in Louisiana. He might have received some
kind of an appointment under the carpetbag regime in Louisiana
after the Civil War, but had either expressed his Southern sympa-
thies too generally to be acceptable or, more probably, found the
life in the shattered area too disagreeable to remain. He was re-
warded as an active Republican politician in the North, however, and
under the Grant regime served in the New York Customs House as a
minor official until the end of his life.

His political activities in Louisiana were intimately associated
with newspaper work, and the press he looked upon as properly a party
instrument. Over the neutral policies of the Concordia Intelligencer
he quarreled with Robert Patterson, and his own Daily National was
wholly dedicated to advancing the candidacy of Zachary Taylor. With
the exception of the questions of city sanitation and public schools
for New Orleans, he avoided the discussion of controversial issues,
for he had no faith in the forbearance or even good sense of ordinary
people. The reforms which he believed in, he held should come slowly
and gradually as the result of the work of the intelligent and
responsible people of society. The one important idea which he held
throughout his life, the necessity of the federal union, he held
quietly as a party principle and carried on no crusade for it in his
newspapers, although he never failed to declare it when the need arose.
As an editor, he dedicated his papers to parties and to men, not to
issues.
His writing represents his greatest productivity, and through it he achieved the only place of remembrance history has accorded him. No part of his work is recalled or reprinted today but what he contributed to the humor of the Old Southwest. When he wrote without the balancing influences of humor and realism, his work tended to degenerate into the sentimental fashion of the day, although his native good sense saved him from the worst excesses of the age. At the very beginning of his career as a writer, his "Primitive Forests of the Mississippi" revealed how fully he accepted the influence of nature on man's soul as that influence was defined by William Cullen Bryant in his poetry and was represented formally by the Hudson River School of painters. His "Place de la Croix," written in 1842 for the genteel audience of the Knickerbocker Magazine, was wholly in the sentimentally romantic tradition. The glorification of the Indian as the child of nature, the formation of a romantic attachment between an Indian maiden and a wounded white man, the melancholy death of one or both of the characters -- all these themes lay in the central stream of the tradition of sentimental fiction. Thorpe's work in the nature essay and the sentimental sketch revealed how intimate he was with the literary fashions and currents of the educated people of his age.

Other of his work fits the same romantic pattern. His one novel is generally in the sentimental tradition, modified by the influence of the novel of reform and by the realism which he had learned to
appreciate through his work with William Trotter Porter and which he continued always to use in some degree, probably because he found it congenial to his temperament. His two histories also represent the romantic view of war and the preoccupation with the heroic in the American character. His approach to history was through the individuals who were making it and not through the forces which moved them. He felt he was alive in a heroic age and that the deeds he witnessed deserved to be recorded for the guidance of the times to come. But he approached his task as a reporter and not as a historian whose duty it was to see and understand. Consequently the work is negligible. Furthermore, both the histories and his novel show that as a writer he was deficient in the sense of structure and was unable to achieve any form more complex than the short story or the framework sketch.

The plot and scene of his novel also call attention to the fact that one of the results of his search for the American character and for the picturesque was that he established himself as an interpreter and reporter of the South. His knowledge of the area and his love for it were revealed in his first humorous sketches and in his earliest mature essays, and during his residence in New York in the 1850's his articles for Harper's particularly were a planned attempt to present the Southern scene and character, together with the economic system and the social customs and relationships peculiar to the area. His amiable common sense preserved him from the excesses of blind admiration
for the aristocratic system and from the fanaticism of the rabid reformer.

His own delight was in the lives of the country squires of central Louisiana. He lived in New Orleans in the 1840's when the city was one of the most exotic communities in the United States, but Creole society and the sophistication of the Quadroon balls were complexities which even the seeker for the picturesque was unprepared to deal with. But once having limited himself by a tradition he never considered, apparently, to Anglo-Saxon society and to the Southern countryside, he was a reporter of unusual breadth of vision. He told Americans not only about the lives of the great planters but also about poor-whites, backwoods villagers, and expansive frontiersmen. He knew guides, woodchoppers, hunters, farmers, planters, squatters, preachers, politicians, adventurers and an endless list of others whom he presented deftly and concretely in his careless minor sketches. His report, while never profound or penetrating, was unusually broad and always balanced and sane.

The excellence of a few of his character sketches of backwoodsmen and frontiersmen assures him a secure place among the five or six writers who did important work in this early American humor. The body of his work which belongs specifically to the genre is smaller than Longstreet's or Harris's or Hooper's, but his place is unique in that he more than any other one of the group was aware of the emotional ideals and aspirations of his time and was himself wholly conscious of
the romantic quest for the symbol of the American frontiersman.
The richness and variety of his approach to the scene he viewed —
humorous, realistic, satirical, romantic — is also unique, and,
further, gives cause for regret that he never concentrated his
abilities on some of the tasks which passed under his hand, for his
work is everywhere suggestive of unusual ideas half-formed and quick
insights incompletely examined. The Far West Letters are an unusual
body of comments on frontier characters and the literary minds who
examined them, full of sane and good-humored satire, but Thorpe
apparently never considered how unusual his point of view was, for
the ideas are everywhere incompletely and carelessly expressed. Yet
obviously they are the product of a keen eye and a quick intellect,
and fragmentary as they are, they remain pleasant and suggestive
reading. The mode of address of the romantic adventurer on the
American frontier nowhere found a more pleasantly satirical reporter.
He could detect elements of delusion as well as elements of value in
the romantic quest for the symbol of the heroic American of the West.

Because of his own desire to find the ideal American who was to
be the product of the conditions of the frontier, his Big Bear
differs as a character from Davy Crockett and from the creations of
Hooper, Harris, and Longstreet. Crockett was a sturdy, self-reliant,
tall-talking frontiersman, but along with his more admirable
characteristics he was a clown, a boor, and a rogue. Hooper's Simon
Suggs was conceived satirically as a thoroughly dishonest creature,
a precursor of the Southern poor-white upon whose moral degeneracy
Brakine Caldwell has built so flamboyantly. Harris's Sut Lovingood,
who is also drawn at full length like Simon Suggs, is even more
fantastic in his roguery in that his motives are not easy money and
comfort for himself but physical violence and the discomfort of his
victim. The characters which Longstreet created — the Yaller Blossom
of the Wilderness, the village bullies Billy Stallions and Bob Durham,
the pot-bellied clay eater Ramsey Sniffle — were also conceived
satirically and presented in gross ugliness. But Tom Owen, old Bob
Herring, and the Big Bear of Arkansas were presented with both humor
and admiration. Their tall talk is untinged by roguery and they have
the dignity of honest self-reliance.

Although Thorpe was a realist like the writer of the Crockett
books and Hooper, Harris, and Longstreet, the quality of his realism
was modified by the romantic influences in his background and by his
preoccupation with the nature of the American character. The romantic
tradition utilized realism in the presentation of the quaint, the un-
usual, and the local. The author's point of view was as a rule
carefully defined as that of the intelligent and well-educated
observer, not infrequently of artistic temperament. Such a mode of
address Thorpe maintained for his first sketch, "Tom Owen, the Bee
Hunter." The realism arising from this tradition was that of careful
observation of the unusual in appearance, custom, and language.
The interest in the American character formed on the frontier also sprang from the romantic tradition, and its presuppositions worked to modify Thorpe's realism in the way of excluding physical and moral ugliness. The American character formed in the isolated grandeur of the primitive western forests was expected to be not only interesting and admirable but even heroic. Consequently Bob Herring and the Big Bear of Arkansas are pictured without the immorality and physical ugliness of the creations of Hooper, Harris, and Longstreet. Observing the tradition of realism of the humor of the Old Southwest, Thorpe modified it in the direction necessary for one who consciously sought the heroic symbol of the American frontiersman. Most of the humorists kept their eyes closely fixed on the local scene. Thorpe looked a little further west and allowed his imagination a little freer play with his materials. The difference between Thorpe's work and that of the other writers in the field is a matter of emphasis and selection so subtle as to escape ready formulation without knowledge of the romantic influences operating behind his realistic approach, but once these are seen they will serve to explain why Franklin Meine could with propriety call "The Big Bear of Arkansas" the first genuinely great piece of Western humor. Thorpe's conception of the freedom and largeness of the American character as it developed under the expansiveness of the frontier gave meaning and point to the tall-talk and significance to the physical courage and endurance of his symbol of the new Western man.
Because of the appeal of the characters he created, Thorpe's work continues to interest the anthologists. Collections of American humorous work of the Old Southwest generally give a place to the Big Bear, but because some editors seek for what will make the reader laugh, and others seek for the quaint and the grotesque, the Big Bear suffers much editing. But whatever angle he is reviewed from, he retains some of his vitality as the conqueror of the wilderness. Presented in his entirety he is the best single representative in the humor of the Old Southwest of the symbol of the Western frontiersman, for in this image Thorpe consciously created him.

Finally, as the biographies of the humorists of the Old Southwest are reclaimed one by one from oblivion and their work is revaluated in the light of their backgrounds and their intentions, their excellence and variety become more and more apparent. And as their influence on American writers from Mark Twain to William Faulkner is established critically, the vitality and importance of their pioneering work can be increasingly appreciated and the impropriety of treating their efforts as naive literature is ever more evident. Thorpe's education, the variety of his experience, and the quality of his mind reveal that he wrote from one of the richest cultural backgrounds of all the humorists of the Old Southwest. Hasty and careless as his writing was, the odd-hour work of a man
busy trying to make his fortune in an expansive age, still he came nearer than any of his co-workers in American humor to defining dramatically the heroic American character produced on the Western frontier, for the Big Bear succeeded in slaying the evil of the wilderness, and he laughed at his adventure and made a bed cover from the black bear's hide the devil wore in Arkansas.
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A. BOOKS


The third edition of the book, also published by E. Walker in 1855, lists Thomas B. Thorpe as joint author. The preface states the book was written by a group of gentlemen. It is impossible to tell what Thorpe's contribution was, if anything other than his name and editorial assistance.


B. MAGAZINE PIECES

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Concordia Intelligencer, Vidalia, Louisiana, June, 1843, to June, 1845. The paper contains a good deal of miscellaneous material written by Thorpe, not all of it readily identifiable. The "Letters from the Far West," originally appeared between the fall of 1843 and the spring of 1844. Among the extant copies are two of the letters, one in the issue for November 25, 1843, and the other in the issue for December 30, 1843. Both of these were later reprinted in the New York *Spirit of the Times*. "The Way Americans Go Down Hill" first appeared in the issue for December 30, 1843, and was reprinted in the *Hive of the Bee Hunter* (1854).

Daily Commercial Times, New Orleans, Louisiana, November (?), 1845 to spring, 1846. No copies were located for the period of Thorpe's editorship. In one of the November issues appeared "The Spectator and Simon Suggs," a review of Johnson Jones Hooper's *Adventures of Simon Suggs*.

Daily Tribune, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1, 1846, to September, 1847. On June 6, 1846, appeared the first of a series of dispatches on the Mexican War from Thorpe, who travelled to Port Isabel and Matamoros to visit the scenes of Taylor's victories of the eight and ninth of May.

Louisiana Conservator, Baton Rouge, November (?), 1846, to the summer of 1847. No copies of this paper have been located. In it first appeared "The Chase," reprinted in the *Spirit* January 9, 1847, which also reprinted on May 15, 1847, and following the reports of the races at the Baton Rouge Magnolia Course for the spring season of 1847, from Thorpe's paper.

Daily National, New Orleans, Louisiana, June, 1847, to December 10, 1847. A bound volume of this paper from September 10, 1847, to December 30, 1847, was examined. Most of the original work in it is apparently Thorpe's. A hunting sketch, "Enemy in Front and Rear," first appeared here October 6, 1847.
II. Manuscript Materials

The Glin Library of Wesleyan University has records of Thorpe's enrollment, a blank book showing students' merits and demerits, and the book of minutes of the Peithologian Society, to which he belonged. The last of these contains a record of the meetings he attended, the titles of essays he read, and the topics he debated for the period 1834 to 1836. Professor George M. Dutcher, retired, of Wesleyan University, has generously examined this material and outlined its contents in a letter dated October 22, 1952.

Thorpe's name is recorded in the account books of P. Lebret and Company, Bayou Sara, on June 12, 1839, and also in the account books of Charles L. Mathews on October 20, 1845, and elsewhere. The entries concern small business transactions and throw some light on his connections and activities in the Felicianas from 1839 to 1845. These papers are deposited in the Department of Archives of the Louisiana State University.

The Library of the New-York Historical Society has one letter from General Nathan P. Banks to Thorpe, July 19, 1864, and twenty-one letters from Thorpe to A. Hart and Carey & Hart, 1845 to 1848, concerning the publication of the Mysteries of the Backwoods, Our Army on the Rio Grande, and Our Army at Monterey. The letters to A. Hart are the richest single source of information about Thorpe's plans and activities for the period they cover.

