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## The literary life of John Tomlin, friend of Poe.

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*University of Tennessee*

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Elizabeth C. Phillips entitled "The literary life of John Tomlin, friend of Poe." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Richard Beale Davis, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

July 1, 1953

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Richard Beale Davis  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

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Willis Moore

Accepted for the Council:

E. B. Waters  
Dean of the Graduate School

THE LITERARY LIFE OF JOHN TOMLIN, FRIEND OF POE

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33-

A THESIS

Submitted to  
The Graduate Council  
of  
The University of Tennessee  
in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Elisabeth C. Phillips

August 1953



## PREFACE

The writer's interest in John Tomlin, first aroused by allusions in Poe biographies to "Tomlin, the literary postmaster of Jackson, Tennessee," or "Tomlin, a poet of Tennessee," was further stimulated by those portions of the Poe-Tomlin correspondence in the biographies and in the Harrison edition of Poe's works. As the search for additional information concerning this relatively obscure Tennessean proceeded, many persons who, for one reason or another, had also been interested in John Tomlin and had made preliminary investigation came to the writer's aid and generously made their information available. Their help is gratefully acknowledged below. It is the purpose of this preface to outline the method by which material was gathered and to list the most important sources.

In establishing the Tomlin "canon," standard periodical indices such as Poole's were of little assistance. One index, however, proved very helpful: a starting point in the search for Tomlin's magazine writing was provided by the Periodical Index to Early American Literature of the Washington Square Library, New York University. And there were valuable clues in Tomlin's letters to Poe, both in the published ones previously mentioned, and in the unpublished portion of the correspondence in the Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library. But it has been necessary also to make a personal and detailed examination of available magazine files.

These included not only the periodicals to which Tomlin was known to have contributed, but as many as possible of those to which, by reason of both their publication dates and their general nature, he might have contributed. Especial attention was paid to Southern magazines, but the more popular Eastern journals were also examined. Since the learned reviews were outside the scope of Tomlin's writing, no attempt was made to check them. For the same reason, the strictly technical journals were omitted. When files were examined, an effort was made to cover the years 1835 through 1850, or such portion of that period as the particular magazine's duration included. For many short-lived Southern and Western magazines, the period was less than a year. The following were examined: in the University of Tennessee Library, Burton's Gentleman's, Graham's, and the Southern Literary Messenger; in the University of North Carolina Library, whose magazine collection is especially useful for the period covered in this study, the Columbian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine, De Bow's Review, the Ladies' Repository, the Magnolia, the New York Mirror, the Southern Lady's Companion, the Southern Literary Journal and Monthly Review, the Southern Literary Journal and Magazine of Arts, the Southern Rose, and the United States Magazine and Democratic Review; in Duke University Library, the Guardian, Holden's Dollar Magazine, the Southron (Tuscaloosa, Alabama), the Knickerbocker, and the Western Monthly Magazine; in the Library of Congress, the Broadway Journal and the Saturday Evening Post; in the Tennessee State Library, the Guardian and the Southron (Nashville and Gallatin, Tennessee); and in the Tennessee State Archives, the Nashville Whig and the Nashville Daily Republican

Banner, both newspapers. Although the Alabama State Archives has no extensive periodical file, the Meek papers housed there yielded one pertinent item in the Philadelphia Sunday Mercury for October 31, 1852, in which a chapter of one of Tomlin's serial stories was posthumously printed. In cases where it was impossible to travel to repositories of desired periodicals because of limited time and heavy expense, that boon of impecunious graduate students, Interlibrary Loan, made certain periodicals available for use at the University of Tennessee Library. These included Godey's, Holden's, the Lady's World of Literature and Fashion, and the Quarterly Journal and Review.

Besides these periodicals, the following gift books and annuals were examined: in the Joint University Libraries, Nashville, Friendship's Offering, Golden Leaflets, The Ladies' Annual, and The Token and Atlantic Souvenir; and in the University of Tennessee Library, The Cabinet, The Gift, and The Opal. In the case of the one annual and gift book respectively in which Tomlin's work appeared, The Rainbow and Sartain's American Gallery of Art, both for 1848, the first was made available in photostat by the South Caroliniana Library, the other on Interlibrary Loan.

John Tomlin's published work, besides periodical writings, included two books, Shelley's Grave and Other Poems and Tales of the Caddo. The former is apparently not extant; the latter, listed in Wright's American Fiction, 1774-1850, is in the Rare Books Department of the Library of Congress.

The search for biographical and genealogical data ranged far and wide. The first clues were provided in a letter from Simms to Duyckinck, called to the writer's attention by Joy Bayless. A personal examination of the Simms letters in the MSS Division, New York Public Library, and those in the Butler Library, Columbia University, yielded additional and pertinent information. Photostats of Tomlin's unpublished letters to Poe came from the Boston Public Library. Diligent and persistent inquiry, by correspondence, served to establish the facts of Tomlin's connections with Jefferson, Texas. South Carolina public records, both the originals in Sumter and microfilm owned by the Historical Commission of South Carolina, furnished information on John Tomlin's ancestry and his early life. Of aid in establishing his birth date were the Sessional Records of Salem Black River Presbyterian Church. In Jackson, Tennessee, where the greater part of John Tomlin's adult life was spent, records of his business transactions are available at the Madison County Court House, and personal and literary relics are scattered among a number of interested persons, who came to the aid of the writer of this study.

The dates of John Tomlin's postmastership were furnished by the National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C. An approximate death date having been supplied by a contemporary newspaper item, which also included the place of death, the Charity Hospital of New Orleans, the writer made inquiry at this institution. Its meticulously preserved records made it possible to establish not only the

exact dates, but many of the painful circumstances also, of John Tomlin's last illness.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the course of this study, much assistance has been required and much has been granted. For co-operation and unfailing helpfulness, thanks are due to staff members of the following departments of archives, historical societies, and libraries: Alderman Library, University of Virginia; Alabama Department of Archives and History; Boston Public Library; Butler Library, Columbia University; Duke University Library; Georgia Historical Society; Historical Commission of South Carolina; Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University; Jefferson (Texas) Historical Society and Museum; Joint University Libraries, Nashville; Kansas State Library; Library of Congress; Nashville Public Library; New York Public Library; South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Tennessee State Library and Archives; University of North Carolina Library; University of Pennsylvania Library; University of Texas Library; and Washington Square Library, New York University. Especial gratitude is expressed to Miss Eleanor E. Goehring, Head, Reference Department, University of Tennessee Library, without whose persistence in tracking down obscure but vitally necessary sources many a problem would have gone unsolved.

At the beginning of the study, both encouragement and valuable material were lent by Joy Bayless, Stanley Horn, and Professor Susan B. Riley. The accumulation of genealogical and biographical data would have been impossible without the aid of James McBride Dabbs, Laura Bellinger Jones, J. A. R. Moseley, Mr. and Mrs. John T. Tomlin, and

Emma Inman Williams. In making available for examination letters and other manuscripts, Curtis M. Bray and Seale Johnson rendered an invaluable service. During the course of the study, the writer had, at various times, the benefit of advice and other aid from the following: Professors Nelson F. Adkins, William W. Bass, Gerald G. Grubb, Edgar Johnson, Thomas O. Mabbott, and J. Albert Robbins, and Mr. Humphrey House.

For assistance in the final preparation of this thesis, a debt to my Graduate Committee at the University of Tennessee is gratefully acknowledged. Professors Le Roy Graf and Willis Moore have contributed their time in reading the thesis, and have offered helpful suggestions. To Professor Alwin Thaler, upon whose scholarship and wisdom the writer has constantly relied, profound thanks are tendered for his detection of errors in both style and judgment and for his kindly encouragement. Professor Nathalia Wright has been of immeasurable assistance by her painstaking analysis of problems of structure and content. Finally, an especial acknowledgment is due Professor Richard Beale Davis, under whose direction this thesis has been written. The writer's interest in the subject of this study was first aroused as a student in Professor Davis's seminar in American Literature. Without his acute and penetrating criticism, his illuminating comment, and his unfailing patience, the thesis would never have been completed.

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## CHAPTER I

### A REPRESENTATIVE WRITER OF THE "GOLDEN AGE" OF PERIODICALS

An enthusiastic American magazine editor, writing in 1831, exclaimed, "This is the golden age of periodicals!"<sup>1</sup> With the passing years, this extravagant contemporary appraisal has had to be qualified, for some later periods have proved far more golden. However, the twenty-five years from 1825 to 1850 did see a rapid increase in magazine publishing. Although it is still not possible to obtain exact figures as to periodicals exclusive of newspapers, the best available estimate places the number of magazines published for the year 1825 at less than a hundred, and at six hundred at least for the single year 1850. Setting two years as an average lifetime for the periodicals, four or five thousand were issued during the twenty-five years.<sup>2</sup>

In this "golden age" of magazines, many subscribers were cultured persons whose literary backgrounds were European; but others were poorly educated and sought entertainment without regard for literary standards. Periodical literature, always geared to the average reader, thus reflects popular taste. Nineteenth-century American readers may have been slow to recognize genius, but they read and enjoyed a great number of writers whose fame has not survived into our own century. Representative of magazine writers of the period is the subject of this study, John Tomlin of Tennessee, friend of Poe and variously described by the latter's biographers as "the

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<sup>1</sup> Illinois Monthly Magazine, I (April 1831), 302, quoted in Frank Luther Mott, History of American Magazines, 3 vols. (New York, 1930), I, 341.

<sup>2</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 340-342.

Tennessee poet,"<sup>3</sup> "the literary postmaster of Jackson, Tennessee,"<sup>4</sup> and "a poet of Tennessee."<sup>5</sup>

John Tomlin, whose literary life was relatively brief, may be taken as a norm of periodical writers from 1825 to 1850. In the first place, the magazines to which he contributed were representative of the tastes of the period. They were: Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, The Casket, Godsey's, Graham's, The Guardian (Columbia, Tennessee), Holden's Dollar Magazine, The Lady's World of Literature and Fashion, The Magnolia, The Quarterly Journal and Review, The Rainbow, The Saturday Evening Post, The Southern and Western Magazine and Review, The Southern Literary Messenger, The Southron (Nashville and Gallatin, Tennessee), and The Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine. An examination of the history and significance of these periodicals will establish the range, both geographically and culturally, of Tomlin's magazine writing.

Burton's Gentleman's Magazine was founded in Philadelphia in July 1837 by the popular young actor, William Burton, with Charles Alexander as publisher. Moderately successful from its beginning, it received great impetus from the brief joint editorship of Poe, from July 1839 to June 1840. After Poe and Burton parted company, its original editor, whose heart was in the theatre rather than in literature, sold the magazine, with

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<sup>3</sup> George E. Woodberry, The Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 2 vols. (Boston, 1909), I, 260.

<sup>4</sup> Hervey Allen, Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe (New York, 1934), p. 373.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Hobson Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography (New York, 1942), p. 401.

its list of thirty-five hundred subscribers, to George R. Graham. Burton's Gentleman's, as its title implied, was unhampered by the more Puritanical standards of reading matter designed for both sexes. It was attractive in format and racy in style, owing much of its charm to its actor-editor's personality.<sup>6</sup>

For the purposes of this study, the Casket and Graham's may be considered as one publication, for Tomlin's work appeared in the Casket only after Graham's purchase of it, and the importance of the older magazine in the history of American periodicals is largely due to its being the earlier series of Graham's. In May 1839, George R. Graham, then twenty-six, bought the fifteen-year-old Casket from its founders, Samuel C. Atkinson and Charles Alexander, who had also founded the Saturday Evening Post. Early in the next year, Graham enlarged the page of the Casket, thus giving it the same format as Burton's; and in November of that year he purchased the latter to combine with the Casket. Thus, except for the concluding installment of a de Koch serial in Burton's, the December 1839 issues of the two magazines are identical, and both bear the caption, Graham's Magazine.<sup>7</sup> Following the policy of Burton's rather than the Casket, Graham's became and continued for at least fifteen years one of the most successful magazines in the United States. Poe joined the staff in 1841 as literary editor, an office which entailed not only the reading and selection of material to be included, but also actual contribution of

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<sup>6</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 344.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

book notices and literary content. How brilliantly he executed his office has been told too many times to merit repetition here. Other notable contributors were Lowell, Bryant, Cooper, Longfellow, Holmes, and James K. Paulding. Among those equally popular in their own day but now relegated to a minor category are, besides John Tomlin, Mrs. Sigourney, George Pope Morris, Alfred B. Street, Park Benjamin, Theodore S. Fay, Mrs. Seba Smith, Mrs. Frances Osgood, and Joseph C. Neal.

Some of these contributors Graham had inherited from Burton's, but his policy of paying well made it possible to widen the circle until it embraced almost all of the amateur and professional writers of the day.<sup>8</sup> With his previous experience on other Philadelphia periodicals, including the Saturday Evening Post, Graham had developed a keen sensitivity to popular taste which stood him in good stead in the new magazine. A typical issue of Graham's during the forties contained four or five short stories, an essay on polite deportment, the biography of some eminent person, a literary article, much poetry, nature and travel essays, a fine arts department, reviews of currently popular books, and a breezy comment by the editor on that month's contents. Besides this variety of reading matter, the magazine was embellished by colored fashion plates, and at least a portion of the stories and articles were illustrated by well-known engravers. Frankly designed for entertainment, Graham's furnished a welcome relief from the often heavy "Reviews" of the period; in it is

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<sup>8</sup> See the unpubl. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 1947), by J. Albert Robbins, "The History of Graham's Magazine: A Study in Periodical Publication," pp. 182, 222.

found the beginning of a distinctly "magazinish" type of writing.<sup>9</sup>

The success of Godey's Lady's Book appears to have been largely due to its owner's frank catering to feminine tastes. Certainly it had the largest circulation of any magazine to which Tomlin contributed; Mr. Godey himself boasted in 1839 that its circulation was greater than that of any other three American magazines combined, and that he expected it to reach 25,000 in 1840. By 1849, he was claiming 40,000 and by 1850, 62,500.<sup>10</sup> The chubby, enterprising Mr. Godey founded the magazine in Philadelphia in 1830, calling it for nine years simply The Lady's Book. In 1837, he bought Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale's Ladies Magazine of Boston to combine with his book and employed Mrs. Hale as editor. Through the joint efforts of Mrs. Hale and Godey, the publication flourished to the extent that it attracted all the popular writers of the time. A list of its contributors includes most of those appearing in Graham's, with the addition of such popular writers for women as Mrs. Caroline Lee Hents, of Florence, Alabama, who wrote drama and serial fiction with equal facility, and "Grace Greenwood," (Miss Sarah J. Clark), poetess<sup>11</sup> of New Brighton, Pennsylvania. The importance of Godey's resides in its popularity rather than in its literary merit, for its fiction was largely moralistic and sentimental and its poetry mediocre.

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<sup>9</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 545-555.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 581.

<sup>11</sup> And the participant in some spirited correspondence with Tomlin. See below, pp. 235-236.

That Tomlin's work was published in The Guardian is proof that this Southern writer was by no means a prophet without honor in his own country, for this magazine was one of the two literary periodicals in ante-bellum Tennessee. On January 8, 1841, the following announcement appeared in the Nashville Whig:

Proposals  
for publishing at Columbia, Tennessee  
a monthly production, entitled  
The Guardian

A family magazine devoted to the cause of Female Education on Christian principles, edited at the Female Institute, Columbia, Tenn. by the Rector, with the aid of the Right Reverend Visitor Bishop Otey, and of the Tutoresses. . . . We are bound within no narrow limits. Religion . . . the fireside circle . . . the school . . . whatever may contribute to control the imagination, to expand the mind, and to elevate the aim of the young, "to raise the genius and to mend the heart," we shall gladly welcome to our pages.<sup>12</sup>

The Guardian continued publication for eight years, from 1841 through 1848. In spite of unavoidable restrictions attendant upon its devotion to "Female Education and Christian principles," its scope was reasonably wide. Its stories and sketches were strictly proper, and its poems restrained even in their sentimentality, but it displayed a genuine interest in literary criticism, devoting considerable space both to editorial comment and to reprinting critical articles from other periodicals. Tomlin himself began in its pages an ambitious review of the writers of the Southwest.<sup>13</sup> And the editor took from other papers such literary notices

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<sup>12</sup> IV, 4.

<sup>13</sup> "The Writers of the Southwest," The Guardian, IV (June 1844), 85-86.

as a review of Arnell's poems,<sup>14</sup> reprinted from the Nashville Union and introduced by a lengthy discussion of poetry in Tennessee.<sup>15</sup> Tomlin's own opinion of the Guardian is indicated in a letter to D. C. Gaskill, editor of the other Tennessee literary publication, the Southron. Tomlin complains that there is no real support in the South for Southern literature, saying, "It is painful--indeed it is very painful to me to behold you, and the worthy Editor of the Guardian manfully buffeting an opposing current, with the laudable zeal of accomplishing some good for Tennessee."<sup>16</sup>

The periodicals discussed thus far, though varying in content from the gentlemanly liveliness of Burton's to the simpering sweetness of Goday's, were all nevertheless bound by the canons of good taste. The same cannot in strict accuracy be said of Holden's Dollar Magazine, the most sensational of those to which Tomlin contributed. It was established in 1848, in New York, by Charles W. Holden, himself an occasional contributor to contemporary periodicals.<sup>17</sup> Part of the movement for cheap literature, the Dollar

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<sup>14</sup> David Reeve Arnell, author of Fruit of Western Life, or Blanche and Other Poems (New York, 1847), was a resident of Tennessee.

<sup>15</sup> The Guardian, N. S., III (June 1848), 126.

<sup>16</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 358.

<sup>17</sup> His "The Unwedded Bride," for example, appeared in the January issue of Burton's Gentleman's and attracted the attention of Graham, then editing the Saturday Evening Post. Graham mentions the story in "Literary Notes," Saturday Evening Post, II (January 5, 1839), 3.

Magazine purveyed vicarious adventure to uncritical readers for three years, at the end of which it merged with the North American Miscellany.<sup>18</sup> Holden's appears to have occupied a position similar to such twentieth-century periodicals as McFadden's Liberty; serious writers tended to ignore or to scorn it, but its popularity with the general reading public led to its occasional intrusion into esoteric circles.<sup>19</sup>

Like many other nineteenth-century magazines, the Philadelphia Lady's World of Literature and Fashion changed titles frequently in the course of its history. During the time Tomlin's work was published in it, however, it was known by the title used in this study, with a half-title, The Lady's World, appearing as page caption.<sup>20</sup> The Lady's World was founded in 1842, in Philadelphia, by Charles J. Peterson, while he was still associated with Graham on both the Saturday Evening Post and Graham's Magazine. With a shrewdly correct appraisal of the current periodical field, Graham foresaw that a cheaper magazine for women would reduce the circulation of Godley's Lady's Book, but not of his own magazine. Consequently he gave his blessing and backing to Peterson, whose venture into the field of women's magazines was so successful that he was able to resign from Graham's and sell his interest in the Post. Peterson's

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<sup>18</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 348.

<sup>19</sup> George Eveleth, Poe's faithful young correspondent, read Holden's and thought well enough of its contents to ascribe one story to Poe. See Mary E. Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe the Man, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1926), II, 1372. And see below, p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Mott, American Magazines, II, 306, n. 1.



Ladies' National Magazine, as the Lady's World eventually came to be called, furnished its feminine readers both fashions and diverting literature, and retained its popularity for twenty years.<sup>21</sup>

Among the five Southern magazines in which Tomlin's work appeared, two are of major importance, the Magnolia and the Southern Literary Messenger. The Magnolia had, like most struggling Southern magazines, a varied history. The trials and tribulations of Southern editors were very aptly summarized by D. C. Gaskill, himself one of them, in his reply to Tomlin's complaint at the state of Southern letters. Gaskill had this explanation to offer:

We cannot, in this region, as yet, compete with the North in periodicals. It would be very strange if we could, when the literary facilities that usually grow with the growth of a country are there enjoyed in absolute profusion. The same remark may be applied to the expense attending the mechanical department. Materials and labor, both preferable to what can be obtained here, are there obtained at much less expense than we are subjected to for such as we can obtain in these parts. Add to this the reduction in price caused by strong competition, and it will be seen at once how many advantages Northern publishers and editors possess over us in the South and West.<sup>22</sup>

Largely because of such difficulties as Gaskill cited, the Magnolia was moved from place to place before its demise in 1843. Founded in Macon, Georgia, in 1840 by George F. Pierce, president of the Georgia Female College, and Philip C. Pendleton, uncle of Philip Pendleton Cooke, it was first known as the Southern Ladies' Book: A Magazine of Literature, Science and Arts. The Ladies' Book suspended publication in October

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., II, 311.

<sup>22</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 359.

1840, and resumed in January 1841 in Savannah, under a new name, the Magnolia, or Southern Monthly, with Pendleton as sole editor. After a period of eighteen months in Savannah, it was removed to Charleston, South Carolina, where William Gilmore Simms became joint editor; it continued as the Magnolia, or Southern Appalachian until June 1843. Although not so good a magazine, generally speaking, as Graham's or Knickbocker's, the Magnolia compares favorably with Northern magazines for women. At its best period, under Simms's editorship, it was a periodical in which Southerners might justly take pride.<sup>23</sup>

During that portion of the nineteenth century under consideration, the South and the West were so closely linked, especially in the minds of Easterners, that the terms were used interchangeably to denote any state or territory beyond the Alleghanies. There was, however, a distinction in the minds of Southerners who thought of West as the land across the Mississippi. Tomlin contributed to two Western magazines, the Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine and the Quarterly Journal and Review, both published at Cincinnati in 1844 and 1846 respectively. The publisher was Lucius A. Hine, a young lawyer of a liberal and progressive bent. Taking over from W. D. Gallagher, he began in 1844 the publication of a series of ambitious periodicals, all short-lived, of which the Western Literary Journal was the first. Hine's associate on this magazine was E. Z. C. Judson, who wrote extremely popular adventure stories under the name of "Ned Buntline."

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<sup>23</sup> Bertram Holland Flanders, Early Georgia Magazines: Literary Periodicals to 1865 (Athens, Georgia, 1944), pp. 38-61.

Judson's sudden departure, after an unfortunate shooting scrape, left all the Western Literary Journal's debts on Hine's hands, which accounts for the magazine's sudden cessation after only six issues. Hine then began the Quarterly Journal and Review; but after its four issues of 1846, it was merged with the Herald of Truth, a monthly of socialistic tendencies. Although all of Hine's periodicals were commercial failures, they displayed editorial independence and considerable discrimination in choice of content.<sup>24</sup>

Magazine publishing in the nineteenth century was not limited to individuals; fraternal societies also provided journals for the delectation of the brothers and of any other reader into whose hands the paper might fall. The Rainbow belongs to this class. As the mouthpiece of the Odd Fellows, its motto was "Friendship, Love, and Truth." Commenting on the periodical in March 1843, Simms, then editing the Magnolia, said:

It is really a very showy and creditable magazine. It is published in New York at only 12½ cents a number, is neatly printed and illustrated by engravings. The contents are pleasing, spirited, and tasteful.<sup>25</sup>

The oldest magazine to which Tomlin contributed is the Saturday Evening Post. Founded by Samuel C. Atkinson and Charles Alexander on August 18, 1821, it derived from Franklin's famous newspaper, the Pennsylvania Gazette. Its first publishers designed it as a literary

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<sup>24</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 388.

<sup>25</sup> "Editorial Bureau," The Magnolia, N. S. II (March 1843), 207.

miscellany, in which capacity it furnished Philadelphians weekly with welcome reading matter. A new liveliness was imparted to it in 1840 when George R. Graham became part owner. Under his and Charles J. Peterson's direction, the Post became one of the most popular periodicals in the country.<sup>26</sup> The scope of its content was indicated by the 1841 subtitle: "A Family Newspaper—Neutral in Politics—Devoted to News, Literature, Science, Morality, Agriculture, and the Arts."<sup>27</sup>

Among minor Southern magazines to which Tomlin contributed is the Southern and Western Magazine and Review. The history of the Southern and Western is closely linked with that of the Southern Literary Messenger, with which it was merged in 1845. In that year, Benjamin Blake Minor bought the Southern and Western from Simms, who had attempted to make of it a fitting vehicle for Southern literary expression. The Southern and Western may be numbered among the more important Charleston periodicals of the forties. The short-lived magazine had been founded by Simms in January 1845, with the dual purpose of encouraging political and commercial ties between the South and West, and of combining the virtues of a review with the entertaining quality of a magazine. Notwithstanding its laudable aims, the magazine was forced to suspend publication in December of the same year, because of insufficient funds at home and the competition of Eastern periodicals. But during its brief tenure, although the greater portion of its content was furnished by

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<sup>26</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 127, 213, 546.

<sup>27</sup> Saturday Evening Post, XI (April 3, 1841), 1.

Simms, it also attracted as contributors such contemporary notables as Evert A. Duyckinck, Albert Pike, J. M. Legaré, and Thomas Holley Chivers.<sup>28</sup>

The Southern Literary Messenger shares with Burton's and Graham's the distinction of once having had Poe as its editor, a distinction which alone would have ensured its lasting fame.<sup>29</sup> And there is little doubt that the increase in circulation to five thousand subscribers was, as Poe claimed, due to his talents, creative and critical. But others deserve credit also: Thomas W. White, Richmond printer, who founded it in August 1834; James E. Heath, author of Edge Hill, who became its first editor; Philip Pendleton Cooke, John Esten's elder brother, who was one of its most valued writers; Matthew Fontaine Maury, naval officer, astronomer, and hydrographer, who was editor in 1842-43; Benjamin Blake Minor, young lawyer and a graduate of both the University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary, who bought it in July 1843, and whose book, The Southern Literary Messenger, 1843-1864 remains a good source of information on the magazine; and John Reuben Thompson, Richmond lawyer, poet, and critic, who bought the magazine from Minor in 1847, and conducted it for thirteen years. The Messenger has been correctly called "the mouthpiece of Southern culture."<sup>30</sup> It contributed materially to the

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<sup>28</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 755-756.

<sup>29</sup> Tomlin was among the first Southerners to recognize Poe's greatness; calling attention to the latter's accomplishment in bringing prestige to the Messenger, he called him its "coeur de lion editor." "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 359.

<sup>30</sup> Mott, American Magazines, I, 630.

development of Poe, and to that of many minor writers, Tomlin included.

The Southron, the second of two Tennessee magazines in which Tomlin's work appeared, seems to have puzzled the periodical historians. There is no mention of it in Mott's History of American Magazines. It is listed in a study of nineteenth-century Southern periodicals, with the conjecture that it was published at Charleston.<sup>31</sup> Actually, there were two magazines of that title, one published in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and one in Nashville and Gallatin, Tennessee. The editor of the first was Alexander B. Meek, lawyer and litterateur of Tuscaloosa, with whom Tomlin corresponded and to whom he more than once paid fulsome tribute.<sup>32</sup> In spite of lofty aims,<sup>33</sup> Meek's Southron lasted only six months, from January through June 1839.

The other periodical of this title was edited and published by D. C. Gaskill at Nashville and Gallatin, Tennessee. The Nashville Daily

<sup>31</sup> See the unpubl. diss. (University of Virginia, 1928) by Frank McLean, "Periodicals Published in the South Before 1880," p. 119.

<sup>32</sup> In "The Writers of the Southwest," The Guardian, IV (June 1844), 85-86, Tomlin pronounced Meek, "one of the best lyric poets of the South." And in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, II (December 1848), 278, Tomlin stated that Meek had "for years been favorably known to the readers of the Southern Literary Messenger and Sims Magazine."

<sup>33</sup> In the first number the ambitious editor announced as his general purpose "promoting the Literature of the South," which section he considered the natural home of literature, because "there is much in a Southern climate productive of mental superiority." "Introductory Salutatory," The Southron (Tuscaloosa), I (January 1839), 1.

Republican Banner for November 28, 1840,<sup>34</sup> carried the following announcement:

The Southron: A New Family Newspaper Devoted to Literature, Science, Agriculture, Education, Amusement, and Domestic and Foreign Intelligence. With the view of meeting the interest manifested in the South and West, in the progress of Literature, Science, and general knowledge, the subscriber proposes to publish, simultaneously, in the city of Nashville and at the town of Gallatin, a weekly periodical under the above title. That a paper of this description is a desideratum in the Southwest, appears in the fact that there is not a publication of the kind in the whole of this section of the great valley. . . . The past history of the Southern and Western country, with its present conditions and prospects, is replete with interesting matter for the chronicler of the past and present. . . . The conductor of the Southron will make it a prominent part of the Journal to inculcate sentiments and disseminate facts worthy of the attentive perusal of the youth of both sexes. . . . The publisher proposes to call into requisition some able pens, both at home and abroad, and also to have access to the whole range of periodical literature, and general intelligence of this country. . . . Papers friendly to the success of the Southron will confer a favor by giving a few insertions to this prospectus.

D. C. Gaskill

The first number duly appeared in January 1841, and continued throughout the year. Gaskill, who had had previous experience in the publishing business, appears to have been a better judge of his reading public than his Alabama predecessor. Though the tone of his magazine is not so consciously lofty as Meek's, its contents are livelier. In spite of this, the Tennessee Southron suffered the fate of its Alabama neighbor, suspending publication after 1841.

The fifteen nineteenth-century periodicals discussed above have a rather wide geographical distribution. Eight are from the East, six of them, Burton's, The Casket, Godey's, Graham's, The Lady's World, and The Saturday Evening Post, originating in the great publishing center of

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<sup>34</sup> XXVIII, 2.

Philadelphia; one, Holden's, in New York City; and one, The Rainbow, in Albany, New York. Five are Southern: The Guardian, Columbia, Tennessee; The Magnolia, published consecutively at Macon and Savannah, Georgia, and at Charleston, South Carolina; The Southern and Western, Charleston; The Southern Literary Messenger, Richmond; and The Southron, Gallatin and Nashville, Tennessee. Two, the Quarterly Journal and the Western Literary Journal, are Western. In the fifteen magazines, the following types are found: two "ladies'" magazines, Godley's and The Lady's World; one semi-religious, The Guardian; one organ of a fraternal society, The Rainbow; one weekly miscellany, The Saturday Evening Post; seven of literary tone and general appeal, Burton's, The Casket, Graham's, The Magnolia, The Southern and Western, The Southern Literary Messenger, and The Southron; two vehicles of "progressive" thinking, The Quarterly Journal and Review, and The Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine; and one frankly sensational, Holden's. Only two other kinds of periodicals achieved any considerable circulation in the 1830's and '40's, the scholarly reviews and the technical journals, to neither of which Tomlin ever contributed. Except for these two classes, however, the magazines which published his work constitute a cultural cross-section, as well as a geographical one, of the reading tastes of mid-nineteenth-century America.

The second way in which Tomlin represents magazine contributors of his time is in the variety of literary types at which he tried his hand. The contents of a typical issue of Graham's have already been cited.<sup>35</sup> Other non-technical magazines published, like Graham's, short stories or sketches, literary criticism, and poetry. In addition, one form which

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<sup>35</sup> See above, p. 4.



Graham seldom used was featured in almost all the other literary journals—the serial story. Each of these four types appears in the Tomlin "canon," which is distributed as follows: three serial stories, fifteen short stories or sketches, thirty-one poems of varying metrical forms, and four pieces which are predominantly literary criticism. In comparing Tomlin's work in these four literary forms with that of other contemporary periodical contributors, examples will be cited which will demonstrate the popularity of these types in the magazines of the period.

In the third place, Tomlin is a representative periodical writer in the literary influences apparent in his work. Nineteenth-century tastes in America, where a cultural lag still existed, were largely Romantic. Byron and Shelley were the ruling favorites, except among the extremely pious, who nourished misgivings as to the wickedness of the one and the atheism of the other. Byronic influences are clearly discernible in Tomlin's writing, in both the poetry and the prose. In the former, echoes of Byron's phrasing frequently occur, as do metric patterns very obviously derived from Byron's lyrics. Often, too, themes developed in Tomlin's verse are distinctly Byronic in their pessimism and melancholy and in their apostrophes to Freedom and to Nature. In Tomlin's prose tales, the frequent appearance of the saturninely handsome hero-villain, with a sinister past and an uncertain future, is directly traceable to the ubiquitous Byronic hero of nineteenth-century fiction.

Less apparent is any Shelleyan influence on Tomlin's metre or his phraseology. But Tomlin shared the nineteenth-century American conception of Shelley as a glorious rebel against tyranny and outmoded conventions and a martyr to the cause of liberty and freedom. So conceived,

Shelley became a symbol of Tomlin's most cherished ideals, both national and individual. Hence, there are frequent laudatory references to Shelley in Tomlin's prose. The most notable instance of his reverence is to be found in the title poem of his one published volume of verse, Shelley's Grave.<sup>36</sup>

Contemporary American poets exercised almost as strong influence on nineteenth-century American literature, particularly as represented in the periodicals, as the English Romantics. Longfellow was widely admired and easily imitated, as a glance at the didactic verse appearing in American periodicals of the day will confirm. There are echoes of both Longfellow's themes and his phrases in much of Tomlin's verse. And his tributes to Longfellow in critical writing reveal the esteem in which the Southerner held the Cambridge poet. But another, greater poet influenced Tomlin even more noticeably. His high regard for Poe has been cited,<sup>37</sup> and the relationship between the two will be fully discussed below.<sup>38</sup> For the present, it is sufficient to note his literary debt. Poean phrases and Poean metric patterns occur in a sufficient number of Tomlin's poems to warrant the conclusion that the Tennessean was among the first of the periodical writers to be widely acquainted with Poe's poetry and to imitate it in his own.

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<sup>36</sup> This poem is cited in unpubl. diss. (University of North Carolina, 1936) by Guy Adams Cardwell, Jr., "Charleston Periodicals, 1795-1860," p. 113, as an example of Shelleyan influence on nineteenth-century periodical writers.

<sup>37</sup> See above, p. 13, n. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Below, pp. 181-199.

From England's Romantic Age, novelists as well as poets left their impress on American nineteenth-century periodical writers. Towering above other novelists in popular esteem was Walter Scott, whose historic novels with their pageantry and stirring deeds had many an imitator among lesser writers. Like other contributors to contemporary magazines, Tomlin wrote stories reminiscent of Scott in plot and setting. Often, too, his very sentence structure and word choice are directly traceable to the author of Ivanhoe.

In nineteenth-century America a near rival in popularity to Scott's historical fiction was the Gothic romance of Mrs. Radcliffe, et al. All general magazines featured novels and novelettes dealing with barbaric peoples and exotic customs and crowded with scenes of horror and terror. Tomlin, like the other periodical writers, tried his hand at Gothic romance, and frequently introduced the stock devices of the horror novel into other, less distinctly Gothic tales.

After the lurid and the ghastly, American magazine readers reveled in the sentimental. Early novels like The Coquette and Charlotte Temple, stemming directly from the Richardson tradition, had prepared the reading public for lachrymose accounts of virtue in distress and innocence betrayed. The vogue for stories of seduction lasted well into the mid-nineteenth century, where it was manifested in the popular magazines. And in those publications whose carefully high moral tone forbade any implications of sexual immorality, outlets for reader tears were provided by stories of cruel parents, unhappy marriage, or early widowhood. Tomlin, too, produced his quota of stories of seduction, blighted maidenhood, and thwarted love.

Undoubtedly, the fact that sentimental fiction was already in high favor helped to make the American reading public receptive to Dickens. Although the best of Dickens is far superior to the trashy tear-jerkers flooding nineteenth-century magazines, his American vogue owed as much to those who wept over Little Nell as to those who laughed at, and with, Sam Weller. Tomlin was a consistent admirer of Dickens. As early as November 1841, the Tennessean expressed his opinion of Dickens' genius as being "more elevated than any other being now living on earth."<sup>39</sup> And in December of the same year, Tomlin wrote to Poe that he would send in time for publication in the February issue of Graham's a letter he had received from Dickens, "so full of the most beautiful thoughts that I can scarcely get my own consent for any other to see a sparkle of the rich gems in which it is embedded."<sup>40</sup> The letter was published at the time suggested,<sup>41</sup> and Tomlin used it again in his serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," as well as a later missive in which Dickens tactfully praised some verses Tomlin had sent him but firmly declined to show them to publishers.<sup>42</sup> The direct influence of Dickens

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<sup>39</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (November 1841), 392.

<sup>40</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, December 1, 1841. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

<sup>41</sup> "Original Letter from Charles Dickens," Graham's, IX (February 1842), 83-84.

<sup>42</sup> Holden's, III (January 1849), 29-30.

on Tomlin's writing is not so apparent as that of Poe and others; rather, it appears to be more discernible in a general sentimentalism and emotionalism the Tennessean owed, at least in part, to his enthusiastic reading of the British novelist's work. Certainly, the stamp of Dickens was on the Tennessean as it was on so many of his countrymen.

In the fourth place, John Tomlin was a representative magazine writer in his reflection of contemporary interests. Every age has its fads, but it appears, at least in retrospect, that the nineteenth-century was peculiarly, and often ridiculously, subject to enthusiasms. Autography, cryptography, and phrenology, among other pseudo-sciences, set magazine readers a-gaping. Poe had capitalized on these interests by his "Autography" department in Graham's and by the introduction of a cryptograph into "The Gold-Bug." Other magazine writers followed his example, and readers, who themselves often collected autographs, eagerly read the "character analyses" which almost invariably accompanied facsimiles of signatures, or waited breathlessly for the solution of abstruse coded messages or hieroglyphic puzzles. Tomlin's personal interest appears not to have been so much in autographs for their own sake as in the ties with other persons provided by correspondence. But having collected a sizable number of autographs by means of his extensive correspondence, he capitalized on the current craze by incorporating them all into a curious serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," in which the hero's mania is "autography." Nor was Tomlin unaware of phrenology and cryptography, burlesquing the first by means of a comic character in another of his serial stories, "The Damsel of Basque," and entering so far into the craze for the second as to send a cryptograph

from the Alabama judge and writer, Alexander Meek, on to Poe for solution. In this awareness of contemporary fads and in the introduction of current topics of interest into his magazine writing, Tomlin was representative of mid-nineteenth-century periodical writers.

Thus far we have noted four ways in which Tomlin was representative of mid-nineteenth-century writers: in the magazines to which he contributed, the types of literature he produced, the literary influences he reflected, and the current interests he incorporated into his work. There remains another element of his literary life, not in itself typical, but by means of which knowledge of many other nineteenth-century literary lives can be greatly enlarged. That element is his extensive personal correspondence. Although he complained, as has many a greater writer before and since his time, of his isolation from the great centers of culture, he was not so completely enamored of the piping of his own native wood notes wild as to be unaware of others' notes. And he had a peculiar opportunity to read what other periodical contributors were producing and to correspond with them. As postmaster at Jackson, from 1841 to 1847, he had the two-fold advantage of acting as agent for various magazines and newspapers and of having free mailing privileges. He availed himself fully of these opportunities. Not only did he read the magazines which came his way, but he was also an indefatigable letter-writer. The leisurely age being conducive to correspondence, those to whom he addressed his epistles generally replied.

Tomlin counted among his correspondents, in addition to his great idols Poe and Dickens, a considerable number of lesser lights. William

Gilmore Simms, whom he had known slightly when both were young,<sup>43</sup> became, through their exchange of letters, so aware of Tomlin that he was, some years after the latter's death, to suggest the postmaster's name for inclusion in Evert Duyckinck's Cyclopedia of American Writers.<sup>44</sup> Alexander B. Meek, though he did not scruple to poke fun at Tomlin's less fortunate essays into verse and at his addiction to drink,<sup>45</sup> was nevertheless only too willing to supply the Tennessean, on request, with a detailed account

<sup>43</sup> In a letter published in Tomlin's "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, III (May 1849), 277, Simms says, "I . . . am much stouter than in those days of boyhood when it was our pleasure to meet."

<sup>44</sup> ALS, Simms to Duyckinck, Woodlands, S. C., November 22, 1854. MSS Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>45</sup> "We weep for the Magnolia, fallen like a rose-tree blown down in full flower. Where now shall we see the sweet sonnets of John Tomlin! You were indeed unmerciful to return him the praiseful tributes to yourself. But he is a sonnettee as well as a sonnetter [sin]. Listen! and you shall learn a secret concerning him:

My dear John Tomlin, you're a noble fellow,  
Of most renowned and rich and teeming virtue,  
Your heart is filled with bright-eyed fancies, but you  
Are somewhat fond, I fear, of getting mellow!  
The old Falernian, with its mantling yellow,  
By modern vulgar yclept Irish whiskey,  
Too often makes your gentle Muse as frisky,  
As maudlin loafer in an oyster-cellar,  
How else, sweet backwoods' poet, could you, pray,  
In serious song and simile, compare  
A blooming maiden to 'the lock of hair'  
'Which dying sisters sadly give away'!  
Oh yes, dear John you sure were somewhat flaxen  
When that sweet sonnet blessed the town of Jackson!"

ALS, Meek to Simms, Tuscaloosa, August 21, 1843. Simms Collection, Butler Library, Columbia University.

of his own literary activities.<sup>46</sup> L. A. Wilmer drew Tomlin into his own short-lived feud with Poe.<sup>47</sup> From England, Thomas Noon Talfourd sent his transatlantic correspondent a copy of a sonnet written on the occasion of entering his son at Eton College,<sup>48</sup> Macaulay thanked him for his good wishes and promised to send him a copy of the History of England,<sup>49</sup> Landor summarized a brief autobiographical sketch as "an account of as curious an animal as any on the Mississippi,"<sup>50</sup> and Tennyson confided his own desire to visit America.<sup>51</sup>

The list of American writers, besides those already mentioned, to whom Tomlin indited his words of appreciation and who invariably replied, stretches out to include many more of his contemporaries, among them Longfellow, Cooper, Charles Fenno Hoffman, Albert Pike, T. B. Read, and two very popular women whose writings were much in demand from periodical readers, Caroline Lee Hentz and the poetess "Grace Greenwood" (Sarah J. Clark).<sup>52</sup> Since a fuller account of Tomlin's literary correspondence, used by him to full advantage in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," is

<sup>46</sup> "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, III (May 1849), 279.

<sup>47</sup> More fully discussed below, pp. 194-197.

<sup>48</sup> "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, II (November 1849), 648-649.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., IV (November 1849), 654.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., IV (August 1849), 459.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., IV (October 1849), 619.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., II (December 1848), 717; IV (September 1849), 532; III (May 1849), 278; II (December 1848), 719; IV (August 1849), 461; III (June 1849), 332.



given below,<sup>53</sup> there is no necessity at this point to enumerate all of those with whom he corresponded. Those here cited are sufficient to demonstrate Tomlin's contacts with other writers.

John Tomlin, then, is representative of magazine writers of the first half of the nineteenth century in four ways: (1) he contributed to a cross-section of American magazines; (2) his writing fell into the classifications most in demand; (3) his work bore the impress of the most prevalent literary influences of his day; and (4) he incorporated current fads into his writings. In addition, material contained in his personal correspondence with other writers serves to increase our knowledge of nineteenth-century British and American literary life.

Precisely because Tomlin was a representative magazine writer of the nineteenth century, a study of his life and writings will throw further light on the development of American thought and American literature in the period in which he lived and wrote. A knowledge of major writers is not sufficient for the complete understanding of a literary period--certainly not for the particular period under consideration, this "golden age of periodicals," when the same issue of a nationally popular magazine carried contributions from both John Tomlin and Edgar Allan Poe. While there could have been only one Poe, there might very well have been many John Tomlins. But because such minor writers as Tomlin do reflect, often more clearly than major writers, the tastes and standards of their time, this study of one of them is now presented.

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<sup>53</sup> See below, pp. 217-245.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIFE OF JOHN TOMLIN

On both the paternal and maternal sides, John Tomlin was descended from planter families whose lives centered in Sumter District, South Carolina, particularly a portion around Black River. At the time that John's forebears were acquiring land and establishing themselves in the District, it was much larger than the present Sumter County. In the latter half of the eighteenth century the District included parts of five counties. On this relatively extensive area, John Tomlin's ancestors settled and prospered.

The name Tomlin was originally Tomlinson; the last syllable was occasionally dropped, however, as early as 1807.<sup>1</sup> John's paternal grandfather, Arthur Tomlinson, was the owner of three sizable pre-Revolutionary land grants, comprising over eight hundred acres.<sup>2</sup> His will, proved on October 2, 1767, designates as beneficiaries wife Mary, sons Richard, John, and Robert, and daughters Elisabeth, Eleanor Graham, and Catharine. An interesting commentary on the cultural development of this American Tomlinson is that he specified that although the estate should be divided when his son John reached twenty-one, his books were not to be sold, but should remain for the use of his wife and children. The greater portion

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<sup>1</sup> In a deed executed by John Shaw of Sumter District on January 5, 1807, conveying land "on Pudding Swamp, bounded S. W. by land of John Tomlin." Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, BB, 1774-1807, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> From Pre-Revolutionary Land Grants in the Office of the South Carolina State Historical Commission, Columbia, South Carolina.

of his land went to Robert, who was to become John Tomlin's father,<sup>3</sup>

The three sons of Arthur Tomlinson appear to have followed in the father's footsteps, improving the land left them and acquiring more, and discharging both their patriotic and religious duties. John, for example, served under Francis Marion in the Revolutionary War,<sup>4</sup> and afterwards resettled in Sumter District. It may have been this uncle's stories of the Revolution, heard by his young namesake in childhood, which served as inspiration for John Tomlin's patriotic ballad "Etiwando."<sup>5</sup> The religious affiliations of the Tomlinsons are indicated by John's ordination as an elder in the Salem Black River Presbyterian church, a church with which the Tomlinson and Tomlin family was to retain close connections.<sup>6</sup>

Robert, Arthur Tomlinson's third son, continued to add to the land inherited from his father. On November 18, 1802, for example, nine hundred ninety-five acres were surveyed for him in "Salem county, north side of Black River."<sup>7</sup> And in February 1804 he added two hundred

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<sup>3</sup> Charleston Wills, Book XI, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> William Willis Boddie, History of Williamsburg County, South Carolina (Columbia, S. C., 1923), p. 117.

<sup>5</sup> See below, pp. 58-60.

<sup>6</sup> F. D. Jones and W. H. Mills, History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina Since 1850 (Columbia, S. C., 1926), p. 823.

<sup>7</sup> Post-Revolutionary Land Grants, Columbia, S. C., No. 182, Plat 168.

seventy-two more acres to his holdings.<sup>8</sup> His estate eventually comprised some five thousand acres, a considerable estate even for those times.<sup>9</sup>

On the maternal side, John Tomlin was descended from the sturdy Scotch-Irish McFaddins, whose lives, like the Tomlinsons', were centered in the community around Black River. The first John McFaddin was a planter of large holdings in Prince Frederick's Parish. His will, recorded in Charleston, was signed on July 19, 1773. He left to his wife, Margaret, the house and land he was then living on; to two sons John and Thomas, twelve hundred fifty acres on Black River, "the great savannah"; to son Robert "the waters of Lynches' Lake"; and to son James a hundred acres in Williamsburg Township.<sup>10</sup> John and Thomas both settled on their land in Sumter, where in 1781 Thomas was ordained an elder in Salem Presbyterian Church by the first pastor, Thomas Reese.<sup>11</sup> John, who became John Tomlin's maternal grandfather, came to be known as John McFaddin, Sr. If he can be taken as an example, the McFaddins outdistanced the Tomlinsons in longevity. He outlived both his son-in-law, Robert, and his grandson, Hiram, willing on March 2, 1826, "in the

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<sup>8</sup> In a deed executed by John McFaddin, Sr. and J. J. McFaddin, as administrators of the Tomlinson estate, to John Shaw, July 9, 1813, two hundred seventy-two acres are described as "granted about Feb. 6, 1804, to Robert Tomlinson." Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, DD, 1815-1817, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Described thus in three deeds: the one mentioned in n. 8 above; William and Mary Anderson to Samuel McBride, June 23, 1827, Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, GG, 1827-1829, p. 116; and Samuel and John Tomlin to Samuel McBride, June 13, 1829, Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, H, 1829-1831.

<sup>10</sup> Charleston Wills, Book XVII, p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> Jones and Mills, History of the Presbyterian Church in S. C., p. 823.

seventieth year of my age," to his daughter Mary, already married to her second husband, "six negroes, namely Abb, big Leno, Clory, Pinckney, Eve, and Sam."<sup>12</sup>

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, South Carolina marriage records were not kept so meticulously as transactions involving land. But the marriage of Mary McFaddin and Robert Tomlinson must have taken place some time in 1798. Their four children were baptized in Salem Presbyterian Church on the following dates: Hiram, March 17, 1799; Sarah McFaddin, September 13, 1801; Samuel, July 22, 1803; and John, July 6, 1806.<sup>13</sup> Life in the Tomlinson home was a pleasant one, with material needs satisfied, and with an opportunity for cultural development at least the equal of other families in similar circumstances. Certainly the Tomlinson children were brought up to love books. Although no record remains of the library of Robert Tomlinson, it is reasonable to assume that at least part of the books owned by Hiram, the eldest son, came to him in his childhood and youth. They included English grammars and dictionary, mathematics books, geographies and an atlas, two volumes of astronomy, and three volumes of modern history. This little library was not, fortunately, too heavily weighted on the utilitarian side, for it also included Pope's Works, Campbell's and

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<sup>12</sup> Sunter Wills, Book II-D-II, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Sessional Records, Salem Black River Presbyterian Church. This information was supplied by Professor James McBride Dabbs, Mayesville, South Carolina.

Ovid's poems, and the Arabian Nights.<sup>14</sup> Since Hiram also owned a fiddle, three hymn books, and one volume designated simply as music book, it is to be presumed that music played its part in the family life.<sup>15</sup>

But the life of this happy family was to be saddened by disease and early death. The only daughter, Sarah McFaddin, died in infancy on January 13, 1802.<sup>16</sup> And Robert Tomlinson was not to live to see his little sons grow up. He died in November 1808.<sup>17</sup> It appears from the records that his father-in-law and brother-in-law, John McFaddin, Sr. and J. J. McFaddin, were first appointed as administrators of his will.<sup>18</sup> But the administration was soon taken over by another planter of the district, William Anderson, whose relationship to young John Tomlin was to become an even closer one.

The Andersons, like the Tomlinsons and McFaddins, were planters of the district and members of Salem Presbyterian Church. William's father, David, had given, in 1759, the plot of land on which the log

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<sup>14</sup> "Warrant of Appraisement and Inventory of the Estate of Hiram Tomlin, Deceased," Sufter County Judge of Probate, Inventory Records, 1817-1824, p. 403.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 403-404.

<sup>16</sup> Sessional Records, Salem Presbyterian Church.

<sup>17</sup> "Administration, Robert Tomlinson, November 24, 1808," Judge of Probate, Sufter, Bundle 92, Package 1.

<sup>18</sup> See above, p. 28, n. 8.

cabin that first housed the Salem congregation was built.<sup>19</sup> William and his first wife, Sarah, retained close connections with the church, presenting their five children for baptism. Of these five, only two survived infancy. One, Mary Anna Hannah, baptized on July 11, 1802,<sup>20</sup> may have been the "Mary A." who became John Tomlin's wife. Sarah Anderson died some time after March 1810.<sup>21</sup>

In William Anderson, the widowed Mary and her orphaned sons found a sure protector, who looked after the material needs of all and the education of the boys. Anderson was meticulous in meeting the estate obligations and rendered a strict accounting of all expenditures from Robert Tomlinson's estate.<sup>22</sup> Church expenditures loom large. In November 1808, cash was paid the pastor, G. G. McWhorter, for "reading the citation" at Tomlinson's funeral.<sup>23</sup> On October 3, 1809, five dollars was paid Eli McFaddin, trustee, as "stipend for the Revd. Mr. McWhorter for year 1808."<sup>24</sup> In November of the same year, G. Cooper, trustee of Salem Church, received forty dollars for "Robert Tomlinson's

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<sup>19</sup> Jones and Mills, History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, p. 823.

<sup>20</sup> Sessional Records, Salem Presbyterian Church.

<sup>21</sup> On March 22, 1810, Sarah Anderson signed a renunciation of dower. Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, CC, 1799-1812, p. 283.

<sup>22</sup> A full account of the administration from 1808 through 1822 appears in the records, Judge of Probate, Sumter, Bundle 92, Package 1.

<sup>23</sup> "Administration, Robert Tomlinson," 1808.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1809.

subscription to a Bond for building Salem Brick Meeting House."<sup>25</sup> In January 1811, two dollars was paid John B. Anderson, trustee, the "Estate quota of repairing Salem church."<sup>26</sup> And in 1815 another payment was made to Mr. Cooper, for "minister's stipend."<sup>27</sup>

In his zeal for meeting religious obligations, Anderson did not overlook the physical needs of his charges. On January 25, 1810, he paid out two and a half dollars for "2 boys hatts,"<sup>28</sup> and on March 23 of the same year, three dollars for "1 hatt for Hiram," two dollars for "2 pair of Women's fine shoes," and a dollar and a half for "2 pair of boys fine shoes."<sup>29</sup>

As the boys reached the age when their education must be attended to, it was duly provided. In December of the year of Robert Tomlinson's death, Robert English, who was connected with the family through his daughter's marriage to a McFaddin,<sup>30</sup> received twelve dollars "for Boarding Hiram 6 months,"<sup>31</sup> and on May 11, 1809, S. Millar was paid three dollars for "the tuition of Hiram."<sup>32</sup> School books were supplied as needed, "a geography & Webster" being purchased from Mr. Merriman in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1811.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1815.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1810.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> English willed to "daughter Martha M. McFaddin plantation where my mansion house now stands." Sumter Wills, Book II-D-I, p. 225.

<sup>31</sup> "Administration, Robert Tomlinson," 1808.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1809.



December 1808 for the sum of one dollar,<sup>33</sup> and a spelling book in November 1815 for thirty-seven and a half cents.<sup>34</sup> In June 1811, Samuel's education began to be provided for, Joseph Montgomery receiving seven and a half dollars for tuition of "Hiram & Saml Tomlin."<sup>35</sup> Montgomery tutored the two boys until April 1812, when Robert McKnight, like Robert English a connection by marriage,<sup>36</sup> took over and continued until August 1813.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps Mary Tomlinson was motivated, at least in part, by a sensible recognition of the sterling worth of her deceased husband's administrator; perhaps, on the other hand, there were more romantic considerations. At any rate, in 1814 exciting and novel items appear in Anderson's accountings: on January 24, "cash paid William Anderson to purchase Mary Tomlin's wedding cloaths;" and on February 23, "cash paid Ben Hawkins for whiskey for the above ment'd wedding."<sup>38</sup>

William Anderson proved a good stepfather to the Tomlin boys. Hiram's and Samuel's tuition continued to be provided for, and John's was taken care of as soon as he became old enough. Tutors John had in

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 1815.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 1811.

<sup>36</sup> McKnight' will mentions "sisters Elizabeth McFaddin and Jannet McFaddin." Sunter Wills, Book I-AA, p. 182.

<sup>37</sup> "Administration, Robert Tomlinson," 1812-1814.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 1814.

common with his brothers were James F. Gordon, who on August 14, 1815, was paid sixteen dollars "for tuition of Saml & John,"<sup>39</sup> Samuel Stafford, who was paid four dollars and sixty-six cents on July 30, 1816, for "tuition of Samuel & John Tomlinson,"<sup>40</sup> and thirty-one dollars and thirty-seven cents on July 1, 1817, "for the Tuition of Hiram, Saml & John Tomlin,"<sup>41</sup> and R. H. McKnight, probably a son of Robert McKnight, who on January 17, 1815, was paid ten dollars for "Hiram, Samuel, & Jackey Tomlin," and on October 5, 1819, eight dollars for "tuition of Samuel and John Tomlin,"<sup>42</sup> When John was not quite fourteen, he and Samuel were sent to town to board with a certain Captain Whitworth and to attend Mr. McDougal's school.<sup>43</sup> Among expenditures for that year of 1820 were six and a half dollars "paid Mark Solomon for a Cloak for John Tomlin,"<sup>44</sup> and four dollars and ninety cents paid to Mr. English for "the expenses of John Tomlin from Town."<sup>45</sup>

With physical and educational needs so well provided for, it was a normal, happy boyhood except for the loss, when John was barely out of babyhood, of his father. But disease and early death were to strike again.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1815.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 1816.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 1817.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1815, 1819.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 1820.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

The eldest brother Hiram died in October 1821.<sup>46</sup> With either premonitory or certain knowledge, Hiram had first made a will in October 1819, in which he directed that all his real and personal estate was to be divided between his brothers "when Samuel arrives to the age of 21 years."<sup>47</sup> Later he changed this to include "my half sister, Mary Selaske Anderson and William McFaddin, my mother's brother," who were to have their share in the sale of personal things.<sup>48</sup> Stepfather Anderson once again served as administrator. The settling of Hiram's estate was a long-drawn-out process, involving appraisement of his personal belongings, and extending, by record, into 1828.<sup>49</sup>

The appraisement of Hiram's "Goods and Chattles" reveals much of the standard of living and the aesthetic tastes of the Tomlin family. His books, besides those mentioned above, included "Marrow a Novel, 3 vols.," "Monastrey [sic], 2 vols.," "Life of Wellington," "Washington & Commodore Perry," "Campains [sic] of Bonapart," "History of Decastro," "Embassy to China Lectures, 3 vols.," "Errors of Hopkins and Sheridan's Elocution," and two lots, of "books" and "small Books" with no titles specified.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sumter Wills, Book I, p. 157.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ordinary's Office, Sumter, Book V-G, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> Inventory Records, Sumter, 1814-1824, p. 403.

Other items appearing on the inventory suggest that life in the Tomlin household was pleasantly divided between work and play. Planting had to be supervised, and the young gentlemen of the family knew the uses of such necessary tools as "4 Broad Hoes, 2 grubing hoes," and "1 Cutter and Shovel Plough." But arduous work was done by slaves, who were listed, along with other property, on the inventory, as "Negro man Guy," "Phebe and child," "Girl Heriot," and "negro women Sue, Minda, Sella, and Judy." There was abundant leisure for the gentlemanly sports suggested by Hiram's possession of "one pair Horsemen Pistols," and "bay horse, sorrel horse, and saddle mare." And the plantation yielded sufficient income for the gratification of a love of finery such as "watch trinkets," "Dressing Case," "Vest Pattern and Trimings," and "Silver Spurs."<sup>51</sup>

Samuel, the second brother, was to outlive Hiram by twelve years, but he too was subject to illness. On March 12, 1822, cash was paid "Doer. Haynsworth his acct. against Saml Tomlin,"<sup>52</sup> and in the same year fifty dollars was advanced to Samuel "to travel for his health."<sup>53</sup> But John appears to have been more fortunate than his brothers in this respect; perhaps he inherited the sturdy McFaddin constitution. So far as the record shows, he enjoyed good health throughout his boyhood and young manhood.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 403-404.

<sup>52</sup> "Administration, Robert Tomlinson," 1822.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

John's formal education came to an end early; the young planter's people thought he had no further need of it. But his eager mind was constantly absorbing new impressions. Although he had little opportunity for travel until later in life, even as a youth he occasionally escaped the confines of the Black River country. In June 1830 he was visiting in Charleston, where his circle of friends possibly included William Gilmore Simms.<sup>54</sup> Certainly it included an unnamed but patently attractive young woman, and a young man, William Carlile, whose badly spelled but provocatively detailed letter gives an entertaining glimpse into John Tomlin's young manhood:

Charleston June the 24th 1823

Dear friend

I take my pen to write these few lines hoping the may find you in a state of health as the leave me at present, praise be to god for all his mercies. I recd your kind letter of the 15th and was exceedingly gratified by it to find that you had such a pleasant journey and got safe home on the 16th. Timothy and his family and Newman sailed for the north of the 17th. I delivered you letter. Think it not neglect in me not delivering it sooner, for I have been past there almost every evening since your departure, thinking to see her to deliver it into her own hand but could not see ther. I passed there on the evening of the 17th and seeing a light in the backroom, I knocked at the door, to which a old lady came on. Bidding her good evening I enquired if ther was a young lady lived there by that name. She replied there was. I then delivered the letter and begged her to deliver it to her. She took the letter and begged me to stop stope there a few minutes, to which I replied, I am in haste now maddam and will call on my return, and bid her good evening. I then stepped down the street a few yards and crossed directly opposite when I seen the old lady open the letter, and having looked at it a few moments she flurted round to the opposite side of the table and folded it up very carelessly. Dear John, donot let this stop you from writing to again, but when you write enfold it in one directed to me and I will deliver it if possibel into her own hand. Dear John, write as soon

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<sup>54</sup> See above, p. 23.

as convenient and let me know how you come on and how many sweethearts you have got.

Says no more at present but remains your affectionate

Friend  
William Carlile.<sup>55</sup>

After the death of Hiram and the settling of his estate, the Tomlin and Anderson families began to sever relations with their South Carolina birthplace, and to make preparations for pushing westward to Tennessee. Before arrangements for the removal were completed, however, two marriages took place. A marriage settlement was arranged on March 2, 1826, between Samuel on the one hand and Malachi P. Murphy and Jehu Bates on the other, in which all estate Samuel might acquire by marriage to Harriet Murphy, daughter of Malachi P., should be held in trust for Harriet.<sup>56</sup>

There is no available record for the exact date of John's marriage, but it certainly took place before March 10, 1827, for on that date, when John deeded land to Samuel McBride, a renunciation of dower was signed by Mary A. Tomlin, "wife of the within named John Tomlin."<sup>57</sup> Mary A. may have been the Mary Anna Hanna Anderson, John's stepsister, who was baptized in Salem Presbyterian Church on July 11, 1802. If so, the difference in ages and the family connection might possibly account for marital troubles later.

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<sup>55</sup> This letter is the property of Mr. Curtis Bray, Jackson, Tennessee.

<sup>56</sup> Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, G, 1824-1827, p. 349.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., GG, 1827-1829, p. 151.

It is to be presumed, however, that there was no cloud on the matrimonial sky at the time of departure for Madison County, Tennessee. On October 15, 1828, John bought land in Madison County from William Porter, a resident of the county.<sup>58</sup> The mother and stepfather also elected to join their fortunes with those of the young Tomlins in the "western wilderness." Like John and Samuel, Mary and William Anderson disposed of their portion of the Tomlinson land, executing on June 23, 1827, two deeds to Samuel McBride for considerations of \$1500 each.<sup>59</sup>

The year 1829 found Samuel and John, with their wives, finally established in Madison County, Tennessee, where John was to live out nineteen of the twenty-one years remaining to him.<sup>60</sup> For the first few years, John lived in a country home five miles north of Jackson, meanwhile establishing himself in the social and business life of the town, to which he removed early in 1836.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Madison County, Tennessee, Deeds, Book III, p. 207.

<sup>59</sup> Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, GG, 1827-1829, pp. 116-117.

<sup>60</sup> On June 31, 1829, Samuel and John Tomlin of Madison County, State of Tennessee, deeded the remainder of their South Carolina land to Samuel McBride. Sumter County Clerk of Court, Conveyances, H, 1829-1831, p. 78.

<sup>61</sup> A fragment of an old court record, now owned by Mr. Bray, reads, "John Mooring the Track of Land he wishes to sell 9 miles North East of Jackson he has removed five miles north of Jackson on the Track of Land the Late residence of John Tomlin now living in Jackson. W. M. Tidwell. Jackson, February 10th 1836."

That early death which dogged the Tomlins was to strike again, the victim this time being the second brother Samuel. Although Samuel, unlike Hiram, had not had time to make his will,<sup>62</sup> he may have had some premonition that he was not to live to realize his dreams of success in Tennessee, for he sold his part of Madison County land to John in 1833.<sup>63</sup>

In 1834 John Tomlin and Washington R. Perkins bought from Jacob Perkins a lot on Market Street in Jackson,<sup>64</sup> where Tomlin operated a retail store for seven years, first in partnership with Perkins and later with Joseph White.<sup>65</sup> Tomlin, alone, however, assumed the greater responsibility for stocking the store, doing business, as 1836 invoices show, with the Eastern firms of Hallock and Bates of New York, and Buckmaster and Bowlby, Stokes-Hines, K. F. Edsell, and White and Peabody, all of Philadelphia.<sup>66</sup> He seems to have had a good sense of what his customers

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<sup>62</sup> On September 23, 1837, Osborn H. Boykin, of Jackson, proved to the court's satisfaction that he had paid Samuel Tomlin \$790.00 for a parcel of land, and that Samuel had died before executing bond and without a will. The heirs of Samuel Tomlin were directed to relinquish all claim to the land. Madison County Deeds, Book V, p. 406.

<sup>63</sup> Madison County Deeds, Book III, p. 214.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., Book IV, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> In April 1838, Cary, Withered & Co. brought suit against Tomlin and White for \$1380.25. Circuit Court, State of Tennessee, Madison County, April 1838. This fragmentary record is the property of Mr. Bray.

<sup>66</sup> Copies of these invoices exist in fragments of John Tomlin's ledger, owned by Mr. Bray.



wanted, catering to the tastes of fine ladies and gentlemen, as well as to humbler needs. Along with such prosaic items as "12 Packs Pins, 3 Flowlines," and "2 doz. Manilla cords," are found entries which conjure up visions of richness and beauty, such as "figured Velvet Vesting," "carnation shawls," "black silk hose," "rolled India satin," "Ladies Florence Straw Bonnets," and " $\frac{1}{2}$  doz. Satin Stocks."<sup>67</sup>

Tomlin might well have derived personal gratification from the sight of his well-stocked shelves. But his heart was not in buying and selling. What makes the worn, yellowed sheets of the old Tomlin ledger interesting to the literary historian is the fragments of poems scribbled crosswise or at the bottom of precise, methodical invoices. Beneath a recapitulation on the back of the March 5, 1836, invoice from K. F. Edsell, for example, appear two lines:

My dreams have languished into nothingness  
In echo of a sad and tremulous sigh!<sup>68</sup>

And edgewise of the same sheet this fragment appears:

Farewell! If ever wish express'd  
The feelings of a burning breast  
'Tis this--that I may love thee still<sup>69</sup>

On the August 18, 1836, invoice from Buckmaster & Bowlby, the beginning of another poem is scrawled:

If e'er a prayer was ever made  
In purity of wildest thought.<sup>70</sup>

Still another occurs on the August 19 invoice from Stokes-Hines. This one

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<sup>67</sup> Tomlin ledger.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

bears a title, "The Last Farewell."

I cannot weep  
It is a crime to look on thee!  
And prayer can ne'er atone for crime!  
That I am damn'd!<sup>71</sup>

On the August 20, 1836, invoice from White and Peabody, Tomlin picked up again two lines from March 5, revised them slightly, and added five more. The composition is indicative of great melancholy and shows through its bad spelling the carelessness of hasty writing.

My dreams have languish'd to a nothingness  
In echo of a sad and tremulous sigh!  
The waste of thought hath bens [sic] the dreariness  
Of sleepless midnight hours! I could not die  
For wildest thought with deep intensity  
Frankt on the brain the strangest imagery  
Of unknown objects that from the ground did fly  
Impalbly! [sic]<sup>72</sup>

Tomlin appears at something like his best in a fragment expressing his rebellion against conventional ideas. The three lines which constitute it are found on the back of an invoice for "Bagging & Rope Shiped by E. Webb on Board S. B. Gov. Clark," dated August 31, 1836. This brief piece demonstrates a verbal facility not always in evidence in Tomlin's poetry; at the same time, it expresses a decided distaste, in spite of early Presbyterian training, for the dogmas of organized religion.

#### My Heaven

On Sabbath last I visited the church  
And heard a descant on the Christian's heaven  
But I repudiate the place described.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> The sheet of the Tomlin ledger on which this appears is the property of Mr. Seale Johnson, of Jackson.

Since this, unlike the other fragments, which break off abruptly, indicates by the signature "J. Tomlin" that no more was to be added, it shows that for once at least the too often verbose Tomlin could be laconic.

At the same time that John Tomlin was carrying on his business and beginning to write his poems, he was absorbing some of the best products of other, greater minds. Books had always played an important part in his life and there is evidence that, from time to time, he made judicious additions to his private library. In 1827, before leaving his South Carolina home, he had bought four volumes of The Tatler in a Philadelphia reprint. On the title page of the first volume, under a famous Homeric phrase, Tomlin penned his own translation: "A man of business ought not to sleep all night."<sup>74</sup> Although he followed nineteenth century models when he came to do his own writing, Tomlin continued to read and to buy some of the best English prose works of the eighteenth century. In 1837 he added to his collection a four-volume edition of The History of Tom Jones.<sup>75</sup>

In 1839 the Poe-Tomlin correspondence began, with Tomlin's calling himself a "brither sinner" of Poe's and submitting to him an ambitiously romantic story, "Theodoric of the Amali," for publication in Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, which Poe was then editing.<sup>76</sup> Since this correspondence

<sup>74</sup> Vols. I and III are the property of Mrs. Hewett P. Tomlin, Sr., Jackson, Tennessee; Vols. II and IV of Mr. John T. Tomlin, Jackson.

<sup>75</sup> Owned by Mr. Tomlin, who gave vol. III to this writer.

<sup>76</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, October 18, 1839. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

will be treated more fully below, it may be dealt with briefly here. Twenty-one letters passed between the two, sixteen of which are extant.<sup>77</sup> They concerned such matters as Poe's projected magazine, the Fenn or Stylus, toward the establishment of which Tomlin offered substantial encouragement in the way of subscribers among his Tennessee friends. For the aspiring writer, this contact with the brilliant mind of his Southern contemporary afforded an impetus to his literary career. The impulse had been there, of course, but Poe's acceptance of "Theodoric of the Amali" spurred Tomlin on to greater productivity.

However, the volume of Tomlin's writing during the years from 1839 to 1850 does not have to be ascribed exclusively to his correspondence with Poe. An equally fortunate circumstance was his appointment as postmaster at Jackson. Unlike Poe, who tried for many years without success to secure some kind of government position which would provide him at one and the same time with a livelihood and time for writing, Tomlin had both helpful friends and political influence. His family was well-known and highly respected,<sup>78</sup> and his own misgivings over the attitude of a Whig president toward a Democratic appointee proved groundless. Appointed postmaster by Martin Van Buren on February 24, 1841, Tomlin served until the appointment of his successor on December 23, 1847.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> John Ward Ostrom, ed., The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), II, 579, 582, 585, 591, 594, 596, 598, 599.

<sup>78</sup> See below, p. 233.

<sup>79</sup> Records of the Post Office Department, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D. C.

The new employment was ideal for John Tomlin. Not only did it provide a regular income and leisure for the writing he loved, it also opened wider, exciting horizons for a man who was chafing at his isolation from the centers of culture, and presumably at domestic bonds. The cause of Tomlin's marital unhappiness is still shrouded in mystery, but that he was unhappy is evident not only from veiled references in his own writing but also from newspaper accounts of his death. The Dresden Tennessee Democrat wrote that "he was deserted by her who had vowed to comfort him through life,"<sup>80</sup> and the Jackson West Tennessee Whig said, "Poor Jack, he has from domestic troubles lived an unhappy life for many years."<sup>81</sup> If Mary A. did actually desert Tomlin, she may have left Jackson to live at Wytheville, Virginia. There is in existence a fragment of a letter, inside a cover postmarked Wytheville, with the name of the state obliterated. Its 10¢ stamp indicates that it was mailed in the 1840's or '50's. It is addressed to Mr. John W. Campbell, Jackson, and the only extant words are "give my sincere love to Mrs. Campbell and the same for yourself." It is signed "Mary A. Tomlin."<sup>82</sup> Whatever the trouble between husband and wife, and wherever blame should be laid, "poor Jack" found some comfort in the duties and privileges of his post-mastership.

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<sup>80</sup> "John Tomlin, from Dresden Democrat," Nashville Union, August 15, 1850.

<sup>81</sup> "John Tomlin, from Jackson West Tennessee Whig," True Whig, July 23, 1850. This item and the one above were furnished by Emma Inman Williams, of Jackson, who includes a brief sketch of Tomlin in Historic Madison.

<sup>82</sup> The letter is the property of Mr. Curtis Bray.

One source of satisfaction was the wealth of magazines to which he had access. It was then customary to solicit agents for periodicals among postmasters, and Tomlin appears to have taken advantage of such offers.<sup>83</sup> An even greater privilege for one so avid for communication with good minds was free mailing. He could write—and mail—letters to anyone he wished! So he wrote to many, and, either out of courtesy or pleasure at being addressed, they replied. During the years between 1841 and 1848, this indefatigable letter-writer acquired a list of correspondents which reads like a nineteenth-century Who's Who. It includes most of the famous names of his day, as well as many now known only to the literary, or regional, historian.

Everything being grist for a writer's mill, the literary postmaster was able to put these letters to profitable use. Capitalizing on the contemporary craze for autography, he wrote and had published in Holden's Dollar Magazine a serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," in which the letters appeared with facsimiles of each signature. Holden's gave the story good advance notices,<sup>84</sup> and two years after Tomlin's death it was still being published in weekly installments in the Philadelphia Sunday Mercury.<sup>85</sup>

The greater part of Tomlin's literary career was crowded into those years as postmaster. Before 1841, he had published, besides "Theodoric"

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<sup>83</sup> The Broadway Journal, for example, lists "John Tomlin, P. M. Jackson, Tenn.," as agent from October 4, 1845, through December 27, 1845. II, 202, 218, 234, 250, 266, 282, 314, 330, 346, 380, 396.

<sup>84</sup> Holden's, II (October 1848), 624.

<sup>85</sup> II (October 31, 1852), 1-4.

in Burton's, two short stories and two poems in the Philadelphia Casket. After 1847 these appeared: "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac" and six poems in Holden's; one poem in Graham's; three poems in the 1848 annual of the Rainbow, a paper published by the fraternal order of Odd Fellows; one in a gift book, The American Gallery of Art; and his second book, Tales of the Caddo. But it was during his term as postmaster that his work was first published in Graham's and in such other nationally circulated magazines as Godey's, the Philadelphia Lady's World, and the Southern Literary Messenger. He was also a regular contributor to the Southron for its year's duration of 1841, and to the Guardian from 1842 to 1844. And it was in this period that the first of his two books appeared. Shelley's Grave and Other Poems was published by the Philadelphia Lyceum Press in 1843.

For several years before securing his postmastership, Tomlin had gradually been disposing of most of his Jackson property, including eventually the house and lot where he had operated his store.<sup>86</sup> Why he did this is cause for speculation. It must have been partly due to a natural desire for more time for writing. Probably, too, the domestic difficulties mentioned above added to the onerousness of his duties as property holder. Another element of his complex nature may be said to

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<sup>86</sup> On January 9, 1833, he deeded to his stepfather, William Anderson, two hundred acres of land for \$960. Madison County Deeds, Book III, p. 436. On January 1, 1836, he deeded to John Moring three hundred acres of land for \$7100. Madison County Deeds, Book IV, p. 391. On January 5, 1836, he deeded to Henry J. Persons two hundred twenty-four acres for \$800. Madison County Deeds, Book IV, p. 392. On April 16, 1838, he deeded to Samuel Lancaster, for the sum of five dollars, the house and lot on which he had kept his retail store. Madison County Deeds, Book VI, p. 159.

have contributed to business failures. Like many another gentleman of his day and other days, Tomlin became addicted to drink. His Alabama correspondent, Judge Alexander B. Meek, took notice of this failing in the maliciously clever sonnet sent to William Gilmore Simms and quoted above.<sup>87</sup> His Tennessee friends were kinder. Through the agencies of that nineteenth-century forerunner of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Sons of Temperance, Tomlin received the sympathy and encouragement needed to overcome his vice, and lived, according to the record, for a year in "perfect sobriety."<sup>88</sup>

His postmastership terminated in December 1847. The following spring he set out on what must have been both the happiest and the most profitable, at least from a literary point of view, of his journeys, to the great, sprawling territory to the southwest which in 1845 had become the State of Texas. Texas has always been a lodestone for Tennesseans. And in the preceding decade, Tennesseans had found their imaginations stirred and their adventurous spirits attracted by the heroic struggles of Texans for independence and by the exploits in that fabulous land of one of the most heroic of all Tennessee-Texans, General Sam Houston.

In the spring of 1848, John Tomlin left Jackson for a visit with

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<sup>87</sup> See above, p. 23, n. 45.

<sup>88</sup> "John Tomlin, from Dresden Democrat," Nashville Union, August 15, 1850.



his young kinsman, Hiram Tomlin, in Jefferson, Texas.<sup>89</sup> From Shreveport, Louisiana, he journeyed down the Red River to Lake Caddo, stopping first at Port Caddo, "situated at the terminus of the lake" on Cypress Bayou, and thence to Jefferson, ten miles away, "a well built town, and a most enterprising and industrious population."<sup>90</sup> As a result of his stay in Jefferson, Tomlin produced one of the earliest known pieces of fiction dealing with Texas history during the establishment of the Republic.

Tales of the Caddo, published at the office of "The Great West" in Cincinnati in 1849, is a collection of eleven tales purported to have been told Tomlin by one Jack Faraday, "an old man of the forest," who had seen much of life both in "gay Southern cities" and as "an inmate of the low haunts of the Texian river."<sup>91</sup> The book belongs in the category of Augustus Longstreet's Georgia Scenes and James Hall's Legends of the West. And for its author it marked a definite turning from his early preoccupation with the far away and long ago to an honest recounting of a portion of the contemporary American scene.

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<sup>89</sup> Possibly a nephew. According to information supplied by Mrs. B. Koontz, of the Jefferson Historical Society and Museum, the inscription on the cemetery vault in Jefferson gives his dates as 1826-1867. John Tomlin has nowhere indicated the exact relationship but two references to this Hiram in John's writings, as well as the name's being that of his elder brother, would point to its being a close one. Tomlin concludes the serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac" thus: "As I have a young friend in Jefferson, Texas, by the name of Hiram Tomlin with whom I am deeply intimate and for whose character I have a high admiration . . . I will inscribe the papers with his name." Holden's, IV (November 1849), 656. In the dedication of Tales of the Caddo to Hiram, John writes ". . . with higher considerations than any of these—the ties of relationship, or any connection of the kind—I have other reasons, more cogent and powerful, for manifesting in some slight degree my good will towards you."

<sup>90</sup> Tales of the Caddo, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

Unfortunately, John Tomlin did not live to realize the complete fruition of those talents so clearly manifested in Tales of the Caddo. The circumstances of his death are startlingly reminiscent of Poe's. Tomlin, like his friend, was incapable of moderation in the use of alcohol. Like Poe, after an apparently successful struggle against alcoholism, he again succumbed.

Exactly when his complete surrender took place cannot be determined, but probably not before 1850. Through 1849 he was occupied with publication of Tales of the Caddo and with the final chapters of "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac." Either late that year or early in 1850, he sent a poetic tribute "To Grace Greenwood" to Holden's.<sup>92</sup> But the physical and mental deterioration soon to culminate in death was beginning.

Discouraged and unhappy, he left Jackson in early 1850. According to information he gave for hospital records a short time before his death, he lived for a period in Memphis.<sup>93</sup> From there, he drifted to New Orleans, where on June 30, 1850, he entered the Charity Hospital.<sup>94</sup> Strangely enough, with death approaching he disclaimed all literary achievement and gave his occupation as "farmer." And a touching commentary on his refusal to elaborate publicly on his estrangement from

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<sup>92</sup> See below, p. 83.

<sup>93</sup> Records of the Charity Hospital of New Orleans. Information furnished by Dr. Robert Bernhard, Director.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Mary is that in regard to marital status he described himself simply as "married." He died in the Hospital on July 4, 1850, his malady being recorded as "delirium tremens."<sup>95</sup>

Before turning from this chronicle of the events of Tomlin's life to a detailed study of his literary composition and associations, it may be pertinent to repeat a summary of his character and personality by a person who must have known him very well. While fulsome tribute was typical of most nineteenth-century death notices, and so must be discounted, there is somehow a ring of sincerity in the words with which the Dresden Democrat concluded its Tomlin obituary. "He had a heart noble and generous; he was a devoted friend and a pleasant companion."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> "John Tomlin, from Dresden Democrat," Nashville Union, August 15, 1850.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE WRITINGS OF JOHN TOMLIN: PERIODICAL VERSE

Thus far, this study has been devoted to those general characteristics of Tomlin's writing that make him representative of the "golden age of periodicals," and to biographical data requisite for an understanding of him as a man and as a writer. In this and the two succeeding chapters, an examination will be made of all his known writings.

When John Tomlin died in July 1850, he had made no will, nor had he made any provision for the collection and preservation of his writings. Although it is very probable that some of them are lost forever, it has still been possible to establish the Tomlin "canon," both from the two books he had seen through the printing press, and from his work, both prose and verse, which appeared in contemporary periodicals. Of these books, Shelley's<sup>1</sup> Grave and Other Poems and Tales of the Caddo, only the second appears to be extant. The contents of the first, however, can be reconstructed with reasonable accuracy, by reference to contemporary reviews and to Tomlin's verse published in periodicals. It is the purpose of this chapter to attempt such a reconstruction, and to subject the total body of Tomlin's poetry to critical examination in order to arrive at an evaluation of it, particularly in its reflection of the taste and the demands of nineteenth-century readers.

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<sup>1</sup> In magazines in which the title poem was published, the spelling is Shelley. But since reviewers used the accepted form, it has seemed preferable to use it here and throughout this study.

According to William Gilmore Simms, Shelley's Grave and Other Poems was published in 1843, by the Philadelphia Lyceum Press. Simms furnished this information in a letter written to Evert Duyckinck in 1854, concerning the matter of Southern writers to be included in Duyckinck's Cyclopedia of American Writers. What lessens the possibility that Simms was relying on his memory is that the description he gives has every indication of being taken from a volume at hand. He writes: "This is a thin 12mo. of 40 pages. Do you wish an abstract or have you got the book?"<sup>2</sup>

Ten years before, Simms had written to his friend James Lawson: "My wild friend Tomlin has published his poems, such as they are. Has he sent you a copy?"<sup>3</sup> And in February of the same year, the Guardian reviewed the book very favorably, reprinting three poems from it, "Orihula," "Earth and Ocean," and "Lines on the Death of a Friend."

In April 1845, a review appeared in the Broadway Journal, which Charles F. Briggs had founded in January of that year. Poe is almost certainly the reviewer, since he had been co-editor since March, when Briggs had elevated him to this position on the strength of his reputation as a critic.<sup>4</sup> The review is brief, but not unfavorable.

A very neat and unpretending volume containing much of the truest poetry. We have space only to give an extract from the leading piece of the collection.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ALS, Simms to Duyckinck, Woodlands, S. C., November 22, 1854. MSS Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves, eds., The Letters of William Gilmore Simms (Columbia, S. C., 1952), I, 407.

<sup>4</sup> George E. Woodberry, The Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 2 vols. (Boston, 1909), II, 125-127.

<sup>5</sup> "Reviews," The Broadway Journal, I (April 12, 1845), 226.

The "extract" consists of Stanzas X and XIII of "Shelley's Grave."

The two reviews furnish positive evidence of four poems appearing in Shelley's Grave, the title poem, "Orihula," "Earth and Ocean," and "Lines on the Death of a Friend." For the remainder of its contents, one must turn to the body of Tomlin's published verse, as it appeared in contemporary periodicals. Here is a chronological listing:

"Stanzas"	<u>The Casket</u>	May 1840
"The Farewell"	" "	June 1840
"The Poet's Home"	<u>The Southron</u>	January 1841
"To Miss H. E. B."	" "	October 1841
"Stanzas" (Not identical with poem of same title in <u>The Casket</u> .)	" "	October 1841
"To My Wife"	<u>Southern Literary Messenger</u>	December 1841
"Lines"	<u>Graham's Magazine</u>	December 1841
"Mary"	<u>The Guardian</u>	March 1842
"To Eva"	<u>Republican Banner</u>	November 1842
"Shelley's Grave"	<u>The Magnolia</u>	November 1842
"Orihula"	<u>Godey's</u>	December 1842
"Sonnet"	<u>The Magnolia</u>	January 1843
"The Old Man"	<u>The Guardian</u>	February 1843
"Freedom — A Sonnet"	<u>The Magnolia</u>	March 1843
"Earth and Ocean"	" "	April 1843
"The True and False"	<u>Godey's</u>	May 1843
"Gulnare"	<u>The Magnolia</u>	May 1843
"Thoughts"	<u>The Guardian</u>	September 1843

"To Helen"	<u>Southern Literary Messenger</u>	November 1843
"The Heritage"	<u>The Guardian</u>	May 1844
"Sonnet--To Helen"	<u>Southern Literary Messenger</u>	September 1844
"The Heritage"	<u>Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine</u>	March 1845
"Isola"	<u>Southern and Western Magazine and Review</u>	December 1845
"Trust in God"	<u>Quarterly Journal and Review</u>	January 1846
"Earth and Ocean"	<u>Holden's</u>	February 1848
"Isola"	<u>Graham's</u>	March 1848
"Lines on the Death of the Hon. Richard Henry Wilde"	<u>Holden's</u>	March 1848
"Gulnare"	"	April 1848
"Shelley's Grave"	"	April 1848
"To Byrons--Impromptu"	"	October 1848
"The Heritage"	<u>The American Gallery of Art</u>	1848
"Etiwando--A Ballad"	<u>The Rainbow</u>	"
"Adela--A Song"	" "	"
"Shelley's Grave"	" "	"
"To Grace Greenwood"	<u>Holden's</u>	February 1850
"Alice Lea. By the late John Tomlin."	<u>Nashville Gasette</u>	June 25, 1851
✓ "To Miss M. E. MacM-- of Philadelphia"	Unpublished, but a notation "For Graham's" indicates that it was sent to Poe, while he was editing the magazine.	Undated

It is very probable that the first nineteen of these poems, all published before 1844, were written before Shelley's Grave and Other Poems was issued. If so, there is a very good chance that many or all of them were included in the small volume. Nor is it improbable that some of the titles published in 1844 and afterwards form part of the table of contents, since there is no positive proof that the poems published later were also written later, except in the case of "Lines on the Death of the Hon. Richard Henry Wilde," which could not have been written before 1847.

If, however, any considerable part of the contents of Shelley's Grave and Other Poems are now lost, the small size of the volume precludes the appearance in it of very many of the post-1843 poems. That there is at least a possibility of such a loss is indicated by a long piece of literary criticism published in the Guardian in June 1848. It is reprinted from the Nashville Union, and is a review of Fruit of Western Life, or Blanche and Other Poems, by David Reeve Arnell, a Tennessee poet. Before proceeding to the primary purpose of the article, the reviewer indulges in a long exposition of the theme that "the great West has apparently every requisite to become the land of song."<sup>6</sup> In attempting to demonstrate that progress has been made in the "art poetic," he discusses poetry which was published in Tennessee previous to the appearance of Arnell's Fruit of Western Life. "Since 1840," he says, "have

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<sup>6</sup> "Review of Arnell's Poems," The Guardian, N. S., III (June 1848), 125.



appeared 'Wood Notes Wild,' by Mrs. Avery, 'Humbuggiana, A Satire,' by Dr. Davenport, and a small volume of poetry by John Tomlin, of Jackson, Tenn."<sup>7</sup> Of the last-named, the reviewer, who did not share the 1844 critic's enthusiasm for Tomlin, writes:

The Work of Mr. Tomlin was published at Philadelphia, and consists of "Madrigals" and "Farcicalities"—the former indicating a susceptible heart, though not always a refined taste; and the latter betraying rather an unblinded fancy, giving occasion to a caustic critic to advise the author "to take some of the feathers out of the wings of his imagination and stick them in the tail of his judgment."<sup>8</sup>

Whether the terms madrigals and farcicalities are Tomlin's or the reviewer's, it is extremely doubtful that the second term could accurately be applied to any appreciable number of the nineteen Tomlin poems which appeared before 1843. While it might be argued that neither could madrigal in a strict literary sense, it is understandable that Tomlin, his publishers, or even the reviewer might have felt that the numerous brief lyrics merited such designation. Certainly they were short, with one or two exceptions; many of them were of amatory character; and all might have conceivably have lent themselves to musical setting. These characteristics bring the lyrics within range of a general definition of madrigal, especially for nineteenth-century American readers, who did not concern themselves, in the main, with nice distinctions regarding literary form. But none of the first nineteen poems published before 1844 appears to contain elements of conscious "farcicality." Consequently,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

it seems possible that Shelley's Grave and Other Poems contained, in addition to nineteen or more lyric poems of serious intent, a few pieces of intentionally humorous content and execution. If so, it is a great pity that they remain undiscovered, for they might possibly, in spite of the Nashville Union reviewer's opinion, demonstrate a sense of humor otherwise not in evidence in most of Tomlin's poetry.<sup>9</sup>

Since there is little indication of growth and development in Tomlin's verse, and since its chief value now resides in its reflection of the tastes of nineteenth-century periodical readers, no attempt is here made to analyze it in order of publication. Rather, by grouping the body of his verse according to type, and analyzing the poems in each group, it will be possible to arrive at an estimate of his poetry as a whole, and at the same time to gain a better understanding of the kind of magazine verse published in mid-nineteenth-century America.

Of the thirty poems in the "canon," only one can be classified as narrative. "Etiwando--A Ballad" appeared in the 1848 annual edition of The Rainbow, a journal published by the fraternal order of Odd Fellows. "Etiwando," the longest of Tomlin's poems, tells, in seventeen eight-line stanzas, the story of the young Indian brave for whom the South Carolina river is named and of his part in Francis Marion's battle against the Tory Captain, Tyne. Tomlin here employs the Noble Savage concept of the Indian, picturing young Etiwando as sharing the

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<sup>9</sup> There is abundant, though not overly subtle, humor in some of his prose. See below, pp. 114, 120-121, 172-174.

Revolutionary patriot's scorn of foreign tyranny and his determination that it will never prevail on American soil.

Now, by the healing blood of Christ, will Etiwando swear—  
 God help him now to keep the vow,—no tyrant shall now wear  
 A kingly crown within this land, my native land of bliss,<sup>10</sup>  
 Nor kingly crown, nor purple robe within a land like this.

The debt to Macaulay's rhythmic pattern is very much in evidence even in these heavily padded lines. And in the fifteenth stanza, Macaulayan echoes become more distinct.

Ho! Carolina's Huguenots! rejected sons of France,  
 On Briton and on Hessian too, in chivalry advance!  
 Ho for your altars and your hearths!—arouse, the thought inspires!  
 Arouse ye, for your altar's sakes, your mothers and your sires!<sup>11</sup>

Throughout this long ballad, there are too many instances not only of padded lines, but of inept words, obviously chosen for inherent "poetic" connotation, with little regard for context, as in this description of the advance of Marion's men:

On, on they dash,<sup>12</sup> through mud and wire, a bold and fearless clan,  
 On, on they dash, through bog and fen, with Marion in the van!<sup>13</sup>

But the total effect of "Etiwando" is not so displeasing, nor even so unpoetic, as the isolated lines might indicate. The use of definite

<sup>10</sup> The Rainbow (Albany, 1848), p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Italics not in original.

<sup>13</sup> The Rainbow, p. 165.

place names, such as Pedee and Eutaw, gives the ballad an indigenous quality. Moreover, the theme is one which still had power to stir an American, particularly a Southern American. Tomlin's uncle had fought with Marion during the Revolution; and many of his readers could, like himself, recall stories heard firsthand in childhood of the Swamp Fox's exploits. And they liked to think, with Tomlin, that the Indians who fought with the American patriots were like Etiwando.

The Sachem of a perished race, he stood the white man's friend,  
And blest the cause of Liberty, of Freedom to the end!<sup>14</sup>

The editor of the Annual thought enough of the piece to enhance its attractiveness "with an illustration," to which attention is called by a subtitle.<sup>15</sup> In this, the only illustration "embellishing" Tomlin's magazine writing, Etiwando is pictured in battle array, standing proudly on a promontory, while below him the waters of the stream that came to bear his name beat against the rock.

The remaining twenty-nine poems are lyrics, which may be grouped, for analysis and for comparison with other nineteenth-century periodical verse, according to form and subject matter. Tomlin, self-taught in his art as he was, still consciously strove to produce several definite poetic forms. Three of his lyrics are sonnets, the first entitled simply "Sonnet," the other two "Freedom—a Sonnet," and "Sonnet—To Helen." Four are elegies: "Shelley's Grave," "Gulnare," "Thoughts," and "Lines on the Death of the Hon. Richard Henry Wilde." The five lyrics entitled

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

respectively "Stanzas" (the first of this title, published in The Casket), "Earth and Ocean," "The True and False," "The Heritage," and "Trust in God" have in common the expression of Tomlin's personal philosophy of life. Another group, exceedingly slight in form and import, consists of five brief poems addressed to women: "To Miss H. E. B.," "To Eva," "To Byrons—Impromptu," "To Grace Greenwood," and "To Miss E. Mack— of Philadelphia." Similar in title, but differing from the five in purpose, are "To My Wife," one of few published expressions of John's feeling about his Mary, and "To Helen," which, like the "Sonnet—To Helen," was obviously suggested by Poe's "Helen, thy beauty is to me." Four poems, "Orihula," "Isola," "Adela—a Song," and the posthumously published "Alice Lea," reflect the fondness for evocative, musical syllables which was one of the distinguishing marks of Chivers' weird verse and which saw its most haunting poetic expression in Poe. The remaining poems are not so easily classified. "The Farewell" and "The Poet's Home" are each an expression of a mood; the second "Stanzas," which appeared in The Southron, is unmistakably a love lyric, as are "Lines" in Graham's and "Mary" in The Guardian; and "The Old Man" is a pen portrait. Since nineteenth-century periodicals abounded in poems similar to those found in each of the preceding groupings, an analysis of Tomlin's verse, as it falls into these groups, will demonstrate the quality of poetry which filled both newspapers and magazines circulated in the 1840's and 1850's.

Tomlin achieved least success within the sonnet's narrow room. The best that can be said for his attempts is that he understood what a sonnet is; he did employ the requisite number of lines, and, in two of

his three, used iambic pentameter and an accepted rhyme scheme, his own variant of the Italian. Of his three published sonnets, "Sonnet," the first and poorest, is filled, like so much of Tomlin's work, with feebly Poean echoes, from its opening line, "Thy beauty, Eva, like the isles," to the ninth and tenth, in which the pattern of Poe's metaphor is blurred by bathetic sentimentalism.

Thou art to me the lock of hair,  
Which dying sisters give away.<sup>16</sup>

It was these two lines which so aroused the scorn of Tomlin's fellow poet, Alexander Meek of Tuscaloosa, that he quoted them maliciously as proof that Tomlin wrote the sonnet when not quite sober.<sup>17</sup>

The second sonnet, "Freedom," is better. Both idea and phrasing are reminiscent of Shelley, to whose "Ozymandias" Tomlin probably owed these two lines:

Ere yet on plains of earth one column stood,  
Uprear'd to fame by worshippers below--<sup>18</sup>

Regardless of the derivative quality of the poem, however, the sentiment it expresses is genuine and noble, and one which Tomlin felt deeply. His own love of freedom was very real, finding constant expression throughout his written work. Although the concluding lines of the sonnet are more Byronic and Shelleyan than original, they constitute a worthy tribute to the ideal which the American Tomlin shared with the great British Romantics.

<sup>16</sup> The Magnolia, N. S., II (January 1843), 40.

<sup>17</sup> See above, p. 23, n. 45.

<sup>18</sup> The Magnolia, N. S., II (March 1843), 197.

Thou dost but breathe the unerring will of God--  
 And the sound wakens, as some volcan's roar,  
 The ages--and thy spirit speeds abroad,--  
 Man rises in his strength, by thee made strong,  
 His chains all broken, forged and worn so long.<sup>19</sup>

Printed directly beneath Tomlin's "Freedom" in the March 1843

Magnolia is another sonnet, signed only with the initial "S.," but probably written by Simms, who was then editing the magazine and contributing much of its literary content as well. "S." chose a more concrete subject than the Tennessean's, entitling his poem "Sonnet--By the Swananoa." The phrasing in both sonnets is equally grandiose and rhetorical, as in the first four lines.

Is it not lovely, while the day flows on,  
 Like some unhidden water, thro' the vale,  
 Sun-sprinkled;--and across the fields, a gale,  
 Ausonian murmurs out its pensive tale.<sup>20</sup>

In Tomlin's third fourteen-line poem, "Sonnet--To Helen," the poet appears to have been consciously experimenting with a variation of the metric pattern. The editor of the Messenger, in which it was published, may have felt that its very novelty would appeal to readers, as would its Poesan phrasing. The copy, however, nowhere approaches the excellence of the model. The poem opens very much like the archetype of similar title, but for the remaining lines, the derivation is from "To One in Paradise."

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Thy beauty, like the scene,  
Helen, is forever  
Glorious, as the parted river  
With green isles all between.

. . .  
My spirit for thee pines.

. . .  
To what ethereal [sic] isles.<sup>21</sup>

Appearing in the same issue of the Messenger as Tomlin's "Sonnet--  
To Helen" was a sequence of Simms', "Grouped Thoughts and Scattered  
Fancies."<sup>22</sup> Although the metrics of the superior poet's are true, and  
the run-on lines musically pleasing, today the intrinsic value of this  
sonnet sequence scarcely seems to justify the space allotted to it. But  
the nineteenth-century reader of periodicals was attracted to the sonnet  
per se, and an editor wisely gave him (or her) a generous selection of  
the form, with not a great deal of concern as to whether the sonneteer  
was a competent artificer like Simms or a less skilled craftsman like  
Tomlin.

Because the form of the elegy is less exacting than that of the  
sonnet, and because the emotion inspiring it is less likely to be forced,  
a minor poet perhaps has a greater chance of approaching excellence in  
the former. At all events, Tomlin's elegies are better than his sonnets.  
The most important of these is "Shelley's Grave," which saw publication  
at least four times during the author's lifetime, and which has occasionally

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<sup>21</sup> Southern Literary Messenger, I (September 1844), 569.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 520-521.



attracted critical notice in the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup> Sharing with other nineteenth-century readers a passion for Shelley, Tomlin was able to infuse with some genuine feeling the poem dealing with the great Romantic's death and burial. "Shelley's Grave" consists of thirteen stanzas of six lines each. The poem opens with an announcement of the death of Shelley.

Thus he died—the poet died,  
In the tempest, by the tide,  
In his day of prime.  
Secret, in the mighty deep,  
Was that struggle into sleep,  
That defeat of time.<sup>24</sup>

The succeeding three stanzas have to do with the character of Shelley. Stanza IV contains a peculiarly apt tribute.

Merciful in judgment, he  
Kept his firm fidelity  
To his human laws;  
Mortal only in his tears,  
Earthly suffering, earthly cares,  
And love's mortal cause.<sup>25</sup>

Stanzas V and VI describe the preparation of the funeral pyre. Stanza VII introduces a mourner, who is probably Byron.

He, the mighty one of song,  
A tall leader in the throng,  
With a wo-strung lyre,—

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<sup>23</sup> See above, p. 18, n. 36; and Thomas Ollive Mabbott, "The Correspondence of John Tomlin," Notes and Queries, CLXVI (January 6, 1943), 7.

<sup>24</sup> The Magnolia, N. S., I (November 1842), 298.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Friend and kinsman, lo! He keeps  
 Holy faith with him who sleeps  
 On his funeral pyre.<sup>26</sup>

The next four stanzas describe the cremation of the poet's body, and the elegy closes with a requiem furnished by the murmuring of the waves and the chanting of the sea-birds.

Two lines of this poem reveal Tomlin's perceptive recognition of the essence of Shelley's spirit. In the third stanza there is a reference to "his pure, high, white heart," and in the seventh to "his fair, white spirit." White is a particularly felicitous adjective to apply to one of the least earthy of English poets, and Tomlin's use of it brings his tribute very near to genuine poetry.

The second elegy, "Gulnare," is briefer, consisting of only four quatrains. Although the identity of the subject is never made clear, he is evidently a poet. Read for sound alone, the little elegy is pleasing in its mournful cadences. It opens with the very syllables which Poe was later to make the epitome of all lamentation.

Never, oh never more, Gulnare,  
 Where rose that island by the sea.<sup>27</sup>

But carelessly chosen words mar the total effect. The best stanza, because of Tomlin's use in it of fairly concrete images, is the third, phrases of which suggest Poe's "City in the Sea."

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. In the unpubl. diss. (University of North Carolina, 1936) by Guy Adams Cardwell, "Charleston Periodicals, 1795-1860," p. 112, the lines are called "a memorial garland" for Keats, but the allusion to "friend and kinsman," as well as Tomlin's frequent mention of Byron elsewhere, may indicate that the latter was here described.

<sup>27</sup> The Magnolia, N. S., II (May 1843), 293.

The venom vine is creeping o'er  
 The tottering fane—the serpent crawls,  
 Where birds shall carol never more  
 Among its cold and crumbling walls.<sup>28</sup>

Of these two elegies, the first certainly, and probably the second also, lamented the death of one not known to the author personally. But his third is an expression of personal grief for a friend. It first appeared in The Guardian, under the title "Thoughts," with an explanatory sub-title, "Suggested by the death of S. N. Stephens, Esq." On Publication in Shelley's Grave and Other Poems the title was changed to "Lines on the Death of a Friend." However much pleasure the Guardian reviewer may have found in its "holy thought" and "purely original and exceedingly striking figures,"<sup>29</sup> it is an extremely poor poem. Lacking are both the musical flow of "Gulnare" and the generally apt phraseology of "Shelley's Grave." The metre of the three eight-line stanzas is choppy, and the diction poor. The symbolism appears to have been borrowed from Longfellow's "The Reaper and the Flowers," but in Tomlin's adaptation it becomes sentimental and bathetic. One stanza will suffice to illustrate the poem's defects.

The sweetest flowers will soonest fade  
 And soonest will they die;  
 Death is a reaper that has made  
 His garner in the sky.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "Shelley's Grave and Other Poems, by John Tomlin," The Guardian, IV (February 1844), 22.

And mows the sweetest flowers—and why?  
 His Master needs them most;—  
 Then weep not that our friend did die,  
 So soon from us is lost.<sup>30</sup>

The fourth elegy was written as a tribute to one of the most popular of Tomlin's contemporaries, Judge Richard Henry Wilde of New Orleans, whose fame as a writer rested largely on the single poem, "My Life is Like the Summer Rose." Tomlin had shared the general admiration for Wilde, and had corresponded with the Louisiana justice.<sup>31</sup> The lines to his memory, accordingly, were occasioned by a genuine sense of loss. The opening of the poem effectively combines conventional elegiac sound and symbol with a complimentary reference to Wilde's poem.

No more by Tampa's golden strand  
 When the last summer rose is seen.<sup>32</sup>

The remainder of the elegy is a well-meant but undistinguished recounting of the virtues of "noble Henry Wilde," concluding with references to the Southern and Northern muses in mourning.

While each [of the Muses] thy memory to recall  
 Embalms it in a fount of tears.<sup>33</sup>

Although Tomlin's four elegies demonstrate in general an over-lachrymose quality and tendency toward bathos, they are not in this respect markedly different from other contemporary elegiac verse. Every

<sup>30</sup> The Guardian, III (September 1843), 139.

<sup>31</sup> A letter from Wilde to Tomlin is published in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, III (January 1849), 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> Holden's, I (March 1848), 138.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

reader kept an abundant flow of tears on tap, requiring only the turn of some dolorous line to release it. Indeed, Tomlin's outbursts of manly grief appear restrained and subdued when compared with the maudlin indelicacies of "My Still-Born Babe," a twenty-four-line effusion which appeared in the same volume of The Rainbow as Tomlin's "Etiwando," and which began:

Unfolded Bud of Life, oh, can it be  
This lovely form is all there is of thee?<sup>34</sup>

All five poems in the next group are of a reflective cast, each giving expression to the author's questionings as to the why's and wherefore's of human existence, and to the answers he has found. The first of this group is entitled simply "Stanzas." It consists of two divisions of nine lines each. The theme, the mutability of earthly pleasures, is expressed in terms suggestive of an evangelical hymn. The poem begins:

There is a bright and sunny land,  
Far o'er the wintry seas of time.<sup>35</sup>

But the conventionally concrete religious symbols give way to an imagery suggestive of Poe's "Al Aaraaf." Possibly Tomlin here attempted to present, albeit somewhat vaguely, a heaven of his own conception, in contradistinction to the Christian's heaven he had once repudiated.<sup>36</sup> The third

<sup>34</sup> Frances H. W. Green, "My Still-Born Babe," The Rainbow, p. 167. Italics in original.

<sup>35</sup> The Casket, XVI (May 1840), 205.

<sup>36</sup> See above, p. 42.

and fourth lines continue to present the contrast between heaven and earth, with the promise:

There is beyond earth's frozen strand,  
A soft delicious balmy clime.<sup>37</sup>

And to beckon from this earth there is a "bright and fadeless star." In the second stanza the poet disavows earthly dreams, whose failure of fulfillment is symbolised by the moaning of the wind and the murmur of the streams, and turns again to the star. The conclusion of the second stanza is identical with the first:

[The star] That beckons to a home afar,  
Where spirits rise all dreamingly--  
To heaven!<sup>38</sup>

The second contemplative, and mildly philosophical, poem, "Earth and Ocean," presents a neat contrast between the earth's painfully engraved record of all man's doings and the ocean's majestic indifference to them. Tomlin here employed one of his favorite stanzaic patterns; the poem's two stanzas are each composed of eight lines in iambic tetrameter. In the first stanza he essayed an overly ambitious figure, that of Earth unveiling "a magian scroll, where more than Chaldean lore is writ."<sup>39</sup> But he does achieve one good metaphor, "mind's eternal star-beams." And the second stanza merits quotation in entirety.

But thou, old Ocean--old in might,  
No trophy keep'st of all the past,  
Oblivion threatens the trembling sight,  
When gazing on thy empire vast.

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<sup>37</sup> The Casket, XVI (May 1840), 205.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Magnolia, N. S., II (April 1843), 253.

The busy care which builds the shrine,  
 The pride that rears the trophied bust,  
 How vain in sight of thee and thine  
 Thou foe to human deeds and dust.<sup>40</sup>

Better poets might well have envied Tomlin that last line for its happy juxtaposition of the alliterative "deeds and dust." "Earth and Ocean" deserved better than it got from the Guardian reviewer, who was gratified that "the author is not an inattentive observer of nature";<sup>41</sup>

Like the Casket "Stanzas," "The True and False" is concerned with the ephemeral quality of earthly pleasures. The first two stanzas of this three-stanza poem are devoted to an allegorical presentation of the theme: a rose is blighted by frost overnight, and a maiden who goes out to pluck the blossom, not realizing that it is withered, has her hand pierced by a thorn. The third stanza moralizes on the fable.

'Tis thus our pleasures lie,  
 'Tis thus they quickly die;  
 At most, illusive grown  
 We grasp them, and they're gone.<sup>42</sup>

This poem was especially appropriate for Godey's, in which it appeared. The rose and the maiden were calculated to set the chaste hearts of the readers to palpitating in sisterly sympathy, and the moral was admirably suited to Mr. Godey's avowed purpose of inspiring and elevating his feminine subscribers.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 253-254.

<sup>41</sup> "Shelley's Grave and Other Poems, by John Tomlin," The Guardian, IV (February 1844), 22.

<sup>42</sup> Godey's, XXVI (May 1843), 216.

"The Heritage" is the second longest of Tomlin's poems. It was first published in The Guardian, then in Mine's Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine, and was included three years later in Sartain's handsome gift book, The American Gallery of Art. Since "The Heritage" is the only Tomlin poem of which two markedly different versions are extant, a collation of the periodical and the gift book stanzas will be of interest. But "The Heritage" will first be considered as periodical verse.

The Guardian "Heritage" consists of ten stanzas of twelve lines each.<sup>43</sup> In rambling and discursive fashion, Tomlin here seems to be saying that the only heritage worth anything is the human mind and spirit. He muddies the waters considerably by an attempt to trace the history of civilisation, from the "Caffre boors" from whose ashes no empires rise, through the "Grecian pilgrim" who left a "foot-print on the sand," to Venice, which "to one dark fell control." Thus surveying human history, he arrives at the conclusion that man can only go on with what he has to do, and that if sufficient fire burns in his heart he will be rewarded for his effort by recognition from others after his death.

The "foot-print" phrase is an obvious echo of Longfellow, but, as almost always in Tomlin's verse, there is a greater debt to Poe. In Stanza V, for example, these lines occur:

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<sup>43</sup> Actually, as "The Heritage" is printed in The Guardian, IV (May 1844), 72-73, the first stanza has only eleven lines, but this appears to be an inadvertent omission on the part of either Tomlin or the printer, for the rhyme scheme consistently followed in the other nine stanzas is disrupted by the missing line, as is the sense of the stanza.



What seek we here, if now we find  
That GRANDEUR which is not of mind,  
That GLORY not of soul<sup>44</sup>

And elsewhere in the poem there are phrases which suggest that in writing "The Heritage" Tomlin was constantly harking back in memory to Poe's first "To Helen." Indeed, two lines of the Tomlin poem embody a travesty of that ugly "niche-which" rhyme employed by the greater poet.

But let us build a shrine at which,<sup>45</sup>  
We see in every window niche . . .

"The Heritage" of 1844 shows marks of being carelessly and hastily written and packed off to the printer without revision. One instance of slipshod workmanship is the sudden and apparently accidental employment of repetend in the eighth stanza. A better poet, after such achievement, would certainly have gone back to his first stanzas and shaped them in the same pattern. Tomlin neglected to do so; "The Heritage" could have been a good poem if it had contained more lines like these:

With it [faith] the heart, the sinewy heart,  
Goes on, goes on, goes on.

To such a place the heart will turn,  
And seeing nobly, nobly burn.

And ere the lives we hold in trust,<sup>46</sup>  
Return to dust, return to dust . . .

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<sup>44</sup> The Guardian, IV (May 1844), 72.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

But this was periodical verse, written, as the caption above it denotes, "for the Guardian," and moral truths and philosophical implications, however vaguely presented, were more in demand than artistic craftsmanship. For proof of this statement we have only to turn to another moral piece published in the Guardian, entitled "Time, And Its Changes." Two stanzas will suffice to show that Tomlin was no worse than his fellow versifiers.

I asked an aged man, a man of cares,  
Wrinkled and curved, and white with hoary hairs;  
"Time is the warp of life," he said, "O tell  
The young, the fair, the gay, to weave it well."

I asked a spirit lost; but oh! the shriek  
That pierced my soul! I shudder while I speak.  
It cried—"A particle, a speck, a mite,  
Of endless years, duration infinite."<sup>47</sup>

Four years after the first appearance of "The Heritage" in the Guardian, it was re-published, with considerable revision, in The American Gallery of Art. The primary purpose of this handsome gift book, as explained by Sartain in the preface, was to fulfill a long-cherished dream of presenting a work on the painters of America, with "engraved specimens from all meritorious artists of the country." But since too much expense would be incurred in such a volume, "the ultimate accomplishment of the object appeared practicable by so changing the character of the literary portion of the work as to cause it to assume the form of that class usually selected as Gift Books."<sup>48</sup> Of this "literary portion," Sartain

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<sup>47</sup> The Guardian, IV (February 1844), 22.

<sup>48</sup> John Sartain, ed., The American Gallery of Arts: From the Works of the Best Artists, with Poetical and Prose Illustrations by Distinguished American Authors (Philadelphia, 1848), p. 111.

said, "The articles are all original, and with but one or two exceptions were written expressly for the occasion."<sup>49</sup>

One of the exceptions was, of course, Tomlin's "The Heritage." The poem seems to have been included because of its generally reflective tone and its "inspirational" quality, characteristics it shares with the "articles written expressly for the occasion." Of these "articles," nine are poems, two are essays, and three are short stories, each written as an accompaniment for a featured engraving. Artists represented are P. F. Rothermel, Thomas Sully, Joshua Shaw, W. E. Winner, James Hamilton, Samuel B. Waugh, John Neagle, Russell Smith, and S. S. Osgood; writers, besides Tomlin, are C. Chauncey Burr, Alice G. Lee, W. H. Furness, Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, Anna Blackwell, John S. Hart, Lieutenant James L. Parker, T. S. Arthur, H. Hastings Weld, Mrs. L. C. Tuthill, Julian Cramer, Frances S. Osgood, S. Cameron, Reynell Coates, and Thomas Buchanan Read. It may have been Read who was responsible for the revisions in "The Heritage," since Tomlin had had correspondence with this Philadelphia post-painter,<sup>50</sup> and since the latter appears to have worked most closely with Sartain in compiling the Gallery, furnishing both a vignette for the title page and the Proem to the book, "Be Ye Pioneers of Art."

Whether Read merely suggested revisions to Tomlin, who then made his own, or whether the former used his editorial pen freely, the Gallery

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<sup>49</sup> Sartain, ed., American Gallery of Art, p. iv.

<sup>50</sup> "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, IV (August 1849), 461.

"Heritage" is markedly changed from the original in the Guardian. Gone are the repetends introduced so unexpectedly into the eighth stanza. In their place are smoothly flowing lines of an unvarying metric pattern. Although the Gallery "Heritage" is the length of the Guardian original, the twelve-line stanzas have each been divided into two. The carelessly omitted line of Stanza I in The Guardian has been restored to its proper place, and any eccentricities in punctuation, either Tomlin's or the typesetter's, have been attended to. But the most striking revisions are those of word and phrase. In some instances, as in Stanzas VIII, IX, and X, the purpose is obviously avoidance of the repetend. And elsewhere there is the welcome substitution of concrete terms for vague abstractions.

Sometimes, however, the metric improvement effected seems scarcely to justify the sacrifice of a strong phrase in the original. For example, Stanza VII of the Guardian version concludes with two poetically effective lines:

With it the heart, the sinewy heart  
Goes on, goes on, goes on.

In The Gallery they become:

The heart will ardently pursue  
Until the need be won.<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere, as here, vigor of phrasing is sacrificed to metrical evenness. But it must be admitted that one desirable result was secured by Tomlin's ,

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<sup>51</sup> American Gallery of Art, p. 85.

or Read's, revision of the Guardian poem for the Gallery. The twenty six-line stanzas in the latter publication are correct and consistent, freed of both auctorial and typographical errors. If the Gallery "Heritage" was a trifle dull, it found itself in good company. Certainly, the author of "The Heritage" is guiltless of the artless sophistry with which Alice G. Lee, in her poem "The First Ship," written to accompany Joshua Shaw's painting of the same title, attempts to justify the ways of the white man to the Indian:

Oppression, though it seem a wrong, a just result may bring;  
 God wills, that oft from present ill the greatest good shall spring.<sup>52</sup>

Nor did Tomlin, in either "The Heritage" or elsewhere, ever effect such a compound of optimism and bad rhyme as is found in the concluding stanza of a poem by the editress of Godey's Lady's Book. Mrs. Hale's commission for the Gallery was to illustrate in verse W. E. Winner's painting "Taking Sanctuary." For twenty-one stanzas, Sarah Josepha Hale adheres to her story of an English widow who took sanctuary during the Wars of the Roses, but in the concluding two the poetess cannot restrain her ebullient patriotism, which overflows into a remarkably inaccurate prediction.

Faith!—I feel her impulse breathing,  
 O'er the future floats her ray—  
 She my country's name is wreathing—  
 She will lead to perfect day!

And though crime, and many another,  
 On the earth will yet be done.

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<sup>52</sup>  
Ibid., p. 15.

Brother ne'er shall war with brother  
In the Land of Washington.<sup>53</sup>

Revised and corrected, Tomlin's "Heritage" was an appropriate selection for the American Gallery of Art. In both subject matter and form, it was similar to the other literary content of this handsome gift book. "The Heritage" is certainly not inferior to any other poem in the volume, and it is decidedly superior to those quoted.

The fifth and last poem in the reflective group is "Trust in God," which was published in Hine's Quarterly Journal and Review. It is the most orthodox of the group, being an exhortation to Christians to persist in faith regardless of what trials may come. Almost every one of its twelve quatrains is a brief and pious admonition, independent of either preceding or succeeding stanza, as this:

Christian, in the voice of God,  
As a child of meekness, trust;—  
Though severely falls his rod,  
The infliction must be just.<sup>54</sup>

Occasionally, however, one thought is developed through two stanzas, as the following. The opening lines, in which Tomlin attempted a variation of Byron's "boat" and "bark," incorporate the Tennessee poet's most unforgivable metaphor.

With a foot upon the shore,  
And a foot upon the sea,  
Tempest tos't, and what is more,  
Life is thorny, still, to thee!

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>54</sup> The Quarterly Journal and Review, I (January 1846), 80.

But take courage, give not up,  
 All must feel his chastening rod—  
 All must drain the bitter cup  
 Ere the soul returns to God.<sup>55</sup>

As examples of the power of faith and trust, the poet cites Daniel and Moses. Writing of the latter's miracle in the desert, Tomlin achieved two neater lines than those quoted so far. Indeed their felicity suggests that Tomlin might have improved his poetry, to say nothing of his philosophy, if he had turned oftener to the vivid and concrete imagery of the Old Testament.

With the golden, charmed rod,  
 Break the waters from the rock.<sup>56</sup>

These lines have a simple power suggestive of Blake. But they almost certainly owe nothing to the great mystic, for it is doubtful whether Tomlin ever heard of him. Surveying the poem in toto, one is forced to the regretful conclusion that the two lines last quoted were achieved accidentally. "Trust in God" ends with a morally irreproachable challenge introduced by one of Longfellow's most famous phrases.

Now be up and doing, for  
 God will brook no long delay;  
 By the high and strong endeavor,  
 Ope the gate and find the way.<sup>57</sup>

The five poems classified as philosophical or reflective present no startlingly original truths nor even any profound observations on

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

well-established truths. But they are of interest as they reflect a variety of current religious or semi-philosophical ideas: a transcendentalist heaven is pictured in "Stanzas;" a quasi-scientific view of nature's antagonism to man is presented in "Earth and Ocean;" the transience of mortal joys is lamented in "The True and False;" the invincibility of the human spirit is urged in "The Heritage;" and a conventional religious challenge is issued in "Trust in God."

In the next group of verse, the "To—" poems, Tomlin was merely following a convention almost as old as poetry itself but especially dear to mid-nineteenth century readers. Poe had written his "To F—," "To F—S S. O—d," and "To M. L. S.—," and Willis his "To M— from Abroad," and a host of magazine writers profited by their example. Graham's for 1842 will serve as an illustration of the popularity of this particular type of vers de société. In that year appeared "An Epistle to Fannie," and "To Florence," both by Park Benjamin, "To Annie," by L. J. Cist, "To—," by George Lunt, "To Fanny H.," by Mrs. Seba Smith, and "To Almeda in New England,"<sup>58</sup> by James T Fields.

Tomlin's efforts in this direction are no better and no worse than the rest. The first, in order of publication, "To Miss H. E. B.—," has two stanzas devoted to the idea that:

When all this heart is cold in death  
They will forget me—yes, they will—<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Graham's, IX (March 1842), 219; IX (April 1842), 241; IX (May 1842), 276; XXI (July 1842), 53; XXI (September 1842), 131; XXI (October 1842), 204.

<sup>59</sup>

The Southron, I (October 1841), 344.



But in the third and last stanza, the poet takes comfort from the hope of being remembered by Miss H. E. B—.

There is a pleasant thought that steals  
The care away from out the breast,  
And it sometimes a joy reveals,  
That makes me all supremely blest.

The thought is, that there is an eye,  
That often kindly looks on me—  
I would be happy when I die,  
If all her heart would think of me!<sup>60</sup>

More ambitious, but less successful, is "To Eva," with its Byronic references to "the fringe upon thy soft eye-lid," which "covered the beam that would have made me love." If Tomlin had stopped after the sixth line, he would have produced a charming, though derivative, trifle. But he went on for eighteen more lines, deploring Eva's mistaken supposition that she was loved by him, and winding up with the insistent assertions:

I never loved you, for the heart will not.  
Love's one thing that can never be forgot.<sup>61</sup>

"To Miss S. Mack— of Phila." never saw publication. It is mentioned here not only because it is a brief lyric addressed to a definite person, but also because it was preserved by Poe, to whom Tomlin had sent the lines, marking them "For Graham's Magazine." Tomlin pays his compliments to Miss S. Mack— in an eight-line conceit embodying the hypothetical conversion of "every drop of pearly dew" to gems and all the summer showers to pearls. He concludes:

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Nashville Republican Banner, November 7, 1842.

With thee, dear girl, the prize I'd share—  
And still to thee be true as heaven!<sup>62</sup>

The fourth of this group, "To Byrons—Impromptu," has the added interest of involving an anonymous, and possibly fictitious, poetess. Tomlin sent his verses, along with those which he claimed were the inspiration, to Holden, who published both effusions with the comment that "we have encountered poorer verses in better places."<sup>63</sup> "Lines Inscribed to John Tomlin Esq. on Being Requested to Send Him a Lock of Hair," signed by Byrons, New Orleans, could have been written by Tomlin himself, creating for his own pleasure, as well as<sup>64</sup> for the delectation of Holden's readers, an imaginary New Orleans beauty, whose constancy to a shadowy lover caused her to hesitate before granting the poet's request. Since, however, Tomlin did actually spend some time in New Orleans on his way to Texas, and since the city made such an impression on him that some major episodes of his "Autobiography of a Monomaniac" take place there,<sup>64</sup> it seems more probable that Byrons is a real person. Real or fictitious, Byrons explains in three eight-line stanzas that because of "an olden vow" it has been difficult for her to bring herself to sever one ringlet, and that she has done so only because a poet has requested it.

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<sup>62</sup> ADS, "For Graham's Magazine," postmarked December 24, n. y. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

<sup>63</sup> "Topics of the Month," Holden's Dollar Magazine, II (October 1848), 633.

<sup>64</sup> Holden's, IV (October 1849), 615-616; (November), 654-656.

But genius oft in triumph wears,  
 In honor and in pride,  
 Some trophy, or some token, which  
 To Love has been denied;  
 So please accept this little lock,  
 So proudly worn by me,  
 Remembering that I sever it,  
 A gift—for only thee.<sup>65</sup>

Tomlin responds with fervor—and forty-eight lines. He promises that he will never forget the donor of the lock, adjures her to be on guard against the lover's betrayal of her trust, and concludes with a quasi-rhapsodic outburst that is faintly suggestive of Jonson's "To Celia."

If round my heart—thou wilt forgive!—  
 If I the tress entwine;  
 The pulses there will make it live  
 As when it last was thine.<sup>66</sup>

The fifth of the "To—" group, "To Grace Greenwood," also appeared in Holden's. "Grace Greenwood" was the pen name of Sarah J. Clark of New Brighton, Pennsylvania, one of Tomlin's literary correspondents.<sup>67</sup> The editor remarked that the verses "should have been sent to that charming and purely American writer last month, but they have lost nothing of their freshness and tenderness by keeping."<sup>68</sup>

Tomlin was in these lines the conscious Southron.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., II (October 1848), 634.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See below, pp. 235-236.

<sup>68</sup> Introductory comment, "To Grace Greenwood," Holden's, V (February 1850), 125.

Let those who will of Northern flowers,  
 For thee, an offering bring—  
 But I will from the Southern bowers  
 The buds of early spring . . .<sup>69</sup>

Among his blossoms from Southern bowers were lilies, white roses, and, with more particularisation, "the palest orange flower." The poem concludes with a fine disregard of grammatical logic.

This chaplet then, that Love has found,  
 In buds of early spring,  
 Will weave thy raven locks around,  
 The blossoms which I bring.

And never as the wreath you wear,  
 Remembrance will forget,  
 The hand that wove the chaplet there,  
 In curls of glossy jet.<sup>70</sup>

Badly written as it was, "To Grace Greenwood" would meet with the favor of Northern and Southern readers alike, who cherished the notion that the South was somehow more adept in the art of love-making than the North. Alexander B. Meek, the Alabamian so much admired by Tomlin, had expressed that idea in a poem appearing a few years previously in the Southern Literary Messenger, "The Birth of Love."

Sure Love was born in these orange bowers,  
 Though they fable him child of Eastern climes!  
 Sure here he first played with the rosy Hours,  
 And cheated the count of that gray-beard, Time!

Ah yes! 'twas here in the glowing South,  
 Where Nature is dressed in bridal array,  
 Where the sun aye kisses, with fervent mouth,  
 The fruits and flowers that blush in his way.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Holden's, V (February 1850), 125.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Southern Literary Messenger, IX (December 1843), 754-755.

Tomlin's five poems addressed to women by initial, Christian name, or pseudonym, though varying in form, have in common a kind of playfulness peculiar to their type. But there is nothing playful about the next poem to be discussed. "To My Wife" was written out of personal anguish. By today's standards, both Tomlin and the editor who published it stand convicted of a breach of taste. Not that poets have ever been notably reticent concerning their personal lives, but the best of them have either cloaked the personal in abstraction, or told the laity their love in such compelling beauty and rapture that the intimate merges with the universal. Perhaps Tomlin's offence in "To My Wife" does not consist so much in lack of reticence—the poem never really accuses Mary of any specific crime—as in his careless construction and maudlin sentimentality. Knowing that real pain occasioned these lines, one cannot help wishing the author could have dignified his theme by better poetry. Regardless, however, of the defects of "To My Wife" as a poem, it is of interest both because it is one of Tomlin's few published references to the trouble between Mary and him, and because it further illustrates what the editors of even the best nineteenth-century periodicals were willing to accept for publication.

The twenty-eight line poem is signed "By J. Tomlin, Esq. author of 'The Fountain of Youth'." In J. Tomlin Esq.'s versifying of his sorrow there is more than a suggestion of Byron's postured grief, and a discernible echo of the great Romantic's phrasing and his rhythmic patterns. Unfortunately, the Tennessee poet chose for his "When we two

parted" a meter more nearly resembling his English model's "Well, thou art happy," a choice with less than happy results.

We have parted--we have parted--  
 Yet I will remember thee!  
 Tho' forever broken-hearted  
 You will sometimes think of me!<sup>72</sup>

It would be eminently unfair, however, to allow the first stanza alone, marred as it is by Tomlin's unwarranted shift from familiar to formal in the second person pronoun, to stand for the whole poem. Other lines, such as the following, reflect more credit on both Tomlin and the greater poet he imitated.

Mary! tho' misfortune chill thee,  
 Tho' it be thy only friend,--  
 Tho' sad grief with coldness fill thee,  
 Tho' the pangs of sorrow rend.

Tho' thy heaven be moonless now,  
 Tho' the winter's on thy breast,  
 Yet from out thy feverish brow,  
 Thoughts will spring to make thee blest.<sup>73</sup>

The thoughts which will in some fashion bless the erring Mary are memories of the past, and the concluding line indicates that John might be willing to let bygones be bygones:

The husband's scorn--the husband's love!<sup>74</sup>

A poem of identical title but different theme appeared in Graham's a few years later. Robert T. Conrad's lines to his wife are somewhat better than Tomlin's in meter and phrasing, but equally sentimental.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., VII (December 1841), 860.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Tomlin's poem dealt with betrayal, and Conrad's with bereavement, but both display that unfailing hallmark of nineteenth-century periodical verse, a sickly absorption in unhappy emotionalism. For example, Conrad's "To My Wife" contains this reference to the loss of children:

Years and their snows have come and gone and graves  
Of thine and mine have opened; and the sod  
Is thick above the wealth we gave to God.<sup>75</sup>

Tomlin's last poem of apostrophic title, the three-quatrain "To Helen," is like the "Sonnet--To Helen," an obvious imitation of Poe's inimitable lyric. As in the sonnet, echoes of "To One in Paradise" are discernible here. The third stanza, for example, opens with this line.

Thou wast that more than all to me.<sup>76</sup>

Although other echoes of Poean phrase are discernible, Tomlin has attempted to develop his own figures, rather than to follow slavishly the similes and metaphors of Poe's "To Helen." The Tennessean's Helen is first

. . . . .those lights  
Which Morning breaks on mountain heights.<sup>77</sup>

Then she becomes, by some metaphorical scrambling;

An Eden full of joys and smiles  
An Ocean full of summer isles.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Graham's, XXII (March 1848), 190.

<sup>76</sup> Southern Literary Messenger, IX (December 1843), 728.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 727.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

And, finally, she is the "more than all"

For which—vain thought in me to hold—  
His life, for faith, the martyr sold.<sup>79</sup>

The next group of Tomlin poems consists of those with consciously euphonious titles. Of the four in this group, "Orihula" bears the closest resemblance to those Chivers poems which gave rise to the famous controversy as to whether his or Poe's melodic jargon came first. It is difficult to determine whether Tomlin knew Chivers' work well. No letter from the Georgian appears in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac." This omission could be dismissed as being merely an indication that Chivers, unlike the majority of his contemporaries, simply failed to reply to Tomlin. But what makes it more doubtful that Tomlin was aware of the Georgian's work is that nowhere in his critical writings did he mention the author of "As an egg, when broken, never . . .," although he was full of praise for such correspondingly minor figures as Dr. W. A. Caruthers, Alexander Meek, Richard Henry Wilde, and Albert Pike.<sup>80</sup> It is, therefore, not likely that Tomlin owed the inspiration of "Orihula" to the Georgian. What is more probable is that the contemporary vogue for "poetic" titles caused the Tennessean to invent a musical-melancholy title of his own. And the last two syllables would not, in the nineteenth century, have roused the risibilities they touch in the twentieth.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 728.

<sup>80</sup> In "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 358; and in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, II (December 1848), 719; Ibid., III (January 1849), 27; Ibid., III (May 1849), 278.



Certainly, Godey's editors found "Orihula" acceptable. One stanza will sufficiently illustrate the tenor and form of the remaining five.

On yesternight awhile the pallid moon,  
     Orihula,  
 Was passing thro' her fleecy clouds, at noon,  
     Orihula,  
 I saw thee with thy grave-clothes on,  
 Sitting beneath the cypress' shade, alone  
 On the gray mass of a broken stone,  
     Orihula.<sup>81</sup>

The second poem of the "musical name" group, "Isola," is free of the macabre elements of "Orihula." Addressed to a woman, real or imaginary, its two stanzas develop the strained conceit that the object of the writer's adoration was once a lily, plucked and "nurst" by a cherub, until it grew into "the first of mortal race." Now the poet cannot cast the lily-woman out of his life.

Alas! if I who still was blessed,  
 When thou wast but a lowly flower—  
 To pluck thy image from my breast,  
 Though thus thou will'st it, have no power.<sup>82</sup>

"Isola" was printed on the same page in Graham's with three other poems, one by the poet whose fame endures today by virtue of his "Woodman, spare that tree." The three are "Years Ago—A Ballad: Written Expressly for Mrs. C. E. Horn," by George P. Morris, "To My Wife," by Robert T. Conrad, and "Contemplation: Illustrating an Engraving," by Jane R. Dana. Morris' verse, like Tomlin's "Isola," embodies a flower figure.

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<sup>81</sup> Godey's, XXV (December 1842), 275.

<sup>82</sup> Graham's, XXXII (March 1848), 190.

On the banks of that sweet river  
 Where the water-lilies grow,  
 Breathed the fairest flower that ever  
 Bloomed and faded years ago.<sup>83</sup>

The lachrymose quality of Conrad's poem has already been mentioned. Although not enough reader tears had been induced by thoughts of bereaved parents, Miss Dana's illustration of an engraving afforded an opportunity to weep for sheer relief of soul.

Strange! that a tear-drop should o'er fill the eye  
 Of loveliness that looks on all it loves!  
 Yet are there moods, when the soul's wells are high  
 With crystal waters which a strange fear moves.<sup>84</sup>

Tomlin's "Isola" was neither better nor worse than the company it kept.

Like "Orihula," "Adela---A Song" makes use of the musical name within the structure of the poem. "Adela" is very slight, but not displeasing, except for the occurrence in the second stanza of Tomlin's annoying inconsistency with the second person pronoun.

Never ceasing, now is heard,  
 Evermore this little bird,  
 Chanting evermore the word,  
 Adela! Adela!  
 With this bird, Oh, maiden sweet,  
 In the green woods will you meet,  
 And thy name will it repeat,  
 Adela! Adela!<sup>85</sup>

"Alice Lea," the last of the group under discussion, was posthumously published, and presumably written later than any of the other three. Although Tomlin's poetry displays no positive evidence of growth and improvement, there is indication in this poem, if it was indeed written late in

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<sup>83</sup> Graham's, XXXII (March 1848), 190.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> The Rainbow, p. 110.

his life, that he had learned his limitations. He might have been content, if he had lived longer, to go on turning out such rhythmical prettiness as these three stanzas. The meter is regular, if monotonous, and the third stanza rather charmingly echoes the first. Stanza I begins;

Oh! be not so dejected,  
The lovely Alice Lea,  
Those cherished dreams rejected,  
Are chastened dreams to thee.<sup>86</sup>

The name Alice Lea is omitted in Stanza II, which is devoted to reminding the maiden that love often falters. Stanza III opens:

Then be not broken-hearted,  
The lovely Alice Lea;  
For friends are oft-times parted,  
On life's untranquil sea.<sup>87</sup>

The first and third stanzas are concluded with identical lines:

Sweet days again like flowers  
That bloom in early May,  
Will come like softest showers  
To wash thy grief away.<sup>88</sup>

Six poems remain to be considered, none belonging exactly to any of the groups discussed above. "The Farewell," Byronic in both mood and meter, is an expression of disillusionment. This two-stanza lyric is self-conscious and inept; but it demonstrates that poet's ear which enabled Tomlin, and other nineteenth-century magazine writers, to reproduce

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<sup>86</sup> "Alice Lea. By the late John Tomlin," Nashville Gazette, VIII (June 25, 1851), 2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

the music of the great poets they read and idolized. One stanza will be sufficient illustration.

Farewell to all friendship! if there's aught in the name,  
 'Tis the lure of the phantom that follows all fame;  
 'Tis the sunshine of wealth--'tis the mistletoe <sup>[sic]</sup> blight,  
 'Tis the chime of a bell, or a bird's rushing flight.<sup>89</sup>

"The Poet's Home," not traceable to any source, consists of thirty-six lines, the first twenty-eight of which describe a woodland scene on a summer night. The last eight are addressed to Mary, who is very probably Tomlin's own Mary, imploring her to live with him "in this sweet home," and invoking on both the blessing of, a forest deity.

Always I'll love thee--ever, ever  
 Linked in chains that never sever  
 Love--and be beloved thro' time--  
 Breathe the odors of this clime--  
 Underneath the old oak tree,  
 Weave to us one destiny,  
 Spirit of the wood.<sup>90</sup>

The Southron "Stanzas," published nine months later than "The Poet's Home," consists of two octaves, the first a complaint against those persons who, failing to understand the poet, call him passionless and cold, the second a eulogy of the "one heart," owner unspecified, which knows him. And a promise is given that this heart will never be harmed by the poet.

To be a thing of nothingness  
 If e'er my thoughts become impure--  
 I will not wither love like this--  
 I cannot break a heart so pure.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> The Casket, XVI (June 1840), 253.

<sup>90</sup> The Southron, I (January 1841), 122.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., I (October 1841), 332.

"Lines," which appeared in Graham's in the same year The Southron published "Stanzas," is less languishing than most of Tomlin's love lyrics; there is a semi-humorous quality in the question with which both the first and last quatrain of the four-quatrain lyric are concluded, "What can a poor man do but love?" Since this bit of vers de société is signed only J. T., some doubt might occur as to whether it is actually Tomlin's. But almost conclusive proof of his authorship can be found in the following:

Oh! never will you be forgot,  
While all your image is on time,<sup>92</sup>  
A heart like thine—an eye so bright,  
Will ever all the passions move—  
When gazing on those eyes of light,  
What can a poor man do but love?<sup>93</sup>

John Tomlin was in some ways a better poet than many other periodical writers, but they were seldom guilty of his worst stylistic blunder, the inconsistent second person pronoun. Except for that fault, "Lines" is no poorer than others of its kind.

The title of the fifth poem in the miscellaneous group under consideration, "Mary," suggests that it is a tribute to Tomlin's wife, for wherever else in his writing her name occurs the reference is obvious. But a note appended to the poem leaves some doubt as to whether Mary Tomlin was the subject of these musical lines:

The lines above were composed some two years ago, on an occasion in memory very dear to me. They were written on the eve of the departure of a young female friend of mine to a "Sunny clime,"—but since then she has come back to cheer us with her presence. The lines scarcely breathe one of the high feelings of my heart for her virtues—and they are many—nor a moiety of my unbounded admiration for her genius—which is of a high order.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Italics not in original.

<sup>93</sup> Graham's, XIX (December 1841), 272.

<sup>94</sup> The Guardian, II (March 1842), 42.

In 1840, two years before publication of the poem in the Guardian, Mary Tomlin had been John's wife for at least thirteen years, scarcely warranting, at least by nineteenth-century standards, the appellation of "young female friend." So the Mary of this poem may well be someone other than John's wife.

Whoever she was, Mary had reason to be gratified at the verses addressed to her. The poem consists of sixteen couplets in iambic heptameter. It is one of the most effortless of John Tomlin's lyrics, with a flow of words as easy and graceful as those of a Stephen Foster song. Indeed, there is much in "Mary" of that "Southern" quality which the Northern Foster was to capture in his artless songs some ten years after Tomlin's death. The mocking-bird and the orange blossom are here, and the poet lavishes on them almost as much tenderness as on the human object of his affections.

The opening couplet of "Mary" indicates the tenor of the remainder.

Oh! she is gone to sunny climes, to smile on perfumed hours,  
To twine her raven locks around the palest orange flowers.<sup>95</sup>

Tomlin was sufficiently pleased with these lines to repeat them near the end of the poem and to use almost the exact words of the second line later, in an effusion addressed to a Northern poetess.<sup>96</sup> Other lines catalogue Mary's virtues as well as her charms:

That form so perfect in its mould, so noble in its mien,  
And all the eye so elegant, so perfectly serene—

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> See above, p. 83.

Those rich and glossy curls that stray along her snowy breast,  
 I love to gaze upon—and love—but what I love the best,  
 And worship with the wildest love that ever thrilled the heart—  
 Its sympathies to wake, and glow—its energies to start—  
 Its depth of feeling to arouse, in streams of love to flow—  
 Is that she has a heart to feel—that feels for other's wo!<sup>97</sup>

And the conclusion of this lilting bit of harmless sentimentality might well have served as a model for the countless complimentary expressions of good will scribbled in nineteenth-century albums.

The blessings of an honest heart, to thee, dear girl, I give—  
 My wishes for thy weal, sweet girl, with thee will ever live:—  
 And while the orange-tree is green, and lives the long-leaf vine,  
 Joys such as heaven will lend, dear girl, be ever, ever thine.<sup>98</sup>

The last poem to be discussed, "The Old Man," is refreshingly free of the sentimentality, though not of the unskillful phraseology, of most of the rest of Tomlin's verse. It expresses with insight the inescapable sadness of age. And it is to Tomlin's credit that, in telling how the old man appeared to him, he was not guilty of watering down the genuine pathos of the portrait by any sentimental optimism. A twentieth-century reader may find some amusement in the lines of Tomlin's poem, but he will derive no amusement from the pathetic figure it presents.

His heart is sad, more sad than years  
 That have no summer days,  
 And lonely as some frozen isle  
 Where never yet the rays  
 Of summer suns did ever touch  
 In one meridian blaze.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> The Guardian, II (March 1842), 42.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., III (February 1843), 17.

None of the four stanzas of the poem is any more falsely cheerful than the above. Tomlin would not have been impressed by "Rabbi Ben Ezra," if he had lived to read it, for age and dissolution were indistinguishable in his thought. His picture of an aged man is concluded as somberly as it began, against a backdrop of "the sea-side's rocky shore."

The old man's broken heart but weeps  
For rest within the grave.<sup>100</sup>

Other periodical poets were, like Tomlin, writing brief lyrics treating a variety of miscellaneous subjects. Few of their poems were of any more value than the six of Tomlin's discussed immediately above. Two from other versifiers, chosen at random, will serve for illustration and comparison. The first is found in the same issue of Graham's in which Tomlin's "Lines" appeared. A four-stanza jingle, "The Glad Retreat" is devoted to a repetitive celebration of the charms of a sylvan hideaway, where the poet retired to the shade of "a green old elm" and "raised a rustic seat."<sup>101</sup> The second is taken from the only Southern magazine comparable to Graham's in both quality and popularity, the Southern Literary Messenger. Published in the Richmond Messenger the same month that "The Glad Retreat" appeared in the Eastern periodical, "Regret Pour Le Passe" develops in five labored stanzas a theme of lachrymose retrospection, concerned mainly with "youth decayed—too soon—too soon."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> E. G. Squires, "The Glad Retreat," Graham's, XIX (December 1841), 260.

<sup>102</sup> F. W. R., "Regret Pour Le Passe," Southern Literary Messenger, VII (December 1841), 864.



The volume of Tomlin's poetry is slight when compared with that of most major poets. The thirty poems analyzed in this chapter constitute his entire known poetic output, with the possible exception of a few humorous poems included in the lost Shelley's Grave and Other Poems. Furthermore, Tomlin's poetry is minor in quality as in quantity; nothing he wrote is great poetry and his best is mediocre. Regardless of its slender volume, however, and perhaps because of its mediocre quality, his verse saw publication not only in Southern periodicals but also in magazines and newspapers of national circulation, as well as in one annual and one gift book. The discussion of his verse above and its comparison with other contemporary magazine verse has demonstrated the representative qualities of Tomlin's poetry.

In the first place, John Tomlin's verse is representative of mid-nineteenth-century periodical poetry in both form and subject matter. His one narrative poem dealt with a popular theme, the American Revolution, and a popular concept, the Noble Savage. His sonnets employed, with one exception, the conventional Petrarchan form. That exception, "Sonnet—To Helen," was of equal interest for its experimental form as for its derivation from Poe's lyric. Tomlin's elegies, although they never plumbed the depths of a great grief, were melodiously mournful, whether written of personal friends or of public figures. A group of his reflective, semi-philosophical poems gave expression to both the inspirational ideas expected from this type, and, though to a lesser degree, to some of the questionings that found their way into even the most orthodox periodicals. Tomlin's little songs to women, with the exception of the painful lines to his wife, blended sentimentality and

whimsicality as the age demanded. His "musical name" lyrics reflected the popularity of euphonic and evocative titles. A final group of miscellaneous poems by the Tennessean illustrated the variety of themes with which nineteenth-century periodical verse concerned itself.

In the second place, Tomlin's poetry is representative in its debt to Romantic and Victorian sources, both British and American. His long narrative poem demonstrated a definite Macaulayan influence. His most-printed poem, the title poem of his lost volume, reflected nineteenth-century American reverence for Shelley, and a Shelleyan worship of Freedom and Beauty pervaded his philosophical poems. Among British poets, however, Byron influenced Tomlin most strongly. Byronic themes and Byronic forms were distinctly visible in at least five poems, and the Byronic impress may be detected on many more. In his debt to the two great Romantics, Tomlin reflected mid-nineteenth-century American enthusiasm for poets who, because of their revolt against conventions, were thought of as being more American, in spirit and expression, than British.

Two contemporary American poets, both major figures and each epitomising a distinct poetic philosophy, influenced Tomlin's poetry. To Longfellow, whom Tomlin once pronounced a great poet, he was indebted for many phrases, and for moral and philosophic themes as well. But his poetry owed most to Poe's. Two years before publication of "The Raven," from which the vogue for Poe's poetry is usually dated, Tomlin was cramming his stanzas with Poesan phrases, and cutting his lines to Poesan patterns. Thus, as one of the earliest known imitators of Poe, Tomlin helped to initiate a trend toward Poesan imitation.

Finally, Tomlin's poetry is representative in that it pointed directly toward the "feminine fifties." Published during the decade immediately preceding that languishing period, it reflected the demands, or what editors believed were the demands, of an ever increasing number of women readers. Although Tomlin's and other verse similar to it appeared in periodicals of general appeal as well as in "ladies'" magazines, the greater portion of it was geared to the standards of the latter. Certain characteristics of Tomlin's verse recur in other magazine verse of the 1840's: the prettiness and whimsicality of his love songs; the bathos of his elegies; the artificial conceits of his sonnets and other brief lyrics; and the morally irreproachable pronouncements of his didactic stanzas. These characteristics of the magazine verse of the forties were so to dominate the literary scene in the fifties as to postpone for more than a decade longer the emergence of a vigorous, masculine poetry.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WRITINGS OF TOMLIN: PERIODICAL PROSE

Since John Tomlin kept no note-book or diary, the only extant clue to his pre-publication writing is the ledger mentioned in Chapter II above,<sup>1</sup> some sheets of which have been preserved. The abortive verses scrawled on the backs or margins of invoices of merchandise indicate that his major interest was the creation of poetry. Only one fragment of unpublished prose remains—an uncompleted review of Bulwer-Lytton's The Lady of Lyons.<sup>2</sup> The predominance of verse in this apprentice work suggests that Tomlin, like Poe and other major writers, was a poet—at least a writer of verse—before he turned to prose. This supposition is strengthened by the publication dates of his two books. Shelley's Grave and Other Poems was published in 1843, and Tales of the Caddo, a collection of prose tales, six years later. But his magazine prose, with which this chapter is concerned, saw publication simultaneously with his verse. Below is a chronological listing of this prose:

"The Spanish Adventurer"	<u>The Casket</u>	February 1840
"Theodoric of the Amali"	<u>Burton's Gentleman's</u>	May-June 1840
"The Fountain of Youth"	<u>The Casket</u>	October 1840
"The Fatal Kiss"	<u>The Southron</u>	January 1841

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<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> Property of Mr. Curtis Bray, Jackson, Tennessee.

"The Fatal Kiss"	<u>The Saturday Evening Post</u>	April 1841
"A Sketch from Life"	<u>Graham's</u>	March 1841
"The Damsel of Basque"	<u>The Southron</u>	May-November 1841
Letter in "Editor's Table"	" "	October 1841
Letter in "Editor's Table"	" "	November 1841
"Western Literature"	<u>The Guardian</u>	January 1842
"Original Letter from Charles Dickens"	<u>Graham's</u>	February 1842
"L. A. Wilmer, Esq."	<u>The Guardian</u>	May 1842
"Herbert Moultrie"	<u>Lady's World</u>	February 1843
"The Writers of the Southwest: A. B. Meek"	<u>The Guardian</u>	June 1844
"The Autobiography of a Monomaniac"	<u>Holden's</u>	November 1848- November 1849

When read carefully, the prose listed above reveals no more improvement, stylistic or intrinsic, than took place in the verse discussed in Chapter III. There is, however, one major difference between Tomlin the prose writer and Tomlin the poet. A collection of eleven tales written near the end of his life and published in book form as Tales of the Caddo is markedly different from anything of his which preceded it. Because the book belongs in the category of early "Western" fiction, and because its contents had not seen previous publication in magazines or newspapers, it will be considered separately. The purpose of the present chapter is to examine Tomlin's magazine prose and to show how it represents periodical fiction and criticism of the mid-nineteenth-century.

As with the verse, it has seemed more desirable to group the prose writings by type rather than to take up each piece in chronological order.

Tomlin's fourteen prose pieces which were published in periodicals fall into three groups: short stories, or tales; continued stories; and critical writing. Five of the titles from the chronological listing above belong to the first group: "The Spanish Adventurer," "The Fountain of Youth," "The Fatal Kiss," "A Sketch from Life," and "Herbert Moultrie." Three are continued stories: "Theodoric of the Amali," consisting of only two installments, but embracing a variety of incident and covering a longer period of time than could possibly be encompassed in a short story; and two longer serials, "The Damsel of Basque," and "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac." In the third group, three articles, "Western Literature," "L. A. Wilmer, Esq.," and "The Writers of the Southwest: A. B. Mack," are conscious literary criticism. The two letters which appeared in the "Editor's Table" of the Southron, by virtue of their observations on both literature in general and on particular writers, also belong in this classification, as does the "Original Letter from Charles Dickens." With the exception of strictly technical articles in agricultural or other vocational papers and of scholarly studies in the learned "Reviews," other contemporary magazine prose may also be grouped under the three headings of short stories, serials, and literary criticism. Consequently, an analysis of Tomlin's prose writings will add to an understanding of nineteenth-century American reading tastes, as reflected in periodical prose.

In the short story group, both "The Spanish Adventurer" and "The Fountain of Youth" reflect interest in the early Spanish explorers of America. "The Spanish Adventurer" is the better plotted of the two. In

it Tomlin has attempted his own solution of the mystery surrounding the death of De Soto. Discarding the generally accepted belief that the explorer died on his southward journey down the Mississippi, the author of the short story has De Soto commanding a crew of buccaneers in the Caribbean and meeting death on the island of Hispaniola.

Disguised as the pirate captain, Bourilla, De Soto conceals his identity from even the most suspicious members of his band, until sea-battle and shipwreck have hastened his end. A long-lost daughter and a persistent but somewhat shadowy suitor are conveniently close at hand when the revelation is made. Reunion and reconciliation contribute to the climax, in which the erring father's demise is postponed until, in the approved fashion of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, he has received his daughter's forgiveness and bestowed a paternal blessing on the couple.

Far-fetched and contrived, "The Spanish Adventurer" has, nevertheless, one reasonably convincing characterization, the title character. Tomlin draws this picture of the disguised explorer:

He appeared to be about fifty-five years old. The hair escaping in dark matted folds from his hat was sprinkled with grey. The large mustaches ornamenting the corners of the upper lip were uncombed and lay across a pair of bushy whiskers. . . . [His eyes] were black and twinkling—glowing with a restless fervor, and glancing around in haughty pride. . . . Excessive toil had worn away the cumbersome flesh, until nothing was left but sinew and brawn.<sup>3</sup>

An attempt is made to reveal Bourilla's character traits through his conversations with others, as in the following bit of dialogue between the captain and a member of his crew.

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<sup>3</sup> The Casket, XVI (February 1840), 66-67.

"Who did you leave on watch?" [asks Bourilla.]

"The boatswain, St. Pierre."

"Who has sainted the boatswain?"

"None other than the devil, or he would have been damned long ago," replied Rudel.

"I wish to God he would doff the St. and be simple Pierre! I am ever suspicious of Saints on earth; they do well enough in heaven."<sup>4</sup>

But another conversation, apparently intended to demonstrate the Spaniard's superstitious reverence for images, succeeds only in demonstrating the author's ignorance of nautical custom. As Rudel and the disguised explorer scan the horizon for an approaching vessel, the former exclaims, "But do you see that black spot in the west, that is no bigger than the head of St. Denis, that ornaments the rudder [sic] of the Delphin?" The phrasing of Bourilla's quick reproof betrays no auctorial awareness that the figurehead is out of place: "Which protects her against the danger of the seas, you should have said, Rudel."<sup>5</sup>

The other characters of "The Spanish Adventurer" are stock figures, but there is evidence in one case that Tomlin was striving, even in this highly romantic tale, for the "vraisemblance" he was later to insist upon as an essential quality of fiction.<sup>6</sup> A measure of verisimilitude is achieved in a Negro, Juba, and in the use of authentic dialect in his speech. The author accounts for Juba's status among the pirates by a reference to the variety of racial and national types in Bourilla's crew.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "To the Reader," Tales of the Caddo (Cincinnati, 1849), p. 2.



The Negro displays an amusing impertinence in maintaining his independence of spirit. His brief appearance in the story is sufficiently entertaining to suggest that, if his creator had bothered, Juba might have become at least as convincing a character as Poe's Jupiter. St. Pierre, avidly quizzing Rudel on the possibilities of finding satisfactory loot on the vessel with which the pirate ship battles, is interrupted by Juba.

"Gor a mighty, Massa St. Pierre, how you 'spec Massa Rudel gwine know dat, when you tallyscope fail to teach you dis 'portant knowledge?" answered the negro Juba.

"Hold your tongue, you old blackamoer—or I'll tear it out by the roots," replied the enraged St. Pierre.

"Try 'em if you please—you no dare do 'em—dat you ain't."<sup>7</sup>

Tomlin's second story of the Conquistadores is, like "The Spanish Adventurer," an attempt to fictionalize history. But "The Fountain of Youth" is much more ambitious than the De Soto tale. Tomlin's imagination, given free enough rein in "The Spanish Adventurer," gallops headlong into fantasy in this story of Ponce de Leon. The reader is prepared for something of the sort by the sub-title, "A Tradition of the Lucoyos." A summary of the plot will indicate how Tomlin here treats history and legend.

Ponce De [sic] Leon, accompanied by his friend, Juan Dias De Solis, and a crew which includes a Casique Indian, Hatuey, sets sail from Puerto Rico to the island of Bimini, where the explorer expects to find the Fountain of Youth. After a storm and the loss of the rest of the crew, the three men reach the island. Here they find the Fountain, on a smaller island in a lake, and, for good measure, a beautiful Indian priestess,

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<sup>7</sup>

The Casket, XVI (February 1840), 69.

with the improbable name of Chevilette, and a bevy of female attendants. In spite of warning from Hatuey, who remembers an ominous legend, De Leon, transformed by the magical waters, spends a night with Chevilette. The next morning the priestess, her retinue, her throne, and the fountain have all disappeared, and De Leon is old once more. A passing vessel carries the three back to Puerto Rico.

Carried away by his island motif, Tomlin essayed the creation of something preternaturally strange and lovely in his description of his Lucayan Lady of the Lake and her fairy attendants. The latter are thus pictured:

They were small, but they were not like the children of the earth, for they were fairer and more sylph-like. They had forms, but they were unlike anything that had been seen on earth. . . . Their faces, and the color was not like alabaster, yet it was exceedingly fair. Their teeth were white, yet it was not the whiteness of snow, nor like any whiteness that had been seen, yet they were very beautiful. . . . Their eyes beamed the divinest ray that had been seen, yet it was not like the beam of a star, for it was more beautiful than any light that had been given to the world.<sup>8</sup>

And in painting a word portrait of the Indian Priestess Tomlin disregarded ethnologic accuracy, preferring in its stead these imaginative details:

Her eyes were darkly blue, and swimming in the soft intensity of their own light. Her cheeks were soft and of alabaster whiteness, and the dimples appeared as if they were tinted by the shade of a rose-bud. Her dress was a tunic, and was woven from the fibrous shred of orange flowers—and on her head was a wreath made of pansies. Midway the flowery wreath that bound her forehead was a gem that looked like the morning star.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., XVII (October 1840), 155.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-154.

Marred by hackneyed phrase and figure, the above affords a good illustration of a minor nineteenth-century writer's attempt to treat of the marvelous. Equally superficial is this quasi-philosophical digression introduced in explanation of De Leon's belief in the legendary fountain.

He had not abandoned altogether the hope of yet discovering the Fountain of Youth. The sentiment of its existence was the causation of the faith—and the faith of its existence had not produced the sentiment. He believed because he wished it was so and not because there was a probability of its existence.<sup>10</sup>

Philosophy thus disposed of, religion could be dealt with. Conforming to popular conceptions of Jesuitical practice, as presented in the Gothic novel, Tomlin gave this account of the Indian Hatusey's experience with a wily priest.

"If you will believe, Hatusey, you will enter into the joys of heaven," spoke the Franciscan friar to the Indian.

"Believe!—I cannot—it is impossible! What will you have me to believe?" asked the excited Indian.

"In our God—the God of the white man," answered the friar.

"But I do not understand him—and have not faith in his works," replied the Indian.

"Oh! that is a difficulty easy enough got over—say that you believe, and all will be well," spoke the friar.

"Would you wish me to tell a falsehood?" asked the now astonished Cacique.

"Falsehoods are not criminal when they produce good results," answered the wily casuist.<sup>11</sup>

Superstition as well as casuistry is ascribed to the friar in another scene, in which Tomlin has somewhat skillfully allowed each of several speakers to characterise himself, without auctorial comment. As De Leon's

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 151-152.

ship is buffeted by the storm, four persons aboard, the friar, Hatuey, De Solis, and a young man, express their various feelings of fear or excitement.

"Throw overboard the Casique Hatuey, and the storm will cease," spoke the Franciscan friar.

"A hypocrite will make a better peace offering to the incensed God of the sea than an unbeliever," spoke De Solis.

"The great Spirit is angry with the whites for their cruelty to the poor Indians," spoke Hatuey.

"She is scudding before the tempest like an arrow," spoke a young brother of De Leon as the vessel dashed down a mountain wave.<sup>12</sup>

Of more interest than the stock character of the friar is the Indian Hatuey. Tealin's presentation partakes of two concepts: the readiness of Hatuey's speech and his confutation of the Jesuitical friar are in the Noble Savage tradition; but a long digression occasioned by the first mention of Hatuey reflects a more realistic attitude. Since this passage appears to embody the author's honest attempt to understand the American aborigine, it merits quotation at some length.

The savage feels, but it is the feeling only of independence. It is not the warm and gushing flow of sympathy at other's happiness. . . . He is a member of society only because it enables him to secure the means of a support more easily. . . . His caprices are ungovernable, and under restraint he is like a wild Tartary horse, impatient and unmanageable. His hatred is implacable and unforgiving, and he cherishes up a wrong as a sweet morsel to be revenged. Entirely a creature of impulses, and those of the most dangerous kind—he never acts from a conviction of justice. . . . His virtues, if he has any, are merely the offspring of the circumstances that surround him; and are mostly negative ones. He only reasons and acts from necessity. . . . He is a wild man, full of whims

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

and caprices, and only capable in emergencies of acting with the sober dignity of a civilised man.<sup>13</sup>

In comparison with "The Spanish Adventurer" and "The Fountain of Youth," the third Tomlin tale, "The Fatal Kiss," is slight indeed. Having little plot, it is merely the re-telling of a story Tomlin may have remembered from boyhood, since its locale is Goose Creek, South Carolina. Alice Jones was affianced by her father to Lucius Wilson, son of her father's friend. But Alice loved another man, Julius Maxwell, and resolved not to live beyond her wedding hour. The ceremony took place, and with it the conclusion of the tale:

Alice touched her lips with a subtle poison, which on touching the bridegroom's lips communicated its deadly influence—and neither Alice nor Lucius outlived the moment of the Fatal Kiss.<sup>14</sup>

The little story, which saw publication twice, first in the Southron and then in the Saturday Evening Post, contains elements which Tomlin's great New England contemporary, Hawthorne, would almost certainly have compounded into allegory. But Tomlin was evidently uninterested in any possible symbolic or allegoric interpretation, desiring more to secure

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 151. In this connection, mention of a letter Tomlin wrote to the editor of the Magnolia is apropos, in that it reflects his consistent interest in the American Indian. Although the letter was not published, a lengthy comment in "Editorial Bureau," The Magnolia, N. S., I (December 1842), 396, indicates its tenor. Tomlin had written concerning an Indian Mound twelve miles from Jackson. The editor somewhat condescendingly corrects Tomlin's "mistaken" idea that the mounds were burial places, and disagrees with Tomlin "in his sympathy for the aborigines of America. . . . They could only have been saved from annihilation by a stern subjection to slavery, and if there be anything to lament or regret, it is that it was not done. . . . A savage is not a man. . . . He may be made one, by civilisation, but civilisation must begin with coercion." Tomlin appears to have gone much further than the Magnolia editor toward an objective appraisal of Indian nature.

<sup>14</sup> The Southron, I (January 1841), 3.

editorial—and reader—attention by the story's sentimental-sensational qualities. He even disavows any invention, insisting that "the tale is not one of fiction . . . several persons are now alive who witnessed the Fatal Kiss."<sup>15</sup>

Almost as slight as "The Fatal Kiss" is "A Sketch from Life," which treats of seduction in the approved fashion of the sentimental novel. To one of the most popular of this genre, The Coquette, Tomlin's reputedly true story owes both its theme and the name of its fallen heroine, Eliza Wharton. But Tomlin's plagiarism from Hannah Foster was not absolute, since his Eliza's fall was not occasioned by flirtatiousness but by innocence. And there are no rejected suitors to mitigate in any degree the seducer's crime. The story has, in fact, only two characters, betrayed and betrayer, and the narration of their involvement consists mainly of a series of high-minded castigations of the latter, called in Tomlin's story Gordon de Severn. Of this "vile seducer" the narrator is made to say:

The subject of the present sketch has had in time the most sincere friendship of the writer. One act, and one alone, has made them enemies—irreconcilably, forever.<sup>16</sup>

The fate of Gordon's hapless victim is related in terms well calculated to arouse a sisterly sympathy in even the primmest readers.

A little while ago, Eliza Wharton was not more fair than she was innocent; but now at the heart the canker-worm preys voraciously, as is evidenced by the deep lines that mark the

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<sup>15</sup> The Saturday Evening Post, XX (April 3, 1841), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Graham's, XVIII (March 1841), 136.

cheek. Retired beyond the precincts of the bustle of the multitude; lost to friends that once loved her—she lives a solitary creature, ruined in reputation by the very being she once loved;—penitent in seclusion, she has wept her sins forgiven.<sup>17</sup>

And the conclusion of the sketch is devoted to kindling a fine indignation in all gentlemanly hearts at the thought of the arch-villain and destroyer of female innocence.

She believed him when he said that he loved her. She trusted, when he deceived. She fell because she loved one too much, that proved himself a villain, and not because she was base. . . . She fell—and this vile seducer is now sporting in the sunshine of wealth—and has friends, and is received into the houses of the honorable, and is caressed, and is smiled upon; while the poor injured one—Elisa Wharton, is abandoned by the world, and by her relations, to pine in some sequestered spot, and die of a broken heart.<sup>18</sup>

Villainy also figures in the last of the short-story group, as its cumbersome title implies. But in "A Life Story of Herbert Moultrie, A Bad Man of Williamsburgh District," virtue triumphs with villainy receiving its just deserts. In Williamsburg, South Carolina, Isabella Witherspoon, beautiful daughter of a wealthy planter, is sought in marriage by the dissolute and unprincipled Herbert, whose suit she very sensibly spurns in favor of Henry McCord, an estimable Charlestonian. But she chooses an inopportune setting, the banks of the Santee River, for the rejection of the impulsive Herbert. In his disappointment, her thwarted lover attempts to drown her, but Henry arrives on the scene, and fires at his dangerous

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

rival "a pistol, without which he never travelled." After this timely rescue, Tomlin disposes of the fate of all three in a sketchy conclusion:

The ball struck home and the wounded man must have fallen into the river, for his corpse was found, some days after, miles below. A few months afterward Isabella became the wife of her rescuer.<sup>19</sup>

Of Tomlin's short stories, the two earliest, at least in order of publication, are the best, for both "The Spanish Adventurer" and "The Fountain of Youth" evince some ingenuity of situation and plot, as well as reasonably skillful characterization. That stories similar to these in the employment of historical setting and adventurous incident were in demand is evident from a study of the contents of almost any popular magazine of the time. Graham's, for example, in 1842 carried three historical stories by H. W. Herbert, "The False Ladye," "The Duello," and "The Doom of the Traitress,"<sup>20</sup> all laid in sixteenth-century France. And a feminine author, Mary S. Pease, contributed to the same volume still another tale of exotic castles and temporarily thwarted love in "The Lady and the Page: A Story of Moorish Spain."<sup>21</sup> Tomlin's stories based on early American history carried much the same appeal to readers as these Graham's stories of historical France and Spain. If there was

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<sup>19</sup> Lady's World of Literature and Fashion, III (February 1843), 57.

<sup>20</sup> Graham's, XI (January 1842), 27-30; (February 1842), 85-87; (March 1842), 150-153.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., XI (March 1842), 167-173.



not in the Tennessean's tales so much of the far away, there was, as compensation, sufficient romanticizing of the long ago.

As for the three lesser tales or sketches, they, too, were representative of a popular type, in which an incident purporting to be true was made the basis for pious moralizing. Similar in length and treatment to Tomlin's "A Sketch from Life," though less daring in choice of subject, are two little stories by Robert Morris, also in Graham's for 1842. Both "The Bridal" and "The Hasty Marriage" bear the subtitle "A Sketch from Real Life."<sup>22</sup> The first was designed to touch the sensibilities of its readers by recounting the fate of a bride who lay a corpse within a year of her wedding day, and so to drive home the transience of earthly joy. The second points the obvious moral implied in the title. Both reflect the current vogue for "true" stories upon which Tomlin capitalised in "The Fatal Kiss," "Herbert Moultrie," and "A Sketch from Life."

Tomlin's first published serial story, "Theodoric of the Amali," is, like the two short stories, "The Spanish Adventurer" and "The Fountain of Youth," indicative of the fashion for historical tales embellished by an admixture of the fanciful. In October 1839 the Tennessean had sent the manuscript of "Theodoric" to Poe, accompanied by a brief note, the beginning of the correspondence between the two. Tomlin threw himself and his opus on the mercies of Poe with a frank admission that he was a beginner. "A 'brither sinner's' hopes of future celebrity in his yet

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<sup>22</sup> Graham's, XXI (July 1842), 13-14; (December 1842), 336-338.

untrodden paths of Fiction depend almost certainly on the success of 'Theodoric of the Amali.'<sup>23</sup> While such an appeal was well calculated to enlist Poe's sympathies, it is doubtful that he would have risked his editorial reputation and position for the mere encouragement of a "brither sinner." His keen eye must have detected reader-appealing qualities in this romantic tale of the Byzantine court. At any rate, "Theodoric" was published in the May and June, 1840, issues of Burton's Gentleman's, which Poe was then editing.

The story might have been more aptly titled "Theodora the Empress," for it is actually Tomlin's version of how the notorious courtesan became the consort of Justinian I. Like "The Spanish Adventurer," "Theodoric" embodies the concealed identity motif so popular in the period, but the clues are somewhat more skillfully planted in the serial than in the short story.

The title character appears twice only, in the opening paragraphs of Parts I and II respectively. Theodoric the "Scythian Ostrogoth" is presented, according to Romantic convention, as a noble barbarian triumphing through "natural" virtue over the corrupt plotters of the Byzantine court. But it is with the latter that the story is chiefly concerned. They include the aged ex-empress, to whom Tomlin consistently refers as "the Verina," a former general, Trascalisseus, whose inability to remember that the Verina has re-christened him Zeno affords some badly strained humor, Narses of the Herali, "a bold and indefatigable individual in

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<sup>23</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, October 16, 1836. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

prosecution of pleasure" and a leader of one of the warring factions of Constantinople, and the object of Narses' desire, a provocatively voluptuous young female called, for reasons known only to the author, "the Comito."

While that intrigue and counter-intrigue so dear to the hearts of Romantic novelists is taking place between the scheming Verina and the nobly elemental Theodoric, Narses the Herali becomes involved in a series of episodes incorporating almost every stock situation of the Gothic novel. Inflamed by the Comito's brazen exhibition, in the arena of the Hippodrome, of her physical charms, Narses secures an introduction to her which leads him first into some titillating conversation and eventually into bodily peril. The first part of Theodoric closes, like any twentieth-century thriller, with the hero in dire straits, the Comito having capriciously imprisoned him in a dungeon.

Part II makes short shrift of Theodoric, disposing of his military victories and his vengeance on the Verina in a few paragraphs. The scene shifts, with disconcerting abruptness, back to Constantinople and Narses in the dungeon, where twenty hours of imprisonment have "sufficed to convince him that something was wrong." For no good reason, except that this was magazine fiction, Narses is subjected, among other unpleasantness, to a terrifying visit from an old Jewess, Abigail, described with fulsomeness of Gothic detail:

She carried in her hand a small lamp, from which gleamed fitfully a fiery red flame. . . . Her hands were long and attenuated; her eyes were sunken. . . . The cheek-bones were high, and the chin terminated in a point; the hair was grizzled and

hung in matted elf-locks. . . . She carried in her hand a small but exquisitely wrought dagger . . . the point . . . tipped in blood.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of her frightful appearance, Abigail proves harmless and the Comito releases Narses, assuring him that his imprisonment was "the result of a freak of love." New complications arise, however, when an understandably enraged rival, Ecebolus, attacks Narses. The latter is forced to murder the superseded lover and to throw his body into the Bosphorus, obligingly assisted by the Comito. But poetic justice overtakes him when he unsuspectingly steps on a trap-door and is himself precipitated into the stream. And later in the evening, more dousings ensue, when the palace catches fire, and the Comito and Abigail are forced to jump for their lives.

After this watery episode, five years elapse, during which "the vast futurity was opening still to the ambitious Herali the schemes that the past had abandoned." Part of the "vast futurity" is his association with the Emperor Justinian. During an evening visit to his Emperor's palace, Narses learns that his erstwhile light-o'-love is now the wife of Justinian. "Theodoric of the Amali" is concluded by a speech of the ex-Comito's, which serves the double purpose of voicing the moral that mid-nineteenth-century priggishness demanded of even the most lurid tales and of revealing the identity of the principal character.

"Never . . . mistake light heartedness for vice; for many maidens that the world deems of easy virtue, are as spotless as the babe at nurse, while the vicious, by their wiles of

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<sup>24</sup> Burton's Gentleman's, VI (June 1840), 270. The blood on the dagger is never explained. Apparently it served its purpose in piling up horror.

hypocrisy, have purchased of the world an immaculate virtue. Remember this, and the Express Theodora will be the friend of the Herald."<sup>25</sup>

In "Theodoric of the Amali," Tomlin was capitalizing on the contemporary vogue for Gothic romance. Although his unskillful handling of such stock devices as senseless murders, bloody daggers, and dungeons with a secret spring, results in a reductio ad absurdum, his story had many counterparts in current periodicals. The same volume of Burton's in which "Theodoric" was published featured other nineteenth-century thrillers: "The Murder on the Bridge," by G. W. M. Reynolds,<sup>26</sup> the story of a young Parisian rake who murders his own father, is replete with gory details of the parricide's execution; "A Visit to a Madhouse," by Miss Mary E. MacMichael,<sup>27</sup> depicts with obvious relish the tormented faces and the anguished screams of the inmates; "The Metempsychosis," by R. S. Elliott,<sup>28</sup> is the narrative of a wandering soul which found its first earthly habitation in the body of a Roman gladiator, slain because he dared to love a patrician's daughter; and "The Gladiator," by Tomlin's fellow-Jacksonian, Wiley Pope Hale,<sup>29</sup> piles slaughter upon

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., VI (January 1840), 24-26.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 230-234.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-39, 74-76.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 198-200.

slaughter, as Nero's gladiator receives his own death wound in the arena immediately before killing a Goth, the prisoner Majesticus, and his daughter, and Nero is later stabbed fatally by the avenging son and brother of the gladiator's two victims.

Readers who had supped full upon the horrors of these romances would not be revolted by the macabre elements in Tomlin's story. But at least one subscriber to Burton's Gentleman's felt that Tomlin's talents merited more worthy subjects. This reader, who signed himself only "T. E--," put into verse both a highly flattering opinion of "Theodoric" and a desire for more uplifting themes in the future. Tomlin sent T. E--'s poetic criticism on to Poe, with this assurance:

You will not, Mr. Poe, for one moment believe that it was my vanity that caused the producing of the Eulogy--nor will you believe that your warm-hearted friend, with all of his Southern chