# WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS AND HIS NOVELS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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# WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS
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C O N T E N T S

# WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS
## And His Novels Of The American Revolution

### I. Simm's Early Years--The Social Influences

William Gilmore Simms is a name rarely heard nowadays. It is generally necessary to explain that he was an American writer, a young contemporary of James Fenimore Cooper, whose best works show a considerably greater creative faculty than do those of the better known writer; and whose backwoods characters are frequently more finely drawn and more realistic than any of Cooper's. It is the purpose of this study to consider the best writings of Simms and to show why, despite his being one of the South's best authors, they are little read today.

Simms was born April 17, 1806, at Charleston, South Carolina, where his father migrated shortly after the Revolution.[1] It is necessary to give a short biographical account of Simms's life, together with a sketch of the Charleston society in which he lived, for the southern social order had considerable to do with his literary defects. William was the second child and the only living one. His mother, Harriet

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[1]William P. Trent, William Gilmore Simms, Boston, 1892, pp. 1-4.

Singleton, died in giving birth to the third. This misfortune was in concert with the elder Simms's business failure, after which he took to wandering, leaving William in the care of his maternal grandmother.

At six William was sent by his grandmother, Mrs. Gates, to free school. The South Carolina free schools were incredibly poor, and when we read Simms's testament regarding them it seems miraculous that he should ever have come to anything as an author and it is certainly an indication of genius, or at least, tremendous talent, however poorly it was cultivated in the Charlestonian world:

> "With the exception of one (of the schools) I was an example of their utter worthlessness. They taught me little or nothing. The teachers were generally worthless in morals, and as ignorant as worthless. One old Irishman, during one year, taught me to spell, read tolerably, and write a little. Not one of them could teach me arithmetic. There was no supervision of the masters or commissioners worth a doit. The teachers in some cases never came to the school for three days in the week. We boys then thought these the best. When they did come, they were in a hurry to get away...."[2]

Yet the boy became an omniverous reader, and when he could not read the poetry of his favorites, Byron, Scott and Moore, he took to writing his own. His prose staples seem to have

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[2]Ibid., p. 7.

been Pilgrims Progress and Vicar of Wakefield.[3] His last two years of formal education were spent in private schools, where he was not particularly better off than before.

It is not known precisely when Mrs. Gates took her grandson from school and apprenticed him to a druggist, but her hope seems to have been that he should become a physician, although no further reasons than this can be given.[4]

About 1816 the elder Simms visited Charleston and became affectionate with his son, wanting him to go west. At this time William heard from his father many tales of rough border life and Indian warfare which in part were undoubtedly responsible for the remarkable wilderness adventures taking place within his books.[5] To this influence must also be added the tales his grandmother told him, for she had lived in the time of the Revolution and knew any number of fascinating bits of adventure which apparently William later made good use of.

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[3]Ibid., p. 7.

[4]Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

[5]Ibid., pp. 12, 13.

After his father's visit, William continued working in the druggist's shop, keeping on at the same time with reading and writing. The next most influential event was his visit to his father in the then southwest in 1824 or 25. After a sea trip to New Orleans and a hard overland journey, he found his father at his plantation near Georgeville, Mississippi.[6] This was a considerable sojourn, during which time he travelled among the settlements, carefully observing backwoodsmen and Indians and their habits and customs.[7] Here were the originals of such scout heroes as Supple Jack Bannister, Thumbscrew, and Watson Gray, whom no reader of Simms finds easy to forget. His father would have had him stay in Mississippi--or anywhere but Charleston. He knew that, being comparatively low born by the Charleston standard, William would need friends, family, and fortune to succeed at anything. Said the elder Simms:

> "Whatever your talents they will be poured out like water on the sands. Charleston! I know it only as a place of tombs."[8]

How right the old man was will hereinafter appear.

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[6] Ibid., Pp. 14, 15.

[7] Ibid., pp. 15, 16.

[8] Ibid., p. 17.

For all that William acknowledged the faults of Charleston society, he was still proud to be of that city, and for better or for worse he embraced it with all his soul.[9] For a time he seemed to have done wisely. In 1827 on his twenty-first birthday he was admitted to the bar and was likely to have been a successful lawyer, but he soon followed his most natural bent, threw up his law career, and determined to live by his pen.[10] We are not concerned here with his sallies into the fields of poetry and drama. Suffice it to say that his literary endeavors necessarily played second fiddle to his efforts to "succeed" in the eyes of Charleston society. In Charleston it was not good to be known as "a mere literary man".[11] But it is evident that in 1836 Simms's stock rose when he married Miss Chevilette Roach, the daughter of Mr. Nash Roach, of Barnwell, South Carolina.[12] This was his second marriage, his first wife having died in childbirth in 1827; and although we are not to suppose it was not a love match the fact remains that the marriage was socially advantagious. Simms eventually inherited his father-in-law's

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[9] Ibid., pp. 19-21.

[10] Ibid., p. 52.

[11] Van Wyck Brooks, World of Washington Irving, Philadelphia, 1945, p. 291.

[12] Op. Cit., pp. 95-97.

plantation, complete with slaves, beautiful grounds, and a name--Woodlands. He never became primarily a planter, but was engaged in several editing ventures, all of which failed, often because it was not considered important for a gentleman of South Carolina to be concerned about subscription rates.[13] He lavished time and effort contributing to numerous literary magazines, which died out like spring flowers in the desert; for South Carolinians, who worshipped literary lawyers like Legare and Crafts, were not likely to appreciate any young upstart who did not follow eighteenth century models as those two did and who did not belong to the foremost families.[14] Finally he spent some time in the state legislature (1844-1846) and even ran for the governorship, (December 8, 1846), losing out by a narrow margin.[15] Activities like these drained him of those energies which could have been employed so much more profitably had they been devoted to writing only what he was truly fitted for--tales of his native state during the Revolution. This was a tragedy which he did not realize for many years. To him a true-blue southern gentleman

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[13]W. P. Trent, William Gilmore Simms, pp. 54-56.

[14]Ibid., p. 51.

[15]Ibid., pp. 141,2.

was the non plus ultra. The South Carolina standards and conventions and prejudices were his undoing.[16] How could any man's mind be free to create without let in a society believing that:

> "any freeman might with virtue aspire to any height, and no Negro slave might so aspire, ever; but every slave could expect always, as many a 'wage slave' in Boston could not expect, all of the basic necessities of existence plus a recognition of his humanity, of his brotherhood in God!"[17]

> "The planting aristocracy, however proud of its polite learning, looked with condescension on any of its sons who might be ambitious to make a career of literature; this attitude had a discouraging effect on youth who were ambitious for a life of letters or had the scholar's temperament."[18]

This is what the hopeful son of South Carolina had to contend with. We shall now proceed to a consideration of his principles of literature, which are acted upon to a considerable degree in the novels of the American Revolution.

## II. Simms's Literary Theories

Simms explained his principles in a collection of essays and addresses called Views and Reviews of American

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[16]Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, New York, 1930, vol. 2, p. 126.

[17]Thorp, Spiller, et al., Literary History of the United States, New York, 1943, p. 450.

[18]M. E. Curti, Growth of American Thought, New York, 1943, p. 450.

Literature, History, and Fiction. They:

> "constitute a class in themselves, illustrative of our history, our materials of art, the moral of our aims, and the true development of our genius...They aim at showing what may be done among us, and insist upon what we should do, in regard to the essential of our progress..."[1]

And what is it Simma insists upon? It is Americanism in literature. It is worth remarking on the similarity in tone between the articles in Views and Reviews of American Literature, History and Fiction, published in 1845, and Emerson's American Scholar, delivered in 1837. That "intellectual declaration of independence" may very well have helped to shape Simms's own views on Americanism in literature and may have been the more influential because of his life long fondness for Revolutionary history. Compare the statements on Americanism in literature to follow with this excerpt:

> "Our anniversary is one of hope, and, perhaps, not enough labor...Perhaps the time is already come when it ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectations of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age...?"[2]

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[1] W. G. Simms, Views and Reviews of American Literature, History, and Fiction, New York, 1845, advertisement.

[2] R. W. Emerson, The American Scholar, N. Foerster, American Poetry and Prose, Cambridge, 1947, p. 484.

Looking to European models de-nationalizes our own literature, says Simms. It is natural that our literature should be at first imitative, since we are a new nation and have no body of lore and literature that is properly ours and descending to us from remote periods. But we must overcome this servility.[3] We are not without the start of a national literature already. Our history supplies the raw materials for it. In considering American history as a fit subject for literature we must note that it falls more or less naturally into four unequal periods. First were the frequent and unsuccessful attempts at colonization in the Elizabethian period by the French, Spaniards and English from the explorations of Cabot under Henry VII to the Jamestown colony in Virginia--a period of some seventy-five years. Second was the history and progress of settlement from the time of Jamestown to the accession of George III, when America was no longer dreamed of as the land of golden treasure, but viewed in the light of sounder economics, when Indian wars were fought with an eye to genuine improvement of the colonists' lot in America, and not merely for immediate exploitation. The third period consists in the preliminaries up to the Revolutionary War, dating more or less from the French and Indian Wars--when Britain, seeing the

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[3] Op. Cit., Article I.

growing prosperity of her colonies, saw fit to impose duties without representation of the taxed people. The sentiment of independence grew strong; partisan conflicts in the South were increasingly common--the wars of--

> "...riflemen and cavalry, the sharp-shooter and the hunter, and the terrible civil conflicts of Whig and Tory, which for wild incident and daring ferocity, have been surpassed by no events in history."[4]

The fourth period ran from the end of the Revolution to the present (1845); it was the transition from colonial to republican condition and a period of growing awareness of our American character.

The events of these four periods, Simms believes, the future Homer will use as the original did; that is, not altogether factually, not so much to make an accurate report as to shape the material into interesting and instructive tales for the improvement of morals as long as probability is not outraged.

We must now consider to what extent Simms utilized the four arbitrary historical periods. An example of literature based on the first period of our history--that of hasty exploration and exploitation--is Vasconselos,[5] a story of the

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[4] Ibid., p 66.

[5] Ibid., Article IV.

early Spanish voyagers and the explorations of Hernando De Soto. Vasconselos is supposed to be (not surpassing the limits of probability) one of De Soto's men. Another basis for literary endeavor Simms considered to be the settlements of the Hugenots in Florida under Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France.[6] These people travelled in Georgia and the Carolinas, which brought them particularly to Simms's attention. Still another is Cortez and the conquest of Mexico. Of the only completed specimen using materials from the first period this may be said. Vasconselos was begun many years before its publication in 1854, but laid aside in favor of pleasanter work. It has not the humor that graces the best pages of the novels of the Revolution, but it sold well, even though published under a pen name, Frank Cooper, for Simms was a little dubious as to what made his books sell; merit or reputation.[7] Vasconselos indicated merit, but that is something of a mystery today.

Suitable story material derived from the second and third periods of our history would be the adventures of Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, and the life of Daniel Boone, "the first hunter of Kentucky."[9] Aside from the

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[6] Ibid., Article V.

[7] William P. Trent, William Gilmore Simms, Boston, 1892, p. 120.

[8] Op. Cit., Article VI.

[9] Ibid, Article IV.

outlining Simms did little or nothing with the materials, but the principle is the same which he applied in the Partisan series.

An excellent character for Simms to have used was Benedict Arnold, whose fate was coupled with Major Andre's. Simms puts his principle into action once more:

> "When the grandson of the last Revolutionary soldier shall be no more--when the huge folios which now contain our histories and chronicles shall have given way to works of closer summary and more modern interest--the artist will find a new form for these events, shape all their features anew, and place the persons of the drama in grouping more appropriate for scenic action. There will be more individual character given to the history--the general events will be thrown out of sight--the personal will be brought into conspicuous relief in the foreground--the rival heroes of the piece will be forced into closer juxtaposition, and the treason detected in the moment of its contemplated execution will be crushed by the timely interposition of Washington himself. He will be made to have seen the true nature and to have suspected the purpose of the traitor, from the moment of his very first lapse from honor--to have had his eyes upon the tempter--a stern, cold, silent watch--keen and vigilant, and the more terrible from its very silence and unimposing calm. His watch will have been maintained with an interest no less personal than patriotic. It will not impair the character of Washington to show that he, too, had his ambition...It may be that, in the hands of the future dramatist the sword of Washington himself shall be made to do justice upon the head of the traitor--as, by a similar license, Richmond slays Richard, and MacDuff the usurper of Scotland, in the presence of an audience."[10]

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[10] Ibid., pp. 55,56.

Of the fourth period we may take Beauchampe, or The Kentucky Tragedy, as a representative product. It is based on a sordid love affair occurring in Simms's "present",[11] and so far as modification of cold fact for story telling purposes goes it follows the general pattern.

Views and Reviews in American Literature, History, and Fiction is important for Simms's remarks on James Fenimore Cooper, for his not only continues to set forth his own ideas but makes sound criticism of the better-known author. Simms defends his inventive theory for dialogue and action in the following:

> "A writer of Romance cannot more greatly err than when he subjects his hero to the continual influence of events. We have no respect for heroes placed always in subordinate positions--sent hither and thither, baffled by every breath of circumstance--creatures without will, constantly governed by the caprices of other persons."[12]

This criticism he applied to Scott in the novels of Waverly, who is nothing to Claverhouse, and Morton, who is nothing to Burley. It is true of Cooper in the Two Admirals. But The Spy made Cooper's reputation and made Americans think of their own resources. Here an American had sprung up equal to the best Europe could produce. It helped rid us of the

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[11] W. P. Trent, William Gilmore Simms, Boston, 1892, pp. 115-20.

[12] Op. Cit., p. 215.

feeling of intellectual dependence upon Europe that we still had.[13] Cooper's Leatherstocking is less believable than Simms's backwoodsmen, mainly because of the lack of realism in his speech. He uses terms like "varmint" and "argyment", but these and some others occur rarely enough to seem unnatural, particularly in conjunction with the flawless syntax. The dialect words are conscious efforts to give flavor, but they do not succeed, since they do not fit in with the other elements of his speech. Simms,as we shall see in the samples of his writing given below, is far more authentic.

## III. Treatment of the American Revolution in Accordance With the Theories

Simms found the era of the Revolution the best suited to the needs of the American writer, whose duty is stated here:

> "History itself is only valuable when it promotes... a just curiosity awakens noble affections--elicits generous sentiments--and stimulates into becoming activity the intelligence which it informs. Hence, it is the artist only who is the true historian. It is he who gives shape to the unhewn fact,--who yields relation to the scattered fragments--who unites the parts in coherent dependency, endows with life and action the otherwise motionless automata of history...It is the soul of art alone,

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[13] Ibid., p. 215.

> which binds periods and places together;--that creative faculty which as it is the only quality distinguishing man from the animals, is the only one by which he holds a life tenure through all time--the power to make himself known to man, to be sure of the possessions of the past, and to transmit with most happy confidence in fame, his own possessions to the future.
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> It is really of very little importance to mankind whether he is absolutely correct in all his conjectures or assertions, whether his theory be true or false...Assuming that...he offends against no facts which are known and decisive, no reasonable probabilities or inferences,--it is enough if his narrative awakens our affections, inspirits our hopes, elevates our aims, and builds up...a fabric of character, compounded of just principles, generous tendencies and clear, correct standards of taste and duty..."[1]

This, then, is the duty of the American writer. It is the surest and best way to the establishment of a genuine American literature. So long as the romancer does not violate ordinary truth, he may invent and endow as he pleases. We must never believe that America is too young for a national literature. Although our history is recent, it is as heroic as that of any older nation whose founding is hoary with age and with legend. The American writer will use the bare facts of the Revolution as Homer did the Trojan War and render them pleasing, instructive, and morally elevating.[2] Simms had strong and original ideas about the cultivation of American

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[1] Ibid., Article II, pp. 25,6.

[2] Ibid., Article III.

literature, and it is likely, as we have seen, that these ideas owed their conception partly to Emerson and also to the tales from his father and grandmother in his childhood and to the actual experiences he had during his visits to the border country in 1824 or 1825. These experiences helped excite an interest in American Indians, and later Simms was fascinated by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's Algic Researches, dealing with Indian myths, poetry, and ethnology.[3] This work, in conjunction with the foregoing and his own boyhood excursions, enabled Simms to give us such wonderful pictures of wilderness, ragged heroes, equally ragged villains, and stalwart Indians--the last occurring mainly in The Yemmassee.

Although Simms wrote hastily and rarely revised, he was, paradoxically, an indefatigable laborer when it came to gathering materials for his work.

> "He filled commonplace books with information culled from all quarters. He was constantly in correspondence with local antiquarians, asking such minute questions as where the Orangeburg tavern was standing in 1780, and what was the tavern keeper's name. Nothing was too trivial to require investigation.[4]

And this was not all. Simms was well read in the history of the revolutionary period. One guiding light in particular is David Ramsay, author of History of the American Revolution, whom Simms quotes in the introduction to Katherine

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[3]Van Wyck Brooks, World of Washington Irving, Philadelphia, 1945, p. 300.

[4]W. P. Trent, William Gilmore Simms, Boston, 1892, pp.191,2.

Walton, and whom he even makes appear in that book. It was only in accordance with a principle expressed in Views and Reviews of American Literature, History, and Fiction--that of employing actual characters to suit his purpose so long as what he makes them do is not actually contrary to historical fact.

Ramsay tells us that the Americans were poorly prepared for conflict with Great Britain. There was no training. Love of liberty was dominant over discipline and submission, and this gave the A mericans their spirit in the face of the dangers they were facing. Christopher Gadsden, one of the South Carolina delegabes to the Continental Congress, said:

> "Our houses being constructed of brick, stone, and wood, though destroyed, may be rebuilt, but liberty once gone is lost forever."[5]

The spirit of those words, which must have been known to Simms, is embodied in the speeches and actions of the author's heroic partisans. According to Ramsay, on the British side were arms, ammunition, trained leaders, experienced army organizers, good morale, great financial resources, and a big navy; on the American side were valor, enthusiasm, fighters acquainted with Indian war methods, paper money,

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[5]David Ramsay, History of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, 1789, I, 197.

a willingness to live without foreign trade, and the belief that liberty was more important than material things.[6] The connection between Simms and Ramsay and the use which Simms made of these opposing forces--the best of material on one side and little more than an idea on the other appears below.

## IV. Historical Background--Use of David Ramsay

The influence of Ramsay's history is obvious throughout the series in more than the general plan of action. With a view to authenticity Simms creates within the novels of the revolution an atmosphere very much like that which Ramsay tells us prevailed at that period. The most important element in this is the trends in thinking. There were three distinct classes of colonists, Ramsay says: (1) Those who were for rushing into extremeties; (2) Those who knew their rights, but were averse to revolution; and (3) those who disapproved of what was going on--some out of love for Britain, others from love of ease and self-interest. These last two groups commonly did not participate in the action, for they thought that Great Britain's power would presently stamp out the foolhardy rebellion.[1]

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[6] Ibid., I, 197,8.

[1] Ibid., I; 125.

Simms made much use of the varying political views among both his high and his low characters. As a high character example of the first category Lieutenant Porgy is foremost. He owned a plantation upon the Ashepoo, but with the coming of war he gave himself up to the swamps and Marion's men for the duration. Singleton is another, who "rushed precipitately" into the struggle. The looting of his estate by the Tories showed him there was only one course open to him commensurate with honor, regardless of material considerations.[2] Ernest Mellichampe is another whose situation is very much the same, but few of the high characters seem to act from as noble principles as the low character patriots. While Simms's gentle heroes are frequently driven to war by loss of property, there are plenty of representatives from the lower ranks of society who have had no such motivation. Consider Supple Jack Bannister in The Scout. He explains the situation in his plain talk manner in an effort to win over his luke warm Tory friend Muggs, the tavern keeper and occasional entertainer of Edward Conway, leader of the Black Riders.

> "...it made the gall bile up in me to see a man that I had never said a hard word to in all my life, come here, over the water, a matter, maybe,

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[2] W. G. Simms, The Partisan, New York, 1882, p. 142.

> of a thousand miles, to force me, at the p'int of the bagnet, to drink stamped tea. I never did drink the tea no how. For my own drinking, I wouldn't give one cup of coffee well biled, for all the tea that was ever growed or planted. But, 'twas the freedom of the thing I was argying for, and 'twas on the same argyment that I was willing to fight...It's agin' nature and reason and a man's own seven senses, to reckon on any man's right to make laws for another, say, King George, living in England, never had a right to make John Bannister, living on the Congaree, pay him taxes for tea or anything... I won't pay George the Third any more taxes. That's the word for all; and it's good reason why I shouldn't pay him, when, for all his trying he can't make me..."[3]

The second group--those knowing their rights but averse to active participation--is exemplified mostly in Katherine Walton. Colonel Walton himself was one of these. In The Partisan he had taken a British protection as expedient, but for no other reason, and he turns down a royal commission.

> "By what right, sir, does Sir Henry Clinton call upon us for military service, when his terms of protection, granted by himself and Admiral Arbuthnot, secured all those taking them in a condition of neutrality?...By what right does your superior violate his compact? Think you, sir, that the Carolinians would have made terms with the invaders, the conditions and maintenance of which have no better security than the caprice of one of the parties?"[4]

Ella Monckton and her brother, Alfred, the secretary to Balfour in Katherine Walton, are two other illustrations of the

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[3] W. G. Simms, The Scout, New York, 1882, pp. 140-143 passim.

[4] Op. Cit., p. 124.

second category. The widow Monckton "well knew how irksome were his labors under the eye of such a man as Balfour".[5] But out of love for his old mother, Alfred has stayed in British employ, apparently not believing enough in rebellion to join the American forces like many another young man in the novels. Bill Humphries in The Partisan, for instance, or Willie Sinclair in The Forayers and Eutaw, both of whom acted with the disapproval of their respective fathers. There are numerous representatives of the third group Ramsay mentions--those who disapproved of what was going on, some out of love for Britain and others from love of ease and self-interest. Old Colonel Sinclair, Willie's father in The Forayers and in Eutaw is blindly attached to Britain, and his faith in British arms is infinite. He was "a good example of the best English squirearchy, when the squirearchy of England was legitimate--in the days of Falkland and Hampden-Frank, hearty, honest, stubborn".[6] He grieves that his son could not feel with him, think with him, and sustain the banner which he has borne.

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[5] W. G. Simms, Katherine Walton, New York, 1882, p. 146.

[6] W. G. Simms, The Forayers, New York, 1882, p. 147.

A less honorable member of the third category is the older Humphries, the tavern keeper at Dorchester, whose son is one of the partisans.

> "None of the villagers was more dutiful or devout in their allegance than Richard Humphries--Old Dick, sly Dick--Holy Dick as his neighbors capriciously styled him--who kept the 'Royal George', then the high tavern of the village. The fat, beefy face of the good-natured Hanoverian hung in yellow before the tavern door, on one of the two main roads leading from the country to the town. The old monarch had, in this exposed position, undergone repeated trials. At the commencement of the Revolution, the landlord, who, after the proverbial fashion of landlords in all countries, really cared not who was king, had been compelled by public opinion to take down the sign and replace it with another more congenial to the popular feeling. George, in the meantime was assigned less conspicuous lodgings in an ancient garret. The change of circumstances restored the venerable portrait to its place; and under the eyes of the British garrison, there were few more thorough-going loyalists in the village than Richard Humphries."[7]

It has thus far been shown how Simms synthetized the types of individuals Ramsay listed in his history. This technique is plainly in accordance with his opinions as expressed in the Views and Reviews of American Literature, History, and Fiction, quoted earlier. We must now consider the political differences among his characters. Ramsay tells us that during the height of the British power, numerous Tory

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[7]W. G. Simms, The Partisan, New York, 1882, pp. 19-20.

bands formed, pledging allegiance to the king, and using their commissions as a shield to cover their plunderings.

> "Among those who call themselves loyalists, there were many of the most infamous characters. Their general complexion was that of a plundering banditti more solicitous for booty than for the honor and interest of their royal master. Among these people, the royal emmisaries had successfully planted the standard of loyalty and of that class was a great proportion of those, who in the upper country of Georgia and the Carolinas, called themselves King's friends. They had no sooner embodied and begun their march to join the royal army at Augusta than they commenced such a scene of plundering of the defenseless settlements through which they passed as induced the orderly inhabitants to turn out to oppose them. Col. Pickens, with about 300 men of the latter character immediately pursued and came up with them near Kettle Creek. An action took place which lasted three quarters of an hour. The tories were totally routed."[8]

Simms employed such passages as this several times, three of which will serve to illustrate. In The Partisan, Singleton's band ambushes a Tory group who were about to murder a neighbor and his family because of a personal grudge held by the leader. With the passage from Ramsay in mind, here are Simms's remarks on Amos Gaskens, the Tory leader.

> "The arrival of the British forces, the seige and surrender of Charleston, with the invasion of the state by foreign mercenaries, presented him with a new field for action, and with thousands of others, to whom all considerations were as nothing weighed against the love of low indulgence, unrestrained power, and a profligate lust for plunder, he did not scruple to adopt the cause which was strongest and most likely to procure him those objects for which his appetite most craved."[9]

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[8] David Ramsay, II, 114.

[9] Op. Cit., pp. 383-384.

In Mellichampe a Tory band is mentioned as meeting at Sinkler's Meadow, where they were to receive arms from Barsfield, the Tory captain.[10] But we learn that these men were wiped out by Marion when he found them at the rendesvouz playing cards.

> "They were shot down in the midst of dice and drink, foul oathes and exultation upon their lips, and with those bitter thoughts of hatred to their countrymen within their hearts which almost justified the utmost severities of that retribution to which the furious partisans subjected them."[11]

A third instance showing how Simms used this and similar passages in Ramsay occurs in The Scout. The band known as the "Black Riders of the Congaree" are working models of those individuals of whom Ramsay tells us. Simms describes these "Black Riders" as:

> "...detached bands of ruffians formed upon the frontiers of Georgia and in the wilds of Florida--refugees from all the colonies--(who) availed themselves of the mountains. Harrassed by the predatory inroads of these outlawed squadrons...the more civil and suffering inhabitants gathered in little bands for their overthrow."[12]

And it might be added that Hell Fire Dick in The Forayers and in Eutaw is another of this genre. He is ruthless and thieving but nevertheless a kind of useful officer employed from time to time by the British.

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[10] W. G. Simms, Mellichampe, New York, 1882, p. 141.

[11] Ibid., p. 276.

[12] W. G. Simms, The Scout, New York, 1882, p. 13.

We have so far discussed group politics. Simms is concerned with the creeds of individuals, too. Frequently the Revolution amounted to civil war, and when it did not relationships were at least strained. In The Partisan Richard Humphries, as we know, is an opportunist and a loyalist, while his son Bill is an ardent patriot. In The Scout, aside from the melodramatic hatred of the brothers Edward and Clarence Conway, there exists between them the difference in politics. Edward leads the Black Riders, while Clarence is a commander of the partisans, and is saddened by Edward's "present public course" and his "position in this conflict."[13] We have quoted the speech of Supple Jack above, giving the crux of the argument--that it was the freedom of the thing, whether a man has a right to levy taxes upon individuals living in another country. Colonel Sinclair in The Foragers holds the opposite view:

> "What is right yesterday is right tomorrow--right for a thousand years--right for eternity."
> "Yes, Sir," (argues Willie), "in simple morals that would be quite true, but not in respect to the policy of nations. With these, right changes aspect according to political necessities, and the altered condition of states. There is one truth, sir, which always eludes the class to which you belong...That the American colonies have passed through their minority. A people who are able to maintain themselves against foreign pressure, have survived the necessity of foreign rule. The mental and social development which enables them to defend themselves by arms,

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[13] Ibid., p. 43.

> are in proof of resources which revolt at foreign dominion. If the American mind is equal to its own necessities, it is adequate to its own rule. If we no longer need English armies for our protection, we no longer need English mind for our government."
>
> "But this, sir," (says the Colonel),"is the argument of ingratitude. You forget the past, sir--the immense debt, arms, men, money, all means and appliances, for the strength and safety which we owe to the mother country."
>
> "No, sir, it is Britain that forgets. We have forgotten nothing. Britain had a right to expect our gratitude, but not the sacrifice of our liberties. That you should lend me money--nay, give it--protect me in weakness--help and cherish me in sickness--gives you no right to enslave me for ever for these services."
>
> "Don't talk of slavery, sir; taxation is not slavery."
>
> "The denial of our right, sir, is the worst slavery and this was the error and offense of Britain. It proved her to be neither just nor wise..."[14]

Compare Ramsay:

> "...the friends of the ministry asserted that the Americans had been long aiming at independence--that they were magnifying pretended grievances to cover a premeditated revolt--that it was the business and duty of Englishmen...to bring them back to a remembrance that their present greatness was owing to the mother country, and that even their existence had been purchased at an immense expense of British blood and treasure..."[15]

> "Under...favorable circumstances, colonies in the new world had advanced nearly to the magnitude of a nation, while the greatest part of Europe was ignorant of their progress."[16]

Thus we see how Simms, in following his authorities, used historical fact according to his own ideas to draw an au-

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[14]W. G. Simms, The Forayers, New York, 1882, pp. 52,53.

[15]David Ramsay, I.,152.

[16]Ibid., p.34.

thentic, carefully detailed background for his characters to move against and be influenced by.

Still another group represented in Simms's work is that which played one side against the other or were first enlisted in one side or cause and then the other. Of the double dealers we should consider "Goggle" Blonay in The Partisan, and in Mellichampe. We first meet him when Singleton's band overcomes Travis's Tories,(not Colonel Travis, father of Bertha), in the early part of The Partisan; and several of the captives are taken into the American force. "Goggle", so called from his fishy-eyed look, is thought to be no good by Humphries, and so he turns out to be,[17] deserting to British employ in the first minute the offer of solid gold is made him. Another notable example of such behavior is Colonel Travis, in The Forayers and its sequel, Eutaw. Travis is in the British Commissariat and is the agent who purchased five hundred head of cattle from old Sinclair. It gradually appears to him that British power is not what it used to be, and this, along with some proddings from his own conscience, causes him to seek reinstatement as a rebel American. Governor Rutledge offers him a commission. Travis is

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[17]W. G. Simms, The Partisan, New York, 1882, p. 97.

not thoroughly bad, but, as were a great many, was swayed by circumstance to join the side which seemed rightest and strongest at the time.

Still other double dealers are the Blodgits in The Forayers and in Eutaw--the whining, curish, Pete and his vicious old mother. These people keep a sort of tavern for the amusement of the British by which means they can buy small amounts of their arms and amunition at a time to avoid suspicion, and hand the weapons over to the Americans, together with the solid gold they get from the sale of liquor. The Blodgits find it more attractive to keep most of their acquisitions for the post war times and to sell them to whoever bids highest.

At this point it would be worthwhile to mention that Simms's knowledge of the revolutionary inflation and the utter poverty of the rebels appears to have been derived from Ramsay.[18] Simms started to make interesting use of this matter when in Katherine Walton the partisans use bows and arrows for hunting and intend to use them in warfare.

> "The partisans of Carolina, during the struggle for recovery of the state, seldom went into action with more than three rounds to the man."[19]

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[18] Op. Cit., II, 125-136.

[19] W. G. Simms, Katherine Walton, New York, 1882, p. 142.

But nothing is made of the idea in the later chapters of Katherine Walton or in any other novel of the series.

We can see from the foregoing, then, that there is considerable relation between Ramsay and Simms's own work in the creating of atmosphere and in the depicting of the various political beliefs and conflicts of the citizenry of the time.

## V. Southern Social Influences in Simms

In the novels of the Revolution Simms makes several illuminating remarks upon the southern social system--remarks on slavery, and upon the old family ties--the aristoi in contrast with the newly rich. It is interesting to note Ramsay's passages on slavery and to see how slightly the order of things had changed in the South from his time to Simms's, whose own statements in the novels are made in a familiar, it-is-as-true-now-as-then manner.

> "Slavery also led to the engrossing of land, in the hands of a few...Such is the force of habit, and the pliancy of human nature, that though degrading freemen to the level of slaves, would, to many be more intolerable than death, yet Negroes who have been born and bred in habits of slavery are so well satisfied with their condition, that several have been known to reject proffered freedom, and as far as circumstances authorize us to judge, emancipation does not appear to be the wish of the generality of them. The peasantry of few countries enjoy as much of the comforts of life as the slaves who belong to good masters. Interest

> concurs with the finer feelings of human nature to induce slave-holders to treat with humanity and kindness, those who are subjected to their will and power. There is frequently more happiness in kitchens than parlors, and life is often more pleasantly enjoyed by the slave than his master..."[1]

Ramsay speaks of slavery's faults as well, but our object is to see the persistence of that peculiar species of southern rationalization from Revolutionary times and before up through such propaganda as William Grayson's The Hireling and the Slave and The Pro-Slavery Argument.

Let us consider Mellichampe for the pro-slavery idea. Mellichampe has been detected in his visit to Janet Berkeley by the Tory Barsfield, who gives pursuit. Mellichampe has the old family slave, Scipio, attract his pursuers' attention while he himself escapes. Scipio thrashes around, and is finally caught by Barsfield. His denial of any knowledge of Mellichampe's whereabouts displays the loyalty which slaves were supposed to have had--and many did have--for their masters. He leads Barsfield and his crew on a fruitless search having sworn he had not seen his master at any time these past three weeks:

> "...the adroit Negro contrived to baffle the vindictive Barsfield. He led him from place to place, to and fro, now here, now there, and through every little turn and winding of the enclosure in front of the dwelling until the patience of the Tory became

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[1] Op. Cit., I.,24.

> exhausted, and he clearly saw that his guide had deceived him...[2]

Such adroitness and wiliness on the part of a Negro Simms attributes to loyalty more than intelligence, and to a fear for his own life. If Scipio had been white, Simms might very likely have proclaimed his actions to be typical of a high order of intelligence and a remarkable coolness of mind in a difficult situation. Later in the book Scipio succeeds in passing a sentry to get arms to the captive Mellichampe by saying that he is chasing three of the plantation's best cows that had been made off with, "Kaise you sodger lub milk." The sentry is satisfied with this answer to his challenge not only because it is reasonable, but because of the seemingly artless way in which it is presented. Simms describes Scipio as:

> "...one of those trusty slaves to be found in almost every native southern family, who, having grown up with the children of their owners, have acquired a certain correspondence of feeling with them. A personal attachment had strengthened the bonds which necessity imposed, and it was quite as much a principle in Scipio's mind to fight and die for his owners as to work for them."[3]

Whether or not Scipio's loyalty is the result of his being a slave, it is obvious that Simms approves highly of the

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[2]W. G. Simms, Mellichampe, New York, 1832, p. 105.

[3]Ibid., p. 104.

institution of slavery while he rather incongruously disapproves of importation:

> "To their arts (the Indians') the Gullah and Ebo Negroes, of which the colony had its thousands furnished by the then unscrupulous morality of the mother country and the northern colonies, added their spells and magic..."[4]

Simms hastened to defend slave owners at the expense of the northerners, among whom he found most of his publishers.[5] The scoundrel M'Kewn, we learn:

> "...had bought at moderate prices, a lot of new Negroes, from the coast of Guinea, from a virtuous Puritan captain of Rhode Island, who had gleaned wonderfully from the Gold Coast, and whose great grandson, by the way, has since shown himself a virtuous abolitionist in the senate of the United States, breathing hate and horror toward the descendents of the very people whom his philanthropic grand-sire had sold the stolen Negroes."[6]

Such may have been an accurate description, but however it pointed out the northern faults, it did not purify slavery nor prove it to be good because another thing was bad. With this we compare chapter Twenty-Nine of Woodcraft, which is notable for picturing the bonds of affection which often existed between slaves and their masters:

> "You nebber guine done wid Tom, maussa! I'tick to you ebbrywhere; you comp'ny good 'nough for Tom in any country, no matter whay you go."[7]

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[4]W. G. Simms, The Partisans, New York, 1882, p. 224.

[5]Oscar Wegelin, Writings of William Gilmore Simms, New York, 1906.

[6]W. G. Simms, Woodcraft, New York, 1882, p. 456.

[7]Ibid., p. 182.

Porgy fears bankruptcy and separation from his favorite slave:

> "Give you, Tom! Give you to anybody? No! no! old fellow! I will neigher give you, nor sell you, nor suffer you to be taken from me in any way... Nothing but death shall ever part us, and even death shall not if I can help it. When I die, you shall be buried with me. We have fought and fed too long together, Tom, and I trust we love each other quite too well to submit to separation. When your kitchen fire grows cold, Tom, I shall cease to eat; and you Tom, will not have breath enough to blow up the fire when mine is out! I shall fight for you to the last, Tom, and you, I know, would fight to the last for me, as I am very sure that neither of us can long outlast the other."
>
> "Fight for you, maussa! Ha! Jes' le' dem Tory try we, maussa!"[8]

This kind of writing, undoubtedly went home to many a slave owner, but was too clannish to be popular very far north of the Mason-Dixon line.