The manuscript collections of the Boston Public Library contain a letter from Thorpe to Carey & Hart, November 27, 1847, and an unsigned, undated biographical sketch of Thorpe in the Griswold Collection, prepared probably by Thorpe himself for the Prose Writers of America.

The Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library has one letter from Thorpe to A. Hart dated November 6, 1853, several to Gordon Ford, President of the Brooklyn Art Association, and several to various other individuals, dated from 1847 to 1876. The collection also has five forms giving the titles of pictures Thorpe exhibited at the Brooklyn Art Association. Among the Duyckinck Papers, in the same collection, is a three-page manuscript biography, unsigned and undated, probably prepared by Thorpe himself for the Cyclopaedia of American Literature.
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania owns approximately twenty letters written by Thorpe to Henry G. Baird from 1852 to 1855 concerning the plates of the Mysteries of the Backwoods. The letters contain information about Thorpe's plans for the publication of his sketches under the title The Hive of the Bee Hunter and some references to the publication of the earlier book. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania also owns the original record books of the firm of Carey & Hart, which contain information concerning the publication of the Mysteries.

The National Archives at Washington contain several groups of records helpful in tracing Thorpe's activities. The records of the Post Office Department give the dates of his service as postmaster at Vidalia, Louisiana, 1844 to 1845.

The files of application for the position of surveyor at the Port of New Orleans contain a letter from Thorpe dated May 20, 1862, to the Honorable R. Mallory regarding Thorpe's interest in the position of Temporary Surveyor of the Port of New Orleans. The file of Letters Sent from the Acting Collector of Customs at New Orleans contains the letter submitting Thorpe's nomination, dated May 26, 1862. Among the Letters Received by the Secretary of the Treasury from the Collector of Customs at New Orleans in 1862 is a letter from Thorpe dated June 17 to the Honorable G. W. Harrington, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, explaining Thorpe's activities as administrator of relief to the indigent in New Orleans under Brigadier General Shepley, Military Commandant of New Orleans. Miscellaneous Letters, 1862, include a letter from Thorpe to Secretary Chase dated June 14, on the currency problem in New Orleans.

The Registers of Customs Officers, New York, for the years 1865 to 1885, in Record Group 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, contain entries pertaining to Thorpe's employment at the New York Customhouse from 1869 to 1878. Among the Application Files for Sub-Officer positions at the port of New York are three items concerning Thorpe. One is a letter dated August 12, 1871, to William W. Belknap from Thorpe proposing that he be appointed to gather facts concerning abuses occurring at the Customhouse. Mr. Belknap forwarded the letter to the Secretary of the Treasury, recommending Thorpe for the position. George Jones of the New York Times also wrote to the Honorable George S. Boutwell, Secretary of the Treasury, recommending Thorpe for the position. The third item is a file of newspaper clippings describing the abuses then occurring in the administration of the port of New York.
Miscellaneous official manuscripts, such as the report of the Census for 1850, threw light on Thorpe's financial circumstances, his family, and his location at different times.

III. Printed Documents

For Thorpe's father's career, the minutes of the annual conferences of the Methodist Church are indispensable. These are available as follows:

Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America: From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive. New York: Printed by Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813.

The minutes of the conferences from 1814 to 1818 were printed yearly and all mention Thomas Thorp. His obituary is found in the volume for 1819:

Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America for the Year, 1819. New York: Published by Joshua Soule and Thomas Mason, for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, 1819.

Thorpe's activities at the convention for the revision of the Louisiana constitution in New Orleans in 1864 are best traced in the two official documents of the convention:


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VITA

Milton Henry Rickels was born in Porterville, California, August 31, 1920. He attended Zion School near Terra Bella, California, and the public schools in Porterville, graduating from high school in 1940. He spent two years at the Porterville Junior College and two years at Fresno State College, where he received his B. A. degree in 1945. After graduation, he did social casework and supervisory work for a year and a half for the Tulare County Welfare Department at Visalia, California. He then enrolled in the Claremont Graduate School at Claremont, California, and received the M. A. degree in June of 1948. Since September, 1948, he has taught at the Louisiana State University as a graduate assistant and as an instructor in the Department of English.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Milton Henry Hickele

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: Thomas Bangs Thorpe: His Life and Works

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination: May 8, 1953