

1984

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4 Miss. C. L. Rev. 169 (1983-1984)

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PHIL STONE AND WILLIAM FAULKNER:
THE LAWYER AND "THE POET"
*Susan Snell**

William Faulkner was not, so far as I know, a student of Southern literary biography. If he had been, he would have taken a law degree, rented an office above the square, hired a secretary, and only then proceeded to compose the chronicles of Yoknapatawpha. He might thus have saved himself great anguish. Instead, he chose, quite early, to become a writer, period, thereby violating Southern tradition and consequently exacerbating his own, perhaps puritanical, ambivalence toward the artist's craft.

Faulkner's devaluation of his "profession" is evident in a story ostensibly about his friend Phil Stone.¹ One Saturday night in the early 1920s in Charleston, Mississippi, bachelors William Faulkner of Oxford and attorney Phil Stone, lately of Charleston, called for Faulkner's date, Miss Gertrude Stegbauer, in Stone's white sports coupe. The three friends were often seen together at the local dances, for, although the writer "fancied" himself "in love with" Stone's legal secretary, he was apparently too shy ever to escort the young woman alone. Phil Stone, as usual, did most of the talking that evening, and his conversation, also quite typically, was of literature, not romance. Miss Stegbauer, observing the Pentecostal zeal with which Stone spoke of Balzac or T. S. Eliot, commented that she was certain Phil would soon give up the law to make a writer himself. At that point Faulkner had broken his habitual silence to disagree: "No," he said, "Stone doesn't write; he's too busy living to write." Years later Phil continued to admire in the remark "a shrewd saying by Bill."

In retrospect the remark is telling, but not as proof of the attorney's greater vitality. Rather Faulkner revealed there how thoroughly he had imbibed the South's conception of art as at best a gentleman's diversion (at worst, perhaps it was downright pathological). One did not make a career of a talent for anecdote

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1. S. Snell, "Phil Stone of Yoknapatawpha," Diss. Univ. of North Carolina 1978, pp. 307-09. Primary sources for my dissertation and my unpublished revised biography of the same title are the Phil Stone papers, Charlotte, N.C., taped interviews with Emily W. Stone (Mrs. Phil Stone), Montgomery, Ala., June-July 1973, and periodic conversations with Mrs. Stone from 1966 to present. She and I discussed supplementary details for this paper by telephone on 28 August 1983. To avoid excessive text intrusions, I omit references to the myriad minor documents of the Stone papers and records and to specific conversations with Mrs. Stone. Portions of Phil Stone's conversation and stories as recalled by his widow appear as direct quotations, a method justified, I believe, by the formulaic quality of the Stone anecdote and by the veracity of Emily Stone.

and a passion for letters. Like the antebellum lyric poets and the Old Southwest humorists — or like Faulkner's older contemporary William Alexander Percy — a talented young Southerner of good family, and good health, first read law or acquired a law degree; then, if he had no better sense, he might dabble in literature as his colleagues dabbled, but more lucratively, in politics or farming.

Although Phil Stone's passion for art stopped short of composition, his case was more typical of the pattern dominant in the region until the Southern Renaissance. Once he had two law degrees and a place in the family law firm, Mississippi society permitted Stone to indulge a literary avocation to his heart's content. No matter that at the age of twenty-eight he was still not self-supporting; no one cared whether he actually worked at the Charleston branch of James Stone & Sons. His name appeared on the office letterhead; he accompanied his father to court from time to time. The Honorable Phil Stone, in short, had an identity the provincial Southern community would certify. His friend the black sheep of the Falkner family had obliged Oxford to coin a label; they called him "Count No 'Count" — and steadfastly refused their approbation. Hollywood, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and the Nobel Prize Committee in time would force Oxford to acknowledge writing as a means of making a living, but the town would prefer, with Faulkner, to think of him as a gentleman farmer, and already suspected, as did Faulkner too, that men of letters were nincompoops.² Phil Stone, born in 1893, was successfully disguised within Southern society as a nineteenth-century country lawyer — until the twentieth century finally occupied Oxford, Mississippi, exposing his life and values as anachronisms. William Faulkner, born less than five years later, in 1897, never belonged in the same way to the Victorian South he interpreted for the twentieth century. But world acclaim became his, and money, after a life's fidelity to a most unorthodox "profession."

Interestingly enough, however, Faulkner had made one concession to convention. In his mature fiction men of the writing trade are noticeably absent. There in fact the rebel did adopt the conventional mask for the practice of Southern literature. In Yoknapatawpha it is often in characters of Phil Stone's profession that artist William Faulkner's reflections appear. And because Faulkner appropriated Stone's "cover" for word-men like Horace

2. See Phil Stone (hereafter PS), "William Faulkner and His Neighbors," *Saturday Review*, 19 Sept. 1942, p. 12; PS, "William Faulkner: The Man and His Work," *The Oxford Magazine*, 1 (April, June, Nov. 1934), reprinted in James B. Meriwether, "Early Notices of Faulkner by Phil Stone and Louis Cochran," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 17 (Winter 1964), 150, 162-63.

Benbow and Gavin Stevens, we might do well to investigate his acquaintance with the legal profession as Stone knew it and the parallel fortunes of the lawyer and his most famous client. Perhaps by the end you will agree with me that it does matter that Faulkner's lifelong friend, mentor, and character study was also a lawyer and that in this way too Yoknapatawpha would have been a different place indeed had there been no Phil Stone.

In the summer of 1914; when Phil Stone returned from Yale College enamored of modern literature, he discovered a fellow enthusiast, to his great surprise, in the sixteen-year-old Falkner boy he knew vaguely from church and around the square. By autumn, when, at his father's insistence, Stone enrolled in the law department of the University of Mississippi, Billy Falkner's tutorial was well underway. The sometime eleventh-grader had begun to devour the books Stone had bought in New Haven, study the new verse appearing in his friend's copies of *Poetry* and *The Little Review*, and listen as Phil recited long passages in classical Greek or simulated the incantory lyrics of William Butler Yeats (a spring lecturer at New Haven).³ Meanwhile, the fledgling poet suffered no small discomfiture, for the Yale man, while admiring the boy's "obvious" talent, ridiculed Faulkner's punctuation and exposed his ignorance of the illustrious company to which he aspired.

Neither Phil Stone nor William Faulkner, however, was so ignorant of the profession for which Stone was in training. Oxford, then as now, was almost overrun with lawyers. Besides the complement of attorneys generally attracted to a county seat, the Lafayette County Bar divided the business of the Northern District's federal court, which convened there. Moreover, because a main artery of the Illinois Central Railroad ran then from Chicago to New Orleans through Oxford, litigation flourished, and fees were plentiful. By some accounts, Phil's father and brother enjoyed the "best practice in the area," principally as retainers for the railroads and the utilities ("If you got one, you got them all," a lawyer of Phil's generation remarked).⁴ According to a contemporary *Oxford Eagle* article, however, "the firm of Falkner, Russell, and Falkner . . . handle[d] by far the largest business" in town in 1913.⁵ Unlike the Stones, though, Bill's grandfather and uncle, the J. W. T. Falkners senior and junior, often did not

3. PS and W. M. Reed, "I Know William Faulkner," *Oxford Eagle*, 16 Nov. 1950; PS to Richard P. Adams, 4 Oct. 1961, L.D. Brodsky private collection; *Yale Daily News*, 17 March 1914.