The Southern mind could scarcely conceive of the immorality of slavery, so firmly rooted was the idea of the white man's burden. In Woodcraft widow Eveleigh visits Major Moncrieff shortly before the British evacuation of Charleston. It is her purpose to have restored to her certain slaves which she knows Moncrieff has. More than that she wants to recover Porgy's slaves too. The southern philosophy is a curious mixture:

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[8] Ibid., p. 183.

> "We are taught to love our neighbor as ourself, and such love can be shown in no better way, perhaps, than in giving heed to his interest at the moment when we attend to our own."[9]

With that, these two human beings spend considerable time discussing bills of sale for other human beings, and the right to consider them as personal property.

Simms casts light upon the southern social system in another respect than slavery: the caste system, regulating individual and family status. The lines between various social levels are clearly marked in Simms's novels in accordance with the "Greek democracy" mentioned earlier--it being difficult for a person to raise himself to a new level "successfully", with the approval of those who had already "arrived." In The Forayers occurs this passage between Willie Sinclair and his true love, Bertha Travis:

> "Willie, dear Willie, you know even better than I what difference exists in the several ranks of our society. Now, you know that mine is comparatively humble stock; and though my mother comes of good family in the Low Country, yet, in marrying my father, who was an obscure Indian trader, she incurred the reproach and anger of her own kindred. They neglected, and finally cast her off."
>
> "She was as good and noble as any of them."
>
> "Yes, but in such cases, it seems, the wife sinks to the husband's rank and loses something of her own..."[10]

Willie's father disapproved of any alliance between a girl of such parentage and his son, and is won over only by

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[9] Ibid., p. 20.

[10] W. G. Simms, The Forayers, New York, 1882, pp. 282 F F.

meeting her, so that her personality and character can overcome his silly preconceptions. Her father, Captain Travis, has aspired to become a planter. He owns a fine home and slaves, has money, and wishes to be on a par with those whom he considers the proper models of gentility. He is a self-made man, by hook or by crook, and Simms's term, "novus homo", means simply that he has not yet been accepted. His commission from Governor Rutledge improves his position, however, but by this time he is not thinking so much of social climbing as saving his family from the villainous Inglehardt. Governor Rutledge's exclamation to Inglehardt, who attempts the governor's capture, shows the high rank of a southern gentleman:

> "'You neither know me--nor yourself. If you knew either of us, sir, you would know that I am not to be made prisoner by you!'
> Inglehardt's cheek flushed. He could feel the sentiment of scorn. He, the son of the overseer and grazier, felt the sting of the sarcasm from the born gentleman."[11]

Here is clear proof of the feudal order of things; gentlemen are born, and the statement in this case means that it is a sort of title which laborers and sons of laborers have no right to aspire to. It does not mean here that a born gentleman is one whose innate characteristics entitle him to that ranking, regardless of social station, which is the only sense in which the old saying has any validity.

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[11] Ibid., p. 408.

How convenient, then, for Simms to make his villain, Inglehardt, a "son of an overseer and grazier". Simms is forgetting his own ancestry in his effort to please the gentle readers of Charleston, who, unfortunately for the author, did not forget as easily.. Inglehardt, too,

> "...Was a new man; an ambitious man, anxious to shake off old and inferior associations; anxious to bring himself into constant communication with persons of whose social rank there could be no question."[12]

Again, a whole book illustrating the southern idea of social rank is Woodcraft, the story of Captain Porgy's readjustment after the war and his efforts to reclaim his plantation from decay and mortgage. We meet Porgy for the first time in The Partisan, where it is pointed out that he is not a "low" character at all, and that the cream of Charleston aught not to be disgusted at his seeming ungenteelity:

> "Now, it will not do to misconceive Lieutenant Porgy. If we have said or shown anything calculated to lessen his dignity in the eyes of any of our readers, remorse must follow. Porgy might play the buffoon if he pleased; but in the meantime let it be understood that he was born to wealth and had received the education of a gentleman. He had wasted his substance, but this matter does not much concern us now. It is only important that he should not be supposed to waste himself. He had been a planter--was in some measure a planter still, with broken fortunes upon the Ashepoo."[13]

An apology for the man who can say, "Damn the patriotism that won't eat stolen food."

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[12] Ibid., pp. 291,292.

[13] W. G. Simms, The Partisan, New York, 1882, p. 358.

## VI The Novels

### 1. The Partisan

We proceed now to the works themselves--Simms's novels of the American Revolution, or The Partisan Series, as they are sometimes called. It is simpler to deal with them according to the action as it naturally progresses through the series. The first of the group is The Partisan: a Tale of the Revolution, published by Harper Bros., New York, in 1835; the next is Mellichampe: a Legend of the Santee, also by Harper B ros. of New York in 1836; then Katherine Walton, or the Rebel of Dorchester, published by A. Hart, Philadelphia, 1851. These three comprise a trilogy in which many of the same characters appear throughout from the earliest pages of The Partisan to the last of Katherine Walton. This trilogy is followed, from the historical viewpoint, by The Kinsmen, or Black Riders of the Congaree, published by Lea and Blanchard of Philadelphia, 1841, and republished in 1854 by Redfield, of New York as The Scout. The next work is The Forayers, or the Raid of the Dog-Days, published by Redfield of New York, in 1855. This has its sequel, Eutaw, also published by Redfield of New York in 1856. The final work, not in the order of composition, is Woodcraft, or Hawks About the Dovecote, republished by Redfield, of New York, in 1856.

Originally this story came out in 1852, published by Lippincott, Grambo and Company, of Philadelphia, and was known at that time as The Sword and the Distaff; or Fair, Fat, and Forty.[1] These are the novels containing most of the best (and some of the worst) that Simms ever wrote.

The Partisan is a kind of foundation upon which Simms intended to build the rest of the series. In the introduction we may observe how Simms put to work his principle as expressed in Views and Reviews of American Literature, History, and Fiction:

> "The work was originally planned as the first of a series devoted to the illustration of the war of the Revolution in South Carolina. With this object I laid the foundation of this work more deeply and broadly than I should have done, had I purposed merely the single story. I designed, in fact, a trilogy. Several of the persons of the story were estimated to be the property of the series...I so arranged my material as to make each of the stories independent of the others...My aim has been to give a story of events rather than of persons. The one, of course, could not well be done without the other; yet it has been my object to make myself as greatly independent as possible of the necessity which would combine them. A sober desire for history--the unwritten, the unconsidered, but veracious history--has been with me, in this labor, a sort of principle. The phases of a time of errors and of wrongs--of fierce courage--tenacious patriotism--yielding, but struggling for virtue, not equal to the pressure of circumstances, and falling for a time, Antaeus-like, only for a renewal and recovery of its strength--it has been my aim to delineate...

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[1] Oscar Wegelin, Writings of William Gilmore Simms, New York, 1906, pp. 13-16;23,26,28.

> Nor is The Partisan merely a local chronicle embodying traditionary characters only...Gates, Marion, De Kalb, Cornwallis, Tarleton, and others are all the property of our histories...The severity with which I have visited the error of Gates, and the traits which I have given his character may be thought harsh, but they are sustained by all the best authorities...I am decided that a nation gains only in glory and greatness as it is resolute to behold and pursue the truth. I would paint the disasters of my country, where they arose from the obvious errors of her sons, in the strongest possible colors. We should then know...how best to avoid them...I have somewhat departed from the absolute plan of the story to dilate upon the dangerous errors of the leading personages in the events drawn upon. The history of the march of Gates' army I have carefully elaborated with this object; and the reflective mind will see the parallel position of cause and effect which I have studiously sought to make obvious, wherever it seemed to me necessary for the purposes of instruction. It is in this way only, that the novel may be made useful, when it ministers to morals, to mankind, and to society..."[2]

The ideas set forth in this excerpt from the introduction to The Partisan will be seen to agree with those in the essays: they are, in fact, the same.

The Partisan commences with an introductory chapter--a sketch of conditions in South Carolina after the fall of Charleston. Cornwallis rules, and Tarleton is the terror of the land. This sketch follows Ramsay accurately, and it is from this point, when South Carolina was well nigh out of the war, except for the bands of Sumter and Marion and a few lesser groups, that Simms begins his story. Simms be-

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[2] Op. Cit., introduction, pp. v-viii.

gins well: we understand that it is to be an action story, and as soon as the scene has been laid in the first chapter we are fairly well in medias res. The atmosphere becomes tense even such a little way into the book as the second chapter, where we have a sharp quarrel going on between a disgruntled young man of the town of Dorchester, South Carolina, and the British sergeant Hastings.

> "Look you, young man, do you see that tree? It won't take much treason to tuck you up there."
> "Treason indeed! I talk no treason, Sergeant Hastings, and I defy you to prove any agin me. I'm not to be frightened this time o'day, I'd have you to know; and though you are a sodger and wear a red coat, let me tell you there is a tough colt in the woods that your two legs can't straddle. There is no treason in that, for it only concerns one person, and that one person is your own self, and I'm as good a man as you any day."

It is not hard to become interested in the book with speeches like that before one, and The Partisan is full of them; plain and fearless homespun speeches that make the British tyrants and their toadies writhe in anger.

In the fourth chapter there is mention of Sir Henry Clinton's proclamation. This was virtually an order for all those who had submitted to British rule at the fall of Charleston to take arms against their rebel brothers. The gist of the proclamation runs as follows:

> "...the helping hand of every man was wanted to reestablish peace and good government...the commander in chief wished not to draw them into danger while any doubt could remain of success but as that was now certain, he trusted that one and

> all would heartily join, and give effect to necessary measures for that purpose. Those with families would be permitted to remain at home and form a militia...but from those who had no families it was expected that they would cheerfully assist in driving their oppressors and all the miseries of war, from their borders."[3]

In other words, "help the conquerors in the pursuit and the destruction of your own relatives and friends." It was enough to drive principled and peaceful Tories onto the rebel side, as was the case in The Partisan of Col. Walton, the father of Katherine Walton, the heroine of a later book. The plot takes its departure from this edict, and we are entertained for the next five hundred pages with the raising of Major Singleton's partisan band, their numerous raids upon strategic locations of British power, the capture of Col. Walton after the battle of Camden, and at the end of the book, the daring rescue of the valuable Colonel from the gallows by Singleton and a body of picked men. We wonder, however, whether one man is worth the burning of half the town of Dorchester, and the death of several brave woodsmen, when he has not shown himself to be utterly indispensable to American victory. This brings us to the sub plot, which in later works too frequently becomes the major one--the love affair between Major Singleton and Katherine Walton, the Colonel's daughter. It seems as if Walton were to be rescued more on the basis of his paternity than his colonelcy.

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[3] David Ramsay, History of the American Revolution, Philadelphia, 1789, vol2, p. 157.

The real action of The Partisan ends with the battle of Camden, in which Gates was defeated and the army nearly destroyed. Simms's account corresponds to that of Ramsay, with only the addition of his own characters. The last charge of Baron De Kalb is a remarkable piece of writing, vivid and inspired,[4] the equal to anything of the same type in Scott or in Cooper.

There is some melodrama in The Partisan, although nowhere near as much as occurs, for instance, in Mellichampe or The Scout. Simms cannot do love scenes. They are pages to be skimmed or skipped entirely, since they have little connection with the rest of the story in The Partisan. If it were possible to extricate the good from the bad in Simms, it would be worth while; for the bad is horrid. Consider this brief sample:

> "Robert, you know how I esteem you--"
> "Utter no professions, Kate--not so coldly, at least--if you really have any regard for me."
> "You mistake, you do me injustice, cousin--I would not be cold or inconsiderate. I do esteem you--"
> "Esteem!"
> "Well,well--love you, then, if you like the word better." He pressed her hand.[5]

There is no grace to this; it is not convincing, yet Simms drags it in by the ears to please the taste of his native

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[4] Ibid., pp. 460-474.

[5] Ibid., p. 278.

Charleston. It reeks of self-consciousness. The minute Simms's characters change from those who say, "hain't it?" to those who say, "Is it not?" he loses all headway and flounders about in a subliterary quagmire. Compare such stuff with the speech of his backwoodsmen. Singleton leads his band in search of Marion, shortly before the Battle of Camden, and he comes upon one of Marion's scouts, whom they approach warily, but determinedly. This man is called Thumbscrew, who is a major character in the next book, Mellichampe. Says he:

> "Why, hello! now; but you block a fellow in, mighty like as ef you wanted to look at his teeth. What mought your with be, stranger?"[6]

Yet his powers are not necessarily limited to the homely frontiersman. Compare the address to the partisans on the eve of the Battle of Camden by General Marion, certainly no drawing room character, being infinitely above that genre:

> "I take up the sword, gentlemen, with a solemn vow never to lay it down, until my country, as a free country, shall no longer need my services. I have informed myself of all these difficulties and dangers--these inequalities of numbers and experience between us and our enemies--of which I have plainly told you. Having them all before my own eyes, I have yet resolved to live or die in the cause of my country, placing the risks and privations of the war in full opposition to the honor and duty--the one which I may gather in her battles, and the other which I owe her in maintaining them to the last. I have told you all that I know, in order that each man may make his election as I have

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[6] Ibid., p. 404.

> done. I will urge no reasons why you should love and fight for your country, as my own sense of honor and shame would not suffer me to listen to any other on the same subject. Determine for yourselves without argument from me. Let each man answer, singly, whether he will go forward under my lead, or that of any other officer that General Gates shall assign, or whether he will now depart from our ranks, choosing a station, henceforward, of neutrality, if such will be allowed him, or with the forces of our enemy. Those who determine with me, must be ready to leave within the hour, on the route to Lynch's Creek, and to the continental army."[7]

This again is some of the best of Simms, but how self-conscious he becomes with Major Singleton, from one of the best Charleston families:

> "This war--the merciless, the devastating war! Oh, my country, when wilt thou be free from invasion--when will thy people come back to these deserted dwellings--when will the corn flourish green along these stricken and blasted fields, without danger from the trampling horse, and the wanton and devouring fire? When--oh,when?"[8]

Yet in The Partisan there is considerably less of the heart-on-sleeve writing than exists in Mellichampe.

## 2. Mellichampe

Mellichampe goes off on a tangent from the circle of novels of the Revolution. It begins just after the rescue of Col. Walton at the close of The Partisan, and its plot comprises an episode, filling up the time between Gates'defeat and the Tory ascendency to the coming of General Greene.

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[7] Ibid., pp. 429, 430.

[8] Ibid., p. 246.

In the introduction Simms defends himself against that critic who objects "to the preponderance of low and vulgar personages" in The Partisan. That objection is typical of a romanticist, says Simms:

> "...of one who is willing to behold in the progress of society none but its most lofty and elevated attributes--who will not look at the materials which make the million, but who picks out from their number the man who should rule, not the men who should represent--who requires every second person to be a demigod, or hero, at the least--and who scorns all conditions, that only excepted which is the ideal of a pure mind and delicate imagination. To make a fairy tale or a tale in which none but the colors of the rose and rainbow shall predominate, is a very different, and, let me add, a far less difficult matter, than to depict life as we discover it--man in all his phases, as he is modified by circumstance and moulded by education--and man as the optimist would have and as the dreamer about inane perfectability delights to paint him..."[9]

The word for this is realism; and it was heresy in gentlemanly Charleston. We must praise Simms for this, certainly, but he did not stick to his guns as we could have wished him to. He submitted to popular sentiment when he gave us Ernest Mellichampe and Janet Berkeley, and the book is saved only by its "preponderance of low and vulgar characters",[10] like Thumbscrew, "Goggle" Blonay, Bill Humphries, and Lance Trampton.

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[9]W. G. Simms, Mellichampe, New York, 1882, pp. 5,6.

[10]Ibid., advertisement, p. v.

Regarding Ernest Mellichampe, let us see what sins the author's apostacy led him to. The third chapter of Mellichampe displays at once some of the best and some of the worst of Simms's writing. Consider the aristocratic romantic hero whose eye is--

> "black and fiery, his cheek brown and thin, his hair of a raven black like his eye, his chin full, his nose finely Roman, and his forehead imposingly high...he seemed passionate and impatient, and his thin but deeply red lips quivered and colored with every work and at every movement.."[11]

This is disgusting, if it's possible at all. We learn that he is the scion of an old plantation family whose misfortunes during the war are not to be thought on by Ernest Mellichampe without his being maddened by it. His grief was caused by one Captain Barsfield, a Tory leader, who attacked the plantation of Mellichampe's father and killed the man in a fair fight. Mellichampe flies into a rage with his friend and savior on more than one occasion--Thumbscrew--when the latter, having sighted Barsfield on the way to the Berkeley plantation, did not shoot him in the back. Not shoot Barsfield in the back! Ernest treats Thumbscrew high handedly for failing to do so, until his tantrum has run its course. This is what Simms intended to please the Charleston best people with, who were not much more real than some of his literary concoctions. The story

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[11] Ibid., p. 32.

is slight: the attempted wooing of Janet Berkeley by the evil Barsfield, the wrath of Mellichampe, and the partisan skirmishes with Barsfield's Tory band.

But side by side with the aristocratic mouthings there is the backwoods speech and the Negro dialect, at which Simms was a master. Thumbscrew is something of a philosopher. Mellichampe complains that Thumbscrew is too worried about him, and the scout says:

> "...I loves you, Airnest, and I watch you like an old hen that's got but one chicken left, and I clucks and scratches twice as much for that very reason. If there was a dozen to look after, now, the case would be different; I wouldn't make half the fuss that I make about one: but you see, when it so happens that the things a man's got to love gits fewer and smaller they gits more valuable, Airnest, in his sight; for he knows mighty well, if he loves them, that he's jist like an old bird that comes back to the tree when the blossoms and the flowers have all dropped off, and are rotting under it. It's mighty nigh to winter in his heart then, Airnest--mighty nigh--and the sooner he begins to look out for a place to sleep in, the wiser man you may take him to be..."[12]

It speaks volumes, but there were those in Simms's time who apparently preferred words from Janet Berkeley. At that point in the story when it is necessary for the partisans to burn the Berkeley place to get at Barsfield and his cohorts Janet presents the partisans with a bow and arrows,

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[12] Ibid., p. 79.

which are to be shot into the roof to start the fire. Surprise is expressed that she should want to destroy the place, but she responds bravely:

> "Sacred as my home, as my own and my mother's birthplace, it is yet doubly sacred as my country's. Place your combustibles upon these arrows, and send them to the aged roof of that family mansion; and I shall not joy the less to see it burn because it is my father's, and should be mine, when I know that in its ruin the people and the cause I love must triumph. God forbid and keep me from the mean thought that I shall lose by that which to my country must be so great a gain."[13]

It is enough to say that the plot struggles on through chapters like"The Maiden's Gift,""The Wounded Lover", "Lover's Doubts and Dreams", and "Love Passages"; that the villainous Barsfield and his band are destroyed and the lovers united, although at the cost of Thumbscrew's life. His death is sentimental, but it is controlled, thoroughly believable, and quite moving. It is to be compared with the prolonged dying of Emily, Singleton's sister in The Partisan, and the fault seems not so much a lack of skill in Simms as a willingness to prostitute his art to those who object to "the preponderance of low and vulgar characters".

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[13]Ibid., p. 196.

### 3. Katherine Walton

In Katherine Walton, the last of the trilogy, Simms's fault is not so much inability to describe high society as it is the change in interest from Singleton to the British Major Proctor.[14] Simms shows that Proctor had provocation for murdering Major Vaughan, but the sudden importance of the former is at odds with Simms's expressed purpose of showing the progress of the Revolution. Like Mellichampe it is incidental, not concerned with the major movements of the time. Katherine Walton "brings us to the city", while the other two works dealt with the interior and lowland river sections. Simms says of his heroine that she is:

> "...a woman drawn...after our best models of good manners, good taste, good intellect, and noble, generous sensibilities; frank, boyant, and unconfined; yet superior to mere convention."[15]

She may be drawn after the best models, but she is wooden. With one exception Simms never drew a woman in his stories that was not wooden.

Katherine Walton was carefully assembled. The term is accurate, since Simms did much research into the times of the occupation, and his characters--David Ramsay, Tom Singleton, Harry Barry, "Mad" Campbell, and Commandant Balfour,

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[14] A. H. Quinn, History of American Fiction, New York, 1936, p.118.

[15] W. G. Simms, Katherine Walton, New York, 1882, p. 4.

the ruler of Charleston and the villain of the piece--are all historical personages. Simms quotes Ramsay, who is his authority for the characterization of Balfour, as saying:

> "By the subversion of every trace of popular government, without any proper civil establishment in its place, he, with a few co-adjutors, assumed and exercized legislative, judicial, and executive powers over citizens in the same manner as over the common soldiery."[16]

He was, then, a tyrant, and the book is concerned with his machinations--the attempted wooing of Katherine Walton, the threat of Balfour to hang her father if she will not have him, and the escape of Proctor from Charleston.

Simms allows his story to ramble on for four hundred and sixty pages, and then rushes the ending in the last fourteen.

Mafor Singleton befriends Proctor, pretending to be a Captain Furness, of the loyalist backwoods riflemen. For a while his speech is typical of the frontiersman, but presently Simms forgets himself and allows "Furness" to speak out of character, which dereliction no one seems to notice--except the reader. Although Simms makes tolerable fun of British society in Charleston, we miss the swamps and the forests. Even though the melodrama is kept within reasonable limits, the story does not compare favorably in interest with The Partisan.

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[16] Ibid., pp. 9,10.

## 4. The Scout

We proceed now to the next book in the Revolutionary series: The Scout. It's action occurs at about the time of General Greene's first victories, pushing the British back toward Charleston. The story makes an excellent start--better than Katherine Walton or Mellichampe. Simms shows his descriptive powers in the first chapter:

> "The dusky shadows of evening were approaching fast. Clouds, black with storm, that threatened momently to discharge their torrents, depended gloomily above the bosom of the Wateree. A deathlike stillness overhung the scene. The very breezes...had at length folded themselves up to slumber on the dark surface of the sluggish swamps below. No voice of bird or beast, no word of man, denoted, in that ghost-like region, the presence of any form of life..."

Here is something Simms knows and believes in, and his work is good.

Unfortunately, after an admirable beginning, we are confronted with more melodrama--perhaps the worst Simms ever wrote. The plot basically concerns the fight of the partisans against a Tory outlaw band known as The Black Riders of the Congaree. The rebels are led by Clarence Conway, the lover of Flora Middleton; while the Black Riders are led by Edward Conway, Clarence's half brother and rival for Flora's love. The climax is the fight between the brothers, and Edward is beaten and left for dead. We are sorry to see that

he is not actually so, and the melodrama goes on for a great many more pages, relieved for a time by Greene's siege of Ninety-Six, and the retreat of the British.

There are murky dialogues between the brothers, who frequently address each other as "Clarnece Conway" and "Edward Conway". On the whole the book is too talky, and except for the scout, Supple Jack Bannister, we are glad enough to lay it down. Strangely, The Scout contains some very good humor. Among the funniest pages Simms are those in which the Tory scout, Watsan Gray, leaps upon Supple Jack near the Middleton plantation, saying:

> "Oh! ho! Caught at last, Supple Jack; Supple, the famous! Y our limbs will scarcely help you now..."
> "...Watson Gray...You're rather a small build of a man, if my memory sarves me rightly--you 'ha'n't half my heft, and can't surely think to manage me."
> "I do indeed...If I'm light, you'll find me strong--strong enough to keep your arms fast till my wild Irish come up, and lay you backward."
> "Well, that may be, Watson. But my arms ain't my legs, my lad. Keep them, if you can."

And Jack trots off down the road with Watson unexpectedly and helplessly piggy-back.

> "...It's but nateral that you should kick and worry, at riding a nag that you hadn't bitted, Watson Grey, but it's of no use; you're fairly mounted, and there's no getting off in a hurry..."[17]

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[17] W. G. Simms, The Scout, New York, 1882, p. 231.

The scene is ludicrous, and a wonderful change for the better; but it is too short. The melodramatic clouds close in again with little relief to the end of the book.

## 5. The Forayers

The Forayers and Eutaw may be considered together, since at the end of the former book several matters are left pending that are settled in Eutaw. The

> "narrative opens at the moment when Rawdon is preparing to yield the care of the army to his lieutenant (Stewart), at the moment when, approaching Orangeburg as a place of rest, after the retreat from Ninety-Six, after the abandonment and destruction of Camden, after the loss of almost all their posts in the interior, the British...are seeking to snatch a momentary rest from fatigue and danger--not willing to seek their foes, and scarcely able to cover themselves from pursuit."[18]

That is the background, against which the hero, Willie Sinclair and his men vanquish Hell-Fire Dick's outlaws and the Tory band led by Captain Inglehardt, a man with ambition, and the cunning and coldness to gratify it, a man who (to appear doubly villainout to aristocratic readers) had

> "abandoned his caste, an unforgivable offense, which moved the dislike of all its members."[19]

Inglehardt has the father of Bertha Travis, Willie's true love, in his power--has evidence against him that would ruin him if it were given to the British, and, in short, offers Travis the choice of the halter for himself or the

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[18] W. G. Simms, The Forayers, New York, 1882, p. 6.

[19] Ibid., p. 292.

altar for his daughter and Inglehardt. All these affairs are only settled at the close of Eutaw, which could almost be called the second volume of The Forayers, were it not for the battle at Eutaw Springs near the end of the book. Neither volume is satisfactory in itself, and both together are inferior to The Partisan, for Simms becomes too involved in plot and subplot and evil machinations to do justice to what was his original inspiration --the fight for independence.

## 6. Woodcraft

The last book in the series is Woodcraft. Set in the post revolutionary period after 1782, it is remarkably free from the turgid melodrama of the preceding three works. As in the other books, many of its characters are "drawn from the life",[20] and those who are not are superior to those modelled on real personages of the time. Captain Porgy returns to his estate, now in ruins, with two stout friends, the one-armed Sergeant Millhouse, and Lance Trampton, a young man of eighteen or nineteen who first appears in The Partisan. There are few plot digressions--the idea being constantly in mind to release Porgy from debt, make his plantation upon the Ashepoo a flourishing estate, and marry if he can either the

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[20] W. G. Simms, Woodcraft, New York, 1882, p. 3.

rich widow Eveleigh or the poorer but comelier widow Griffin, Lance's mother. Porgy succeeds in all but the marital matters, the widow Eveleigh preferring to remain a friend and the widow Griffin marrying Fordham, the backwoodsman overseer on Mrs. Eveleigh's plantation.

## VII. Simms's Characters

Little has been said so far about Simms's characters, and only slightly more about their speeches. Let us first consider the women and then the men, most of whom need only a few words said about them.

Simms does not do his women well. Except for the widow Brewton in Katherine Walton, they are almost all oversensitive, priggish, wooden puppets. There are only two women upon whom it is worthwhile to comment otherwise. The first of these is Mother Blonay. In her case he does not need to bother with female psychology, for she is a witch-like person, about whom we do not remember so much that she is a woman as that she is a fearful creature whose features were:

> "thin, shrivelled...darkly yellow, hag-like, and jaundiced. The skin was tightly drawn across the face, and the high cheekbones and the nose seemed disposed to break through the slender restraints of their covering. Her eyes were small and sunken, of a light grey, and had a vicious twinkle, that did not accord with the wretched and decayed aspect of her other features..."[1]

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[1] W. G. Simms, The Partisan, New York, 1882, pp. 180,181.

The other exception is Ellen Floyd, the Cassandra-like sister of Nat Floyd. She makes a startling appearance in Eutaw, rescuing her brother as he is about to be hanged by Lein Watkins and his outlow gang. She shows herself a woman of action in this passage.[2] She devotes her life to keeping her weakling brother out of trouble, knows woodcraft like any scout, and has a strange gift of prophecy which her loutish associates consider madness. She is intelligent, high minded, and unassuming. Such is the woman--the only really interesting one Simms ever created--whom he has called up from his imagination; but he seems not to know just what to do with her, and he throws her away, finally, letting her be shot to death by Hell-Fire Dick.

Major Singleton would likely have been a stilted, unbelievable creature had he been confined to the drawing room, but the backwoods fighters needed a leader, and he is an admirable one. He plans the expeditions and directs them; he is active all the time, and when, talking with his brothers-in-arms he is decisive and energetic. If he made more love to Katherine Walton than he is allowed to, he would sink in our estimation. On the whole he is level-headed, and not set before us so often that we tire of him.

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[2] W. G. Simms, Eutaw, New York, 1882, pp. 23-33.

Colonel Walton is a shadowy individual, and except for his being an illustration of how certain colonists reacted to the infamous call to arms proclamation of Sir Henry Clinton, and by his capture enabling the plot of Katherine Walton to be formulated he serves no special purpose and calls for no particular development.

Ernest Mellichampe has been dealt with previously. He is a literary monster--the product of cancerous romanticism.

Balfour, the commandant of Charleston, Simms drew from life, using Ramsay (already quoted) as his authority. He, Edward Conway, Captain Barsfield, Captain Inglehardt, and Mr. M'Kewn all comprise that group which may be termed high-character-villain; and they are not much different from the nineteenth century melodrama type that flourished during Simms's life time.

Clarence Conway has nothing memorable about him. He is simply his brother's antithesis, even in the matter of appearance--Edward being swarthy and Clarence fair.

Old Colonel Sinclair is a little more unusual, but not sufficiently pleasing. He is blindly loyal to British rule, which Porgy gently ridicules him for.

The most interesting of all Simms's characters is the gigantic Porgy, philosopher, humorist, gentleman, and no less a fighter. His manner of speech is illustrated here in his

criticism of Col. Sinclair's disparagement of the Americans:

> "My venerable friend, you never, I fancy, heard of Ike Massey's bulldog?"
>
> "You are right in your fancy."
>
> "Well, sir, Ike had a bulldog--a famous bulldog--that whipped all other dogs, and whipped all bulls, and Ike honestly believed that he could whip all beasts that ever roared in the valley of Bashan. On one occasion, he pitted him against a young bull, whom he expected to see him pull down at the first jerk, muzzle, and throttle in a jiffey. But it so happened that Towser--the name of his dog--had, in the process of time, lost some of his teeth. He did take the bull by the nose, but the young animal shook the old one off, and with one stamp of his hoof he crushed all the life out of Towser. But Ike, to the day of his death, still believed in Towser, and swore that the dog had no fair play; that the bull had improperly used his hoofs on the occasion; and that, in fact, having honestly taken his enemy by the nose, according to bulldog science, the victory must still be conceded to him. Now, your faith in British science is not unlike that of Ike Massey in his dogs; but the bull may safely concede the science, so long as he can stamp his enemy to pieces. We are working just in this fashion in our fighting with the British. They have the science, but they are losing the teeth; while we are young and vigorous, lack the science, and have the strength. Scientifically, the British whip us in all our contests; but we do an immense amount of very interesting bull-stamping all the while; and it is surprising how much dog life we are crushing out of the British carcass..."[3]

Porgy presents some interesting conflicts. For instance, the man who could speak thus wisely would ruin his rice crop by draining the fields to catch the perch out of them, just to satisfy his astounding appetite.

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[3] Ibid., p. 350.

Porgy is nearly matched in interest by a group of wilderness scouts, such as Simms may have known when he visited his father in Mississippi. Among the best of these are Supple Jack Bannister, Thumbscrew, and Jim Ballou. These men and others like them call a spade a spade, are fearless, and have a miraculous knowledge of hunting and tracking--generally known as "woodcraft". When Jim Ballou starts to track Henry Travis's captors in The Forayers we must wonder at the remarkable logic he uses in following the culprits' horses, telling them from all others by tell-tale marks which would be hidden from any but a practiced eye.[4]

## VIII. Dialogue

Some samples have been given of the types of speech to be found in Simms's works. Enough has been said about the flowery dialogues, but more may be said of the backwoods and the Negro dialects. The speeches of these people are notable for homely but sharp imagery, for realistic syntactical arrangement, for successful spelling of the printed words to match the pronunciation, and finally for a consistency in all these things throughout the seven books. In this Cooper cannot

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[4] W. G. Simms, The Forayers, New York, 1832, pp. 465, 468.

even be compared with Simms. The only failure--a nodding Homer--is in Singleton's impersonation of Captain Furness, whose backwoods speech wears off like whitewash in a rain storm; and no notice is taken of the change. For imagery I give these examples:

> "I sweated like a bull in fly time"
> "Now look you, ef you don't lie close and keep still, by the eternal fires, I'll slash your oozen (weasand) jest as quick as I would that of a fat shote in December..."[1]

It has been noted by sociologists that among primitive peoples and among the less sophisticated of our own civilization the lack of modifiers acquired through formal education is amply made up by the use of similies and metaphors. Thus where a learned man might cut a man's throat deliberately, coldly, and remorselessly, a certain villainous scout would do it as he would "that of a fat shote in December", the hog killing time. Notice the aphoritic qualities of this sample:

> "The question now, I reckon--now, that you've got him in your clutches--is what you're going to do with him. To my thinking, it's jest the sort of question that bothered the man when he shook hands with the black bear round the tree. It was a starve to hold on and a squeeze to let go, and danger to the mortal ribs whichever way he took it."[2]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 442,443.

[2] W. G. Simms, The Scout, New York, 1882, p. 111.

A good simile:

> "Lying comes as natural to a trooper as mother's milk to an infant."[3]

The one-armed Millhouse's loyalty to, and determination to work for, his friend Porgy:

> "But I'm got a hell of a big heart for my friend, Tom, by thunder; and when there's heart enough in a man's buzzom, Tom, he can always find arms enough to sarve his friend, even if so he both hands are chopped off."[4]

The careful fitting of spelling to pronunciation is observable in this:

> "...he'd a-joined us long ago..."[5]

Here is some Negro dialect:

> "Ki! Maussa: you no lub sleep you'se'f, da's no reason why he no good for udder people. Nigger lub sleep, Mass Porgy, an' 'taint 'specful for um to git up in de morning before de sun."[6]

Besides his skill in dialect, Simms has a flair for names, and those of his backwoods heroes and villains linger in the

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[3] Op. Cit., p. 147.

[4] W. G. Simms, Woodcraft, New York, 1882, p. 104.

[5] W. G. Simms, The Partisan, New York, 1882, p. 49.

[6] Ibid., pp. 349-350.

mind: Supple Jack, Roaring Dick, Fox Squirrel, The Trailer, Hell-Fire Dick, "Goggle" Blonay, Thumbscrew, and The Serpent are sure to be remembered for their heroism or their wickedness, and all the more so because of the titles they bear.

## IX. Critical Judgment of Simms

It is regretable that Simms should have been so concerned with "belonging" to Charleston society. He might have avoided Ernest Hellichampe and others of that ilk if he had been a little less impressionable or a little more wise. It would have been easier for him in his last years had he never become disillusioned, never seen Charleston in the proper light. His father's words came home:

> "Thirty-odd years have passed, and I can now mournfully say that the old man was right. All that I have (done) has been poured to waste in Charleston, which has never smiled on any of my labors, which has steadily ignored my claims, which has disparaged me to the last, has been the last place to give me its adhesion, to which I owe no favor, having never received an office, or a compliment, or a dollar at her hands; and with the exception of some dozens of her citizens, who have been kind to me, and some scores of her young men, who have honored me with a loving sympathy and something like reverence; which has always treated me rather as a public enemy, to be sneered at, than as a dutiful son doing her honor. And I, too, know it as a place of tombs. I have buried six dear children within its soil! Great God! What is the sort of slavery which brings me hither."[1]

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[1] W. P. Trent, William Gilmore Simms, Boston, 1892, p. 239.

His epitaph, which he composed himself, reflects his disappointment:

> "Here lies one who, after a reasonably long life, distinguished chiefly by increasing labors, has left all his better works undone."[2]

Had Simms spent less time pandering to the petty tasks of Charleston society, and in extra-literary matters, he might never have written such an epitaph. As it is, he adjudged himself succinctly and accurately. Said Hayne:

> "Simms's genius never had fair play! Circumstances hampered him. Thus the man was greater than his works."

> "A really great author...Simms emphatically was not, and there is no use in maintaining so fulsome a proposition. But his talents were splendid..."[3]

Said Poe:

> "...He has more vigor, more imagination, more movement, and more general capacity than all our novelists (save Cooper) combined."[4]

This essay has been concerned with the best of his writings, the novels of the American Revolution. There is enough good in them to show what he might have done had he been willing and able to control his imagination, to revise and to trim his prolix productions; and, like another southerner, Edgar

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[2] Ibid., pp. 323, 324.

[3] Ibid., pp. 321, 322.

[4] E. A. Poe, Works, New York, 1871, vol. III, p. 510.

Allen Poe, to leave the discouraging section to which he devoted himself and free himself from the political and other enervating concerns which took so many of his best years and thoughts.

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