4. Interview with Robert Farley, Oxford, Miss., Feb. 1976.

5. As quoted in Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1974), I, 159. Unless otherwise noted, Faulkner family details derive from Blotner's biography.

participate in their firm's cases. The partnership's "most active member," according to the newspaper, was the country upstart (and Snopes study) Lee M. Russell. The senior partner, a man in his mid-sixties, had all but retired; he would be dead by 1922. Faulkner's Uncle John, just fifteen years older than his nephew, practiced only intermittently.⁶ He came late to the profession and would find his main employment in minor appointive positions, or in elective posts, for which, despite his father's influence, he often campaigned in vain. According to Phil Stone, John Falkner would loudly disparage the "tripe" his nephew wrote; it was he who called William the family's black sheep. In a rather suspect story Faulkner claimed to have absorbed as a boy "a bit about the law," especially "Roman law," from browsing in the books his uncle assembled to study for the bar examination.⁷ Yet it was widely believed in town that "Judge" Falkner himself knew nothing about the law. I remain skeptical whether John Falkner in any guise contributed to his nephew's legal "education."

The writer was more evidently respectful of his grandfather, the "Young Colonel," and his grandfather's chief rival in Oxford, Phil's father, "General" James Stone. The men seem both to have sat for Faulkner's portrait of Old Bayard Sartoris, and Jason Compson III and Judge Stevens and Will Benbow, for the two patriarchs were representative specimens of the last "aristocratic" generation "bred for" the law actually to wield considerable economic and civic power. Faulkner's great grandfather, the "Old Colonel," William Clark Falkner, had been a lawyer, a journalist, a soldier, a planter, a legislator, founder of a railroad, a gristmill, a lumber company — and a best-selling author. J. W. T. Falkner and James Stone, by those standards somewhat lesser men, nevertheless for most of a decade largely controlled the economy of the county as presidents and major stockholders of First National Bank and the Bank of Oxford. There was scarcely a business venture in which one or the other did not take part. Falkner was also a state senator and university trustee; James Stone, whose father had been a Batesville planter, also owned farms and thousands of acres of virgin timber in Panola and Tallahatchie Counties.

By the time that William Faulkner was old enough to know them, of those two "fathers" James Stone was the much more active, and accomplished, attorney. With his military school bear-

6. See Meriwether, "Early Notices," p. 157. Because of Falkner's political ties to the disreputable Russell and Theodore G. Bilbo, his practice, at times, was extensive; still, that influence seems more often to have brought him political sinecures.

7. Blotner, 123.

ing, a six-foot-four-inch frame, his snow-white hair, and dark blue eyes, Phil's father easily manipulated Lafayette County witnesses and jurymen. Despite his notorious facility for "cussin'," it was said too that in court he "looked like a saint and spoke like a Baptist preacher." One adversary had become so frustrated that he complained to the bench, "Your Honor, I could win this case, but I can't win it against that affidavit countenance of Jim Stone."⁸ Those who saw the legendary "jury attorney" astride his big Tennessee Walker, even as a man of sixty and seventy, understood why among a town full of colonels he was addressed as General Stone.

Phil Stone and his older brother "Jack" (William Evans Stone IV) were being groomed as heirs apparent to their father's near-feudal authority in North Mississippi. J. W. T. Falkner's sons John and Murry Cuthbert, Bill's father, were proving less malleable to family tradition (as was General Stone's middle son and namesake Jim). Murry Falkner's oldest son, William, seemed keenly aware of the power his father had abdicated, or was unfit for, but after the grandfather's abortive attempt to make a banker out of Billy in the late teens, William accepted the place he was assigned among the mere mortals of his family and class. He knew that his friend Phil Stone, like Horace Benbow, "had no particular affinity to [the law] other than a love for printed words, for the dwelling-places of books,"⁹ but it soon was evident too that, unlike the titans who preceded them, his own talent — and perhaps Phil's — was not to do but to say.

But from their first summer, thanks to Phil Stone, Faulkner was poised to observe the phenomenon of the small town Southern lawyer at the moment when power passed or was supposed to pass from father to son.

The nineteenth century permeated the setting that furnished a central rendezvous for Stone and Faulkner and their friends from 1914 until the late 1920s. Early in James Stone's Oxford career (he had had a smaller but thriving Delta practice), Phil's father had rented an office overlooking the courthouse square. But after Clarence Sivley became his partner in 1903, the firm had bought the antebellum offices on Jackson Avenue just off the square from which Stones were to practice law for sixty years. Lawyers have occupied those quarters continuously since 1861. Behind the eighteen-inch brick walls, Nathan Bedford Forrest had founded the Mississippi chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, General Stone told

8. Robert Farley.

9. William Faulkner, *Flags In The Dust* (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 156.

Phil. United States Senator and Supreme Court Justice L. Q. C. Lamar had practiced law there, Stone said, and also Judge James C. Longstreet. Even with renovations made by Freeland and Gafford, Phil Stone's former partners and the building's current occupants, the exterior has remained virtually unchanged since the turn of the century, when the small, turret-like "sun" room was added. Stone and Sivley had purchased the office for \$4,500 from a former state senator (whose "ex" status was so familiar to the county that one local man named his son "Ex Senator Sullivan"). Investing almost another \$5,000, the partners had had the interior redecorated in 1905, and on the canvas ceiling Jack Stone supervised the painting of a large floral border enclosing (Masonic?) symbols and the facsimile signatures of former tenants and Stone's legal associates, which has been retained to this day. Still in the office yard too is the white stone called the "upping block," used by Phil's father when he mounted his white stallion. "This block originally belonged to the old Methodist Church" across the street from the office, for the use of churchgoers "when the streets were muddy."¹⁰ Into the 1930s a black man named Mulberry, who had been a federal marshal during Reconstruction, was the "janitor" there. Long after automobiles were common in Oxford, Mulberry would catch the Tennessee Walker from the pasture in back where he grazed all day, saddle, and bring the horse around to the upping block for General Stone to mount to go home to dinner.

In that world of antiquities, where time seems to have stopped, it is small wonder that Stone and Faulkner were to be suspended in a prolonged adolescence. With their mutual literary obsession neither gave much attention to his formal schooling during Stone's two years of law school at Ole Miss. Faulkner was twice enrolled in the final grade at Oxford High, with the classes of 1915 and 1916, but by late fall in the second year, after football season, he returned no more.¹¹ For Stone, too, academic affairs were a minor consideration: as his year book epithet reads, "Phil Stone, LL.B., 'Still treads upon the heels of pleasure.'" At Ole Miss he played "poker all night," "learning [his] lessons [when he] was not in the pot."¹² He would have been expelled for his nocturnal pastime, he claimed, if he "hadn't made such good grades."

10. Philip Alston Stone, unsigned article for the Ninetieth Anniversary issue, *The Oxford Eagle*, 22 Aug. 1957.

11. Blotner, 164-67.

12. PS, "Autobiography," unpublished essay written at the state mental institution, 1963.

Although bored by simply reading the law books and giving back the answers, he would be graduated "with distinction."

The Mississippi law faculty consisted of three men rather short on advanced degrees, whose experience in private practice had been supplemented by an assortment of minor legislative or state judicial posts. Attorneys from town also "lectured" at the old Geology building on campus that housed the small law school. (For Phil Stone, far more stimulating hours were spent with the folk historians and raconteurs from out in the county with whom he played his nightly poker.) At school Phil Stone preferred to avoid competition, confident of his place among the "bright boys" of his class. During Moot Court in 1915, Class Poet Stone was murdered "in cold blood" by John Cutrer; a law brief presumably was not required of a corpse. Many of his campus activities were even sillier, such as founding a Bachelor's Club and allowing the senior law students to shave his nearly bald head in the ritual freshmen shearing on Lee's birthday. It was bad form to take law school too seriously.

Even after acquiring law degrees, few of Stone's set, however, went immediately to work. Jim Kyle Hudson, who finished school three years before Phil, was slower than he to practice in earnest.¹³ For six months Hudson went "prospecting" in the mountains of Honduras on the excuse that he was going into the mahogany business, a statement that fooled no one. Stone and Faulkner knew that he was merely "having a lot of fun and doing some hunting." Back in Mississippi, Hudson "called himself practicing law" in Clarksdale for a time, where he defended an illiterate murderer who would say only that his name was "Moonman." Never able to identify the lunatic, the public defender pleaded him guilty on an insanity plea and, under the name of "Moonman," got the man committed.

More often, Jim Kyle Hudson was in Oxford, where just before and after the first war, "Hudson," "Stone," and William Faulkner usually practiced idleness together. (Faulkner's addressing his friends by their surnames was one of "Count William's" British affectations.)¹⁴ Although Phil now abjured the hunt, Hudson and Faulkner still joined General Stone's annual bear hunts in the Tallahatchie canebrakes, whence Hudson once or twice returned in a chauffeur-driven limousine he had bought in Memphis with the camp's poker pots. When the money ran out, a few weeks

13. Interview with Jim Kyle Hudson, Jr., Memphis, Tenn., 16 May 1978. The Hudson anecdotes are from this source.

14. Robert Farley.

later, Hudson would “sell the car, fire the chauffeur, and go back to practicing law.” In Stone’s circle one was assured of bed and board at home long after formal schooling had ended; the rare parental remonstrance was merely cherished for its humor.

Stone too managed to postpone going to work after graduation, by convincing his father to finance his second bachelor’s degree in law, at Yale. In autumn 1916 he bid William Faulkner and Oxford adieu and returned to New England. For two years there Phil was free again to refine his own aesthetic education (and book collection) among the young poets and professors of Yale’s “Literary Renaissance”¹⁵ — while becoming at the same time a proper student of the law. The entrance committee allowed Stone a year’s credit for his work at Ole Miss, but he was at once impressed by the difference in instruction; he smiled at the thought of putting his former professors “up against” Yale exams, “the fiercest I ever lay my eyes upon,” as he wrote his mother after his first year. Having to read heavy loads in his casebooks curtailed Stone’s cultivation of literature, but not significantly. He continued to follow modern poetry, reading recent work by Amy Lowell and Wallace Stevens in an anthology he inscribed in 1916. Outside the classroom, too, he was drawn more often to literary discussions than to arguments about abstruse points of law. His friends at the Brick Row Book and Print Shop were probably responsible for his introduction to Carl P. Rollins, Printer for the Yale University Press for fifty years.¹⁶ While Rollins knew little contemporary literature, in his company Phil read and admired the lineaments of a bibliophile, a more attractive role model to Stone than law professors like stolid William Howard Taft.¹⁷

The European war, however, was a compelling distraction from Stone’s studies. Phil tried for a commission in the summer of 1917, only to be sent back to Yale in the Judge Advocate General’s reserve. Bill Faulkner was similarly stymied, his parents at first refusing him permission to enlist before his twenty-first birthday. By Christmas 1917 the last two civilians in Oxford knew themselves to be pariahs. Thus, the Great War — and Estelle

15. George Wilson Pierson, *Yale College: An Educational History, 1871-1921*. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 346, 361; Brooks Mather Kelley, *Yale: A History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 312.

16. Pierson, p. 364; Carl Purlington Rollins, “Fifty Years of Work and Play with Type,” *Yale University Library Gazette*, (July 1948), pp. 19-24; Rollins to PS, 14 Oct. 1931, and PS to Rollins, 17 Oct. 1931. Humanities Research Center, Univ. of Texas at Austin (hereafter HRC).

17. PS to James Stone, Sr., n.d. (probably early 1918), with Taft’s card and note for his brother Henry: “Phil Stone is one of my best students in the Law School. He has a question of his own under the draft act. Help him out. WHT.” The respect was not mutual; Taft, Stone reiterated, “was dull as hell.”

Oldham's marriage¹⁸ — gave William Faulkner his first look at the Ivy League, as, from Stone's rooming house in New Haven for three months in the spring of 1918, he and Phil concocted outrageous but vain schemes to get posted to the Western front. Meanwhile, the Southerners joined Mr. Rollins, the Brick Row men, and Phil's law classmate Hubert Starr in "bull sessions" on Swinburne and company at restaurants about the city and in Stone's sitting room on York Street.¹⁹

In whatever time remained, Faulkner's host must have sat glued to his desk, typing, for example, "Suretyship notes for review," because Phil Stone completed most of the regular three-year law course, in two years, by taking thirty-four hours in the 1917-1918 term. A normal senior load was twenty. His grades, accordingly, were mixed, from a fifty-five in Office Practice to A's in Taft's Constitutional Law and a course in Private Corporations. Stone later said that he had ranked fifth in his Yale law class, but by June Commencement the war class of 1918 numbered a mere twenty students. Herb Starr of the Yale Law School would become a wealthy Hollywood attorney;²⁰ Karl N. Llewellyn, also of the class of 1918, would become the distinguished legal scholar responsible for the Uniform Commercial Code.²¹ Phil Stone was to employ his expensive education in a country law practice — when he was not full-time gadfly to first the poet, then the novelist William Faulkner.

With the diversion of the Great War behind them, and no patrons forthcoming to set them up in the profession of letters, twenty-five-year-old Phil Stone and twenty-one-year-old Bill Faulkner had returned, like errant boys, to their fathers' houses in Oxford in late 1918. Faulkner, having no desire to resume his banking "career," checked any further family interference with his creative leisure by entering Ole Miss in September 1919. Phil, on the other hand, already had four degrees; not even he could have mentioned school to General Stone again. Consequently, as Faulkner, under Stone's tutelage, put himself as senior apprentice to the English poets, he attended, with great amusement, his friend's inglorious

18. PS did not mention Oldham in his autobiographical account of their wartime chicanery. The connection for Faulkner and Stone's motives for inviting Faulkner to New Haven are a matter of controversy. See Blotner, 196-97, but there is no corroboration for the version among the Stone papers, nor among PS's extensive 1950s correspondence with one Blotner source, *Life* reporter Robert Coughlan. Perhaps the matter was too sensitive to be mentioned in print.

19. PS to William Faulkner, 10 April 1953, and PS to Rollins, 4 March 1959, Brodsky collection.

20. Starr was a lifelong Stone correspondent; Blotner, 776, mistakes the origins of the Starr-Faulkner friendship, but see too Blotner, 851, 1169.

21. There is only one extant Llewellyn letter (1947) among Stone's papers, but they saw one another at ABA conventions.

debut in James Stone & Sons: Phil Stone, like Horace Benbow, "ha[d] spent so much time being educated that he never ha[d] learned anything."²² But it was true. As he was introduced to the bar at the Charleston courthouse in the spring of 1919, Stone discovered that he really knew nothing about trying a lawsuit; nor had he reckoned on his panic at the prospect of a courtroom speech.

Oddly, though he labored all his life to make himself over in the image of his father, talkative Phil Stone was never the "natural" advocate that General Stone was. "Ordinary country practice" was to hold little interest for him, aside from cases involving a "novel point of law." He would earn a reputation as a great appellate attorney,²³ for he was a "perfectionist" in preparing his briefs and "tenacious" in support of a client.²⁴ One chancery judge contends that Stone would have made an excellent law professor; but, though noting the warmth and grace of Phil's mature courtroom personality, the chancellor questions whether, as his wife, for one, has suggested, Stone was actually of "a judicial temperament," for he was quick to make up his mind and more than a little impatient with the common man. Chancery witnesses too often turned to the bench for a translation as attorney Stone delivered a circuitous or ambiguous question. Laymen like druggist Mack Reed, however, seeing Stone in action in federal court in his prime, came away convinced of his "brilliance": "If a point of law arose, I could close my eyes and ears and know for a certainty that Phil would graciously and deferentially supply the answer to the judge, citing case after case."²⁵ Such poise was not a natural endowment; in the first of his forty-three years in court, Stone was shy and nervous. His relish for arcane appellate contests was also an acquired taste.

The lawyer in whose shadow William Faulkner was comfortably invisible (though watchful) during the next ten years, was another Phil Stone, a man in name, accouterments, and perquisite a lawyer, but one far too much fascinated by the life about him and the art that could be made of it to settle down to the tedium of wills and abstracts. For his friend's fictional purposes the lawyer's context, the legal flavor, was probably enough; Faulkner's business, after all, was not transcription, but transmutation.

During the three years that Phil Stone supposedly practiced with

22. Quoted in A. Wigfall Green, "William Faulkner at Home," *Sewanee Review*, 40 (1932), 300.

23. Robert Farley; T.H. Freeland III to Susan Snell, 26 July 1976.

24. Interview with Chancellor W.H. Anderson, Ripley, Miss., 14 July 1976.

25. Interview W.M. Reed, Oxford, Miss., 15 Aug. 1975.

his brother in the Delta, his inveterate companion was witness there to a more complete spectrum of the South's complex and often contradictory social hierarchy, a class structure seemingly immutable to both the postwar boom and bust. The land, however, was not so unaffected, as William Faulkner also noted, and mourned.

The Stones had opened a law office in Charleston, in 1916, to accommodate one of the Northern timber executives whose companies were then moving in force into the Delta. Lamb-Fish Lumber, Charleston's principal employer and landlord, operated there "the largest hardwood mill in the world."²⁶ The Jack Stones and Phil, and sometimes Bill Faulkner, often ate supper at Lafisco, the company's two-story stucco hotel. Lamb-Fish executives and the Delta aristocracy played golf on the company's nine-hole course behind "Milltown," where Faulkner also developed his "strong wrists." As Phil Stone's clients were "coming in the front door" at the Charleston office, he later confessed, he would be "going out the back — with [his] clubs." During the halcyon days of 1919, lumber magnate Garret E. Lamb of Clinton, Iowa, was on hand to open a half-million-dollar wood products factory. It was designed so that the company might double its output without enlarging the original physical plant.²⁷ Apparently Lamb-Fish thought to be in business for years.

But as with the collapsing cotton market the Great Depression premiered in Mississippi in 1920,²⁸ the Lamb-Fish management was soon in bankruptcy proceedings, during which the court appointed Jack Stone and Frank Kelly of Chicago as receivers. Phil Stone and William Faulkner made themselves available as "drinking companion[s]" to those court officials, in return sharing their generous expense accounts and Memphis hotel suites (Faulkner, who had no Spanish, volunteered as well, he claimed, to serve as interpreter for a scheduled Cuban junket).²⁹ From Chicago, receiver Jack Stone returned with furs and barrels of Haviland china and crystal; he and his wife Myrtle bought a summer house in Pascagoula, and employed a chauffeur, cooks, and nurses for the children. Their standard of living could be maintained for a

26. Bryce House, "\$500,000 Factory Begins Operating," news clipping (dateline Charleston), 7 Sept. 1919, Special Collections, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University. Charleston details are supplemented by interviews with W.E. Stone V, Meridian, Miss., 10 Aug. 1975; Mrs. A.S. Scott, Jr., in Laurel, Miss., 9 Aug. 1975; and Philip Thornton, Jr., Charleston, Miss., 16 March 1976.

27. House, n.p.

28. William Lincoln Giles, "Agricultural Revolution, 1890-1970," in *A History of Mississippi*, gen. ed. Richard Aubrey McLemore, 2 (Hattiesburg: Univ. and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 197.

29. Blotner, note to 292.

while yet upon fees earned in liquidating companies; Jack was not often engaged in his other specialty, incorporating new businesses. Ominously too, by 1925 the Charleston firm represented Turner-Farber-Love, Lamb-Fish's successor, a company based in Leland, Mississippi, sixty miles deeper into the Delta.³⁰

The newest attorney at James Stone & Sons, of course, was given less glamorous assignments, working on the naturalization papers of the local Chinese, for example, or negotiating a claim made against the firm's long time "black" clients, the mulatto Boles brothers (their dignified bearing and presence — and almost white skin — sometimes affronted Caucasian customers). Cliff Boles owned a shoe repair shop in Charleston; his brother Rob, a similar establishment across the alley from the Stones' Oxford offices.

The typing Phil Stone more usually requested of Gertrude Stegbauer (or of the Oxford secretary) consisted, however, of the new poems with which Stone and Faulkner now regularly besieged the Eastern editors.³¹ One version of "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faune" was "typed . . . on the back of a sheet of stationery marked 'The First National Bank of Oxford . . . J. W. T. Falkner, Pres.'"³² (Someone, Faulkner perhaps, had scruples about James Stone & Sons' supplying typist, typewriter, and paper too. They rarely made such distinctions later.) So many Faulkner poems had been returned to Oxford "post haste" that the two friends were astounded when in the summer of 1919 *The New Republic* not only accepted Faulkner's "French" poem, but actually "paid fifteen whole dollars for it." "Bill and I," Stone said, "felt like the lucky country boy at his first crap game: How long has this been going on?" But three years were to elapse before they placed another poem, and thereafter Faulkner would lose, not make money until he turned from poetry to prose.

That same summer Phil Stone too had earned his first professional wages, as associate to a Memphis attorney in an expensive lawsuit that went all the way to the state supreme court. Through "sheer drudgery" the junior associate had located, among thousands, the single cancelled check on which their case turned, and the victorious attorneys split a sizeable fee. Like Jim Kyle Hudson, Stone thought immediately of a car, and he had no sooner accumulated the requisite capital than he bought the

30. Dunbar Rowland, *History of Mississippi: The Heart of the South*, 3 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke, 1925), 170.

31. PS to Harrison Smith, 11 June 1959, reprinted in *Saturday Review*, 27 June 1959.

32. Blotner, 246.

coupe with its white wire wheels. According to Faulkner later, there was "never any question of mine and thine" in their friendship,³³ and "Drusilla," as they called the automobile, evidently belonged to both men. Removing all but the seat, Faulkner often packed Stone's books into the rear for his day's reading out in the country. On the weekends, especially after Faulkner quit the university in autumn 1920, the Oxford bachelors were continually in motion.

In Memphis after picking up their whiskey order from fellow Oxonian "Doc" Lott, a barbershop shoeblack, the visitors might look in on the transplanted Mississippi aristocrats who dominated the city's Anglo-Saxon society. In 1919, for example, they attended a houseparty given by the daughters of R. P. Lake, originally of Grenada, a wealthy insurance executive who at sixteen had ridden with Phil's grandfather in Forrest's cavalry.³⁴ After leaving the ladies at South McLean, however, they might stop for a beer with their friend Mary Sharon, a Swedish madam, "fat and flamboyant," whom they had met through the professional gamblers in whose company Stone now played his poker. On other nights the Oxonians frequented the "New World" bawdy district in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where the gamblers and their women had removed to prey upon the new Delta cotton millionaires. By the autumn of 1921 Stone and Faulkner were both sworn to defend the Constitution and the laws of these United States — Stone for two years was assistant district attorney; Faulkner for three years, the university postmaster. Nevertheless, as they joked, "What's the Constitution among friends?" Their attitude reflected more than the well-worn Prohibition joke; for, as confirmed students of character, they were intrigued by the mores and the unwritten "codes" of that illicit subculture, the only place, ironically, where their own talents were met with gratifying respect. Three gaming establishments in Memphis had asked attorney Stone to play for the house, he said, pleased at the compliment. His younger friend's narrative skills — that is, when released by two quarts of Johnnie Walker — were in great demand at Mary Sharon's and in the "New World."³⁵ Prostitute Dorothy "Ware" and "her man," the gambler Lee Brown, urged Stone not to let a recent party bill deter him from a game for which Brown, "T. B.," and Reno De Vaux were planning in the spring of 1922: "So . . . don't disap-

33. William Faulkner to Robert K. Haas, (c. 22 March 1939), in Joseph Blotner, ed., *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 111.

34. W.E. Stone V to Susan Snell, 31 July 1982.

35. PS to Al DeLacey, 18 Feb. 1922, HRC.

point us Dorothy said you don't owe her anything. But be sure and come over and bring the Poet."³⁶ The lawyer and the poet could not make that party, but they did stop at Reno's Cafe in Clarksdale later that spring, when Stone had court in nearby Sumner.

When Stone had moved back home in January of that year, his change of address piqued the curiosity of his New Haven book dealer: "What does your return to Oxford signify? Hope it means you have made enough money in your short term as assistant prosecuting attorney to retire for life and buy all the books you want."³⁷ In reality, though Stone did not know it, the minor bank business inspiring General Stone's summons to him would within a decade result in Phil's virtual retirement not from law but from literature.

Until Faulkner himself left Oxford for New Orleans and Europe in 1925, however, he and Stone were engaged in a feverish round of literature. At first their scheme was to issue Faulkner poems in "pamphlets," heralded by Stone's "open letter" to the Memphis papers prophesying that with poet Faulkner the South was to succeed the Midwest as the center of modern American letters.³⁸ The campaigns of Phil Stone were usually studied and undaunted affairs, and in this dress rehearsal for the promotion of *The Marble Faun*, it seems that Stone obtained promises of publicity from local reviewers and the New Haven bookshop, and made preliminary contacts with the *Double Dealer* circle and with Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Edwin Arlington Robinson.³⁹ The ambitious novices must at last have confronted the manifold difficulties of "publishing" their small edition by means of the typing pool at James Stone & Sons; at any rate, the design to introduce the Oxford poet in 1922 did not mature. The cessation of that activity, however, had not returned Phil Stone to the practice of law. Instead, Stone, Faulkner, and another legal secretary, Bessie Storer, began a comprehensive survey of the dimensions of prose. Stone ordered the year's novels, Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*, and Melville's *Moby Dick* from New Haven in 1922,⁴⁰ and the trio of Stone, Faulkner, and Storer convened nightly to read Balzac aloud together.⁴¹ Stone directed their reading with an informal seminar on his favorite aesthete Willard Hunt-

36. Lee Brown to PS, 3 Feb. 1922, HRC.

37. Al DeLacey to PS, 27 Jan. 1922, HRC.

38. PS to William Faulkner, 10 Jan. 1922, and PS to Brick Row, 18 Feb. 1922, HRC.

39. PS to Van Kincannon, Jr., 10 Jan. 1922, HRC; PS to Al DeLacey, 18 Feb. 1922, HRC; E. A. Robinson to PS, 7 March 1922, William Boozer private collection.

40. PS's extant Brick Row orders, HRC.

41. O. B. Emerson to PS, 23 Oct. 1956, Brodsky collection.

ingdon Wright, for whom Honore de Balzac was the master fictional architect.⁴² Yet for some reason that period too had no immediate tangible issue. Late in 1922 Faulkner was working simultaneously on a novel and a volume of poems.⁴³ But in the next year, when they determined it imperative that he get something published if they were to continue, Stone and Faulkner agreed that the poems might more readily attract an Eastern publisher.

After a false start in the summer of 1923, negotiations with Four Seas Publishing Company of Boston began with Phil Stone's letter, on the office stationery, dated May 13, 1924.⁴⁴ "We have a manuscript of poems by a young man whom I consider to have a great deal of talent," the attorney opened. He asked whether Four Seas might publish the verse if he "personally put up publication costs in advance." It is almost impossible to overstate Stone's role in the publication of *The Marble Faun*. The money, the \$400 Phil seems only to have loaned Bill Faulkner, is certainly the least of it. Assuming three-quarters of the correspondence, he also supplied the title, a preface, perused the contracts, corrected proof, coerced a reluctant author to sit for publicity photographs, and then himself ordered and peddled seventy-five copies of Faulkner's first book. But it was as publicist that he was indefatigable. Stone's letters brimmed with promotional gimmicks. Circulars must have attached subscription blanks. That Faulkner was a Mississippian must be exploited. After abandoning his original idea to write a personal letter to every name on the mailing lists, Stone enclosed a note in longhand for Four Seas to reproduce—exactly—for distribution to those persons scheduled for direct mail. He ordered two hundred brochures to enclose in his own firm's business correspondence. The sixteen legal-sized pages of their "daily"-revised mailing lists soon exhausted Faulkner and Stone's acquaintances as well as the clientele and political connections of the Stone law firm. The Jackson names were hardly less than a registry of government officials, from Governor Whitfield to the state and federal prohibition agents. (Postal Inspector Mark Webster was to be notified, but therein lies another story. During the half-year in which Stone almost took leave of his practice to serve the Muse, he did take one new case, that of postal employee William Faulkner. Earlier that fall Stone had expended some of his political

42. Willard Huntingdon Wright, *The Creative Will: Studies in the Philosophy and the Syntax of Aesthetics* (New York: John Lane, 1916), p. 45; Meriwether, "Early Notices," p. 141; see Blotner, *Faulkner*, 320.

43. Polly Clark to PS, 7 Dec. 1922, HRC.

44. *The Marble Faun* correspondence among Stone's papers is now in the HRC.

capital to halt the firing of the reprehensible postmaster, who had been allowed gracefully to resign.) Phil Stone would sell copies of *The Marble Faun* for the rest of his life — certainly as late as 1958 — but the book was not even out before he tried to secure a contract for Faulkner's next volume, a book of travel essays, with which Stone believed he could finance a "sabbatical" abroad for his talented friend. And before summer 1925 he had begun, too, a folder of letters of introduction for expatriate Faulkner, to T. S. Eliot, Arnold Bennett, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley,⁴⁵ everyone, that is, who should be able to join an obscure but prescient country lawyer in recognizing a major talent at its birth.

Stone's plan to prime American recognition for Faulkner from Europe, in the manner devised by Robert Frost, indirectly resulted in Sherwood Anderson's invaluable assistance to Faulkner's career, but the New Orleans, European, and Gulf Coast sojourns also were to effect subtle changes in the Stone-Faulkner friendship, now in its second decade. At Faulkner's departure in January 1925, he left Stone with his power of attorney, to attend to his local affairs and to continue direction of *The Marble Faun* reviews and sales. They maintained a fragmentary correspondence during Faulkner's absences (letters, postcards, and telegrams since burned in the Stone house fire), and Phil was regularly briefed on the progress of Faulkner's writing. After one prolonged silence, however, he had to wire the French Quarter resident, "WHAT'S THE MATTER? DO YOU HAVE A MISTRESS?" "YES," the reply came, "AND SHES 30,000 WORDS LONG."

Within months Phil Stone was to hear the completed *Soldiers' Pay* manuscript, as read to him by "the world's worst reader," according to Stone.⁴⁶ But the lawyer's principal contributions to that novel, as to *Mosquitoes*, would be editing and proofreading after the fact. Nevertheless, their common experience, even in the New Orleans story, strongly colors both finished narratives, especially in incidental details: the "Charlestown" of the former, for example, and the Genevieve ("Jenny") Steinbauer of the latter, to mention only minor examples.

Phil Stone had once relished puncturing the fictional autobiographies with which traveler Faulkner supplied gullible new acquaintances; but as he saw less of his inventive friend, it was becoming harder even for Stone to separate the real from the fanciful. And in the playful allusions to Yale men in *Mos-*

45. Copies of these letters apparently burned with the Stone house, as did the single reply, from Eliot.

46. PS to Carvel Collins, 16 Aug. 1954, and to James Meriwether, 7 July 1960. Brodsky collection.

quitoes,⁴⁷ or, more seriously, in its pronounced skepticism about men of words rather than deeds, it is clear that garrulous Phil Stone, once aligned with the poet, observing in company with him the passing show, by the second novel had joined Sherwood Anderson and the rest of the world as object. It is true that in the pervasive, "endless talk"⁴⁸ of *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner's subject was the possible sterility of his own profession. The fascination with words, he may have suspected, might perhaps be a common disorder. But this was not the last time Faulkner was to disguise his own ideas within personalities more closely akin to Phil Stone's; however, the next incarnations would not be artists but attorneys.

In Faulkner's absences, when not attending to local publicity for the novels or to manuscript preparation, Stone found other men to accompany him to Clarksdale, shared his theories of Mississippi politics with the courthouse vagrants, and escorted a covey of much younger women to the drugstore fountain for afternoon Cokes.⁴⁹ He was more than disenchanted with the practice of law.

In the spring of 1927, the year Phil Stone seriously considered abandoning the law to become a professional gambler, he sat down at one of the long law tables in the office to compose a publicity notice for *Mosquitoes*. Mentioning no more than the title, he continued with an announcement of Faulkner's two newest novels: "Both are Southern in setting. One is something of a saga of an extensive family connection of typical 'poor white trash' and is said by those who have seen that part of the manuscript completed [that is, Phil Stone] to be the funniest book anybody ever wrote. The other is a tale of the aristocratic, chivalrous and ill-fated Sartoris family, one of whom was even too reckless for the daring Confederate cavalry leader Jeb Stuart."⁵⁰

Phil Stone, to whom literature and politics were nectar and ambrosia, was never so enthusiastic about a Faulkner project as he was about the Snopeses; for, even more than in *Sartoris* or *Sanctuary*, to which he contributed incidents and phrases, with the Snopes clan Stone could experience, if fleetingly, the satisfaction of creation. The idea was his; after William Faulkner, Stone's great compulsion was as self-appointed commentator on the decline of his class and, as he wrote, their displacement in "what the linger-

47. William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes* (1927; rpt. New York: Liveright, 1955), p. 210.

48. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 521.

49. Calvin S. Brown, Jr., "Billy Faulkner, My Boyhood Friend," in *William Faulkner of Oxford*, eds. James W. Webb and A. Wigfall Green (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1965), p. 43.

50. Unsigned, undated sheet among Stone papers, HRC.

ing few of the old ante-bellum ladies still refer to with calm and cultured scorn, as the 'Rise of the Redneck.'"⁵¹ "The Snopes business," he wrote in 1962, "was actually generated around 1924 and 1925."⁵² Having begun as anecdote during their walks together on Woodson Ridge, the Snopes chronicles, like other sagas, would live in the spoken word (Stone's medium) for a time before being confined to print. Stone was instinctively a preserver, and, until he was almost forty, enjoyed the leisure of an 1890s maiden aunt to indulge his historical curiosity by listening to his father's generation of lawyers and by turning over old papers in the antebellum law office. Instead of entertaining other people's children with such tales — he did some of that too — he unconsciously provided a convenient storehouse for Faulkner, out of which came some of the materials for *Flags in the Dust*, the Sartoris book on which Faulkner began soon after the Snopes fragment *Father Abraham*. (Stone, of course, was merely one source; the attentive listener managed to assimilate almost the collective lore of the town.) But besides his historical curiosity, Phil Stone, who lived (as the spinster often did not) in the present too, found there a more engaging study than "before the wa'." Just as Stone as a child had fought "new" Civil War battles, his imagination delighted in representing the class of Vardaman, Bilbo, and Lee M. Russell in fictional situations. Those afternoons of play, however, would have been as ephemeral as the earlier ones had not Faulkner, fascinated himself, joined the game. It is the seminal distinction between the two friends that Faulkner and not Stone gave those creatures the name *Snopes*. Phil could not remember at what stage that had occurred, only that the "name had no connection with the [Scopes] trial."⁵³ In an area where children of the lower classes are named "Ex Senator" and the gentry nickname their wives "Lump" (for "Lump of Sugar"), it was a challenge to christen the clan. Stone subsequently supplied "Admiral Dewey" and "Wallstreet Panic Snopes," he said.

The satisfaction in the conception, it seems, was in "out-heroding Herod," but while Stone had a youthful weakness for pranks, the antics of the characters they laughed at together for forty years were generally black farce, the portrait of a world usurped by gnomes and freaks. The "real revolution in the South was not the race situation," Stone told Faulkner, "but the rise of the redneck

51. Meriwether, "Early Notices," p. 152.

52. PS to Elizabeth Y. Grosch, 19 July 1962, Brodsky collection.

53. PS to James B. Meriwether, 19 Feb. 1957, Brodsky collection.

. . . to places of power and wealth." That class had none of "the scruples of the old aristocracy," which assured them the victory.⁵⁴ Educated himself to assume the responsibilities of his class, Stone would have relished power, as perhaps Faulkner would not. And yet, nearly ten years after his formal education had ended, Phil Stone still played at literature and small-time politics, while James Stone, a vigorous seventy-three, ran the Oxford law office, having placed his proxy Frontis Linker in the president's chair at the Bank of Oxford. By the time Stone's father died, the money necessary for power was evaporated, even if Phil had been capable of action. As a child, his own son Philip would be incredulous that Stone could sit laughing over Theodore Bilbo's skulduggery, too young to sense the impotence of that sardonic mirth. Like a child, however, with Bill Faulkner's characters Phil Stone might manipulate a world — but only so long as Faulkner tolerated such manipulation.

When the Sartoris "history" lured Faulkner from the Snopes saga, at least for a time, Stone embraced with glee the new task of populating Yoknapatawpha County with their kinsmen and compatriots. *Flags in the Dust*, he said later, "is really factual."⁵⁵ Had their countrymen been readers, Stone might have found his professional interest quickened by a libel suit. The Faulkner characterizations, although usually composite portraits, were, it seems, scrupulously researched — yet whether to enhance or to conceal their historical accuracy remains problematic. On October 5, 1927, six days after Faulkner had finished a "final" typescript of *Flags*, for example, Phil Stone asked attorney Orbrey Street of Ripley to repeat a Falkner anecdote that he had told Phil some time before. While cautioning Stone that the tale was "hearsay," Street again narrated the now familiar story of the controversial epitaphs inscribed on the tombstone of a man killed in an argument with Faulkner's great-grandfather. Less than a week later, after a visit to the Hindman family plot, Street reported that the tombstone belied much of the tale but that the chancery records were in such disarray that he had abandoned efforts to explain the discrepancies.⁵⁶ Before the manuscript left for New York a few days later, portions of it seem to have been retyped.⁵⁷ In a paragraph about Colonel Sartoris's tombstone in the penultimate episode of the published novel,⁵⁸ there appears a delicate mixture

54. PS to Meriwether, 19 Feb. 1957.

55. PS to Grosch, 19 July 1962.

56. Orbrey Street to PS, 7 Oct. and 12 Oct. 1927. HRC.

57. See Blotner, *Faulkner*, note to 557.

58. Faulkner, *Flags*, p. 365.

of fact, anecdote, and fiction, a mixture, I suspect, Faulkner concocted (or at least apportioned) only after Stone's research had been completed.

At any rate, the two collaborators were ecstatic about the book's prospects — Stone certain that it would sell, Faulkner convinced that *Flags* would establish his reputation as a writer.⁵⁹ Publisher Horace Liveright, however, would not agree. He saw it as a book with "a thousand loose ends," lacking "plot, dimension, and projection." Liveright could not even recommend revision; the book simply had no "story to tell."⁶⁰ On the contrary, it may be that the novelist had too many stories to tell, stories Phil Stone pressed upon him until the last sheet came out of the typewriter. It was a recognizable pattern to those who had been force-fed books from Phil's "lending library."⁶¹ Overflowing with ideas, Stone had not the patience himself to translate life into art; he needed Bill for that. Whether Faulkner in turn "required" Phil Stone remained to be seen. Faulkner's method in *Flags* clearly satisfied Stone's critical tenet that genius "produces a banquet with enough crum[b]s left over to feed a mob."⁶² Later Stone would object because in his maturity the writer frugally exhausted every morsel. Horace Liveright might have said that Faulkner, after *Flags in the Dust*, learned to weave together his thousand strands. But they were both right in a way, for in his first Yoknapatawpha novel the genius William Faulkner had discovered a life's work, a vocation his mentor deeply coveted, but one to which Phil Stone himself had not been called.

The initial rejection of the *Sartoris* manuscript had marked the nadir of their hopes for Faulkner's career. William Faulkner was bitterly disappointed. He had had "a belly full of writing," he informed his publisher, "since you folks . . . claim that a book like that last one . . . is blah." "I think now that I'll sell my typewriter and go to work — though God knows, it's sacrilege to waste that talent for idleness which I possess."⁶³ Stone was similarly dismayed:

That was the time, in desperation, that I suggested to [Faulkner] to write anything he wanted to, any way he pleased, and perhaps he would get prestige and later could make some money. That was the day when he said he didn't know why he kept on writing — he supposed he did it just to stay out of work, that he was sure he would never make any money writing and was quite sure he would never receive any recognition. I felt the same way at that particular time (I can pick the spot on the University campus where we stood and

59. Blotner, *Letters*, p. 39.

60. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 560.

61. See Blotner, *Faulkner*, 161.

62. PS to Carl P. Rollins, 17 Oct. 1931.

63. Blotner, *Letters*, p. 39.

talked about it) but I didn't dare tell Bill because I was the only one who believed he could do anything, and I was afraid if I told him he would lose heart. I should have known better. You can no more stop a professional from writing than you can stop a dope fiend from taking dope⁶⁴

The question of Faulkner's professionalism, of course, was soon resolved. A year later, in October 1928, the author completed *The Sound and the Fury*.⁶⁵

Whether Stone felt in part responsible for the failure of Faulkner's third novel or whether, after fourteen years, even Phil Stone could hope no longer, he seems at that point to have pulled back, perhaps to hide from Bill his hopelessness, as he said, but in some measure also in reaction to the writer who emerged from the creation and seeming destruction of *Flags in the Dust* to write for himself alone. In the period after *Mosquitoes* was written, definitely through most of 1927 and early 1928, Stone and Faulkner had lived in Faulkner's fiction, in quarters as close as Phil's sitting room on York Street. And if at times Bill Faulkner was one of "the most aggravating damned human being[s] the Lord ever put on this earth,"⁶⁶ according to Phil, Stone himself — swearing, threatening, pleading — was one more. Although usually as generous as his father, Stone was also the son of a chronically penurious mother, and in the long financial drought before his *Sartoris* advance (in the fall of 1928),⁶⁷ a proud William Faulkner had had to rely for money upon Phil Stone, a dependency perilous in the simplest of relationships. On one occasion, in Pascagoula, according to Tom Kell, his friend Bill Faulkner, so often flourishing in poverty, had seemed "crowded" by his lack of funds. It seems that the writer owed over \$700. "Phil Stone lent me that money," Faulkner told Kell, "but I'm not gonna be obligated to him. I'm gonna pay that money back." There was more: "Nobody dictates to me what I can write and what I can't write," Faulkner had added.⁶⁸ But Phil often did not confine his advice to literary matters, and in January 1927, Estelle Oldham Franklin had returned with her children to Oxford, with divorce proceedings already underway.⁶⁹ Phil Stone and William Faulkner would go on as before, Stone hearing and commenting on the Compson novel,⁷⁰ both men driving to Memphis for weeks of "research"

64. PS to Grosch, 19 July 1962.

65. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 590.

66. Meriwether, "Early Notices," p. 150.

67. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 597.

68. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 555 and note.

69. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 524, 539, 557, 561, 563.

70. PS to Collins, 16 Aug. 1954 and to Meriwether, 7 July 1960.

on the scandalous *Sanctuary*.⁷¹ Sometime in the winter of 1929-1930, Faulkner submitted a story called "Smoke" to *The Saturday Evening Post*. It marked the first appearance of Harvard-educated, "loose-jointed" county attorney Gavin Stevens, "with a mop of untidy iron-gray hair."⁷² A bald, double-jointed Phil Stone, Yale, '14, '18L, would be greatly amused. But the former New Haven roommates psychologically began to live apart.

There was nothing so dramatic as a climactic quarrel. Not even during the latter stages of Stone's psychosis were Phil and Bill completely estranged — because, after their fifteenth year together, for Stone at least, estrangement was simply impossible.

As Faulkner with the new novels at last caught the attention of the Eastern publishers, Stone's former services as confidant, editor, publicist, and money-lender were gradually assumed by other men, who were paid for the pleasure. Faulkner correspondence no longer invariably issued from the Stone law firm, though they most often met there for the next thirty-five years.

At first Phil Stone merely devoted more of his time to his political avocation. Bilbo's second term as governor (1928-1932) afforded unprecedented comedy and terror to the Snopes watch. During the presidential campaign of 1928, Stone, a Mississippi delegate to the Democratic convention in Houston, literally risked his neck campaigning for the Catholic (and "Wet") nominee Al Smith at the Neshoba County (Mississippi) Fair.⁷³ At home he managed the successful race of his father's protege "Abe" Linker for the post of district highway commissioner. For their campaign "literature," as he wrote his Yale friend Herb Starr, Stone had composed some "pretty good political flap-doodle," he thought. Too busy to read books anymore, he added, he was "going to work like the devil . . . in order to be a lawyer one of these days."⁷⁴ The moment when Phil Stone finally "abjured" literature and politics to practice law in earnest, however, was not to be of his own choosing.

On December 29, 1930, the Bank of Oxford did not open for business.⁷⁵ Phil Stone could not have imagined either the horror or the longevity of the curse leveled at him when his father's bank failed. By the next spring, however, an outsider could have seen

71. Edith Brown Douds, "Recollections of William Faulkner and the Bunch," in *William Faulkner of Oxford*, p. 52.

72. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 644.

73. W.H. Anderson.

74. PS to Hubert Starr, 27 June 1930.

75. *Oxford Eagle*, 1 Jan. 1931.

that the Stones were financially ruined. General Stone's debts exceeded \$50,000 at a time when their land was worthless and legal fees, except for bankruptcies, almost extinct. But a Stone bankruptcy, to those aristocrats, was unthinkable. The attorneys mortgaged what they could and pledged their practice and their honor to make good the rest. In reality powerless to protect his father's serenity, the youngest son was prepared to sacrifice his most vital self to that endeavor. "Bill," Stone told Faulkner that spring, "you don't need me anymore, and I have to see about making a living for my old folks."

The Depression years, then, fixed the irony that was to contaminate the friendship of Phil Stone and William Faulkner for the next thirty years. Just as the Stone fortune collapsed, Faulkner had made his first financial success with the notorious *Sanctuary*. As the novelist earned what to Stone were "fabulous sums" in Hollywood in the thirties, Phil was reduced to legal hackwork of the dullest sort, searching titles for the Sardis Dam project. Stone and the Ford dealer in Oxford often borrowed fifty cents from one another for household groceries. Nevertheless, by Christmas 1936, when Phil Stone, also married now, had become the sole surviving adult male in the family, he had vaingloriously — and fatally — assumed the remaining \$50,000 of General Stone's debts.

Stone and his wife, his widowed mother, and, for a time, Jack's widow and children lived together in the elegant antebellum mansion that Phil's father had bought in 1892 when the Stones moved to Oxford. His brother Jim's widow and children had lived at the dairy farm on part of the fifteen-hundred acres once adjacent to the Stone house and grounds. The William Faulkners had ascended to the squirearchy with the purchase of Rowan Oak, in April 1930; when the writer sold *The Unvanquished* to MGM for \$25,000 in 1938, he bought his own land, which he would call "Greenfield Farm."⁷⁶ But the mansion where Stone had been born was destroyed by fire in 1942 (Phil groaned in his sleep for the next six months); the family moved into a former tenant house across the street from the ruins. And, beginning in 1940, he parceled out the remaining Stone property by selling small lots in "Stone Subdivision," Oxford's first such development. The real estate sales did ease the Stones' daily expenses but made no headway at all against the ten-year-old debts.

After the Second World War revived the economy, Stone's prac-

76. Blotner, *Faulkner*, 986.

tice sometimes generated a respectable income (though one continuously eroded by note after note); and the quality of his legal mind began to attract state and even national attention. He was appointed to the Advisory Board for the *American Bar Association Journal* in 1947. Later he was “automatically” elected each term as state representative to the ABA’s House of Delegates. At the state bar association convention in Oxford in 1948, his colleagues chose Phil Stone, without opposition, to serve as president of the association for 1949, his highest professional honor. The post was largely ceremonial, his usual duty, collecting delinquent dues. But irony could not relinquish attorney Stone. At the pinnacle of his career, in fact during a final, autumnal flowering of Stone’s friendship with William Faulkner, the novelist was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, also for 1949. Thereafter, Stone charged, Billy Faulkner suffered from “Nobelitis” of the head.

But it was Phil Stone who was sick. Symptoms of his finally debilitating paranoia are in evidence in the papers as early as 1950; they are pronounced by 1956. Arteriosclerosis and constantly harrying creditors would see to the rest. Stone’s stamina and resilience, however, appear phenomenal if one knows what terrors he warded off in those last thirteen years of “sanity.” But in 1963, in the winter after the world mourned the passing of William Faulkner, Phil Stone was committed to the state mental institution in Jackson. He died there in 1967, more than four years later.

Exactly what William Faulkner required of Phil Stone, I don’t know. How much Horace Benbow and Gavin Stevens owe to Stone may take us years to answer, if we ever know that either. I do know this: In Stone’s rise and fall may be seen the history of a time and a place, for Stone’s biography — except for his Faulkner friendship — is not unique. It seems instead strangely representative; perhaps his generation, too, was in a way the last of its kind, that of the last identifiably Southern country lawyer. The pharmacist W. M. Reed, for one, has told me that the “intense” eyes of his friend William Faulkner missed nothing. Hubert Starr, the California attorney, wrote Stone’s widow that “William Faulkner was Phil Stone’s contribution to American literature; don’t you let anyone tell you differently.”⁷⁷ But the friendship after all was mutual, and, thanks to Bill Faulkner, I believe, Phil Stone now rests inviolate in the pages of Yoknapatawpha.

77. The quotation is a reconstruction, for the letter has not survived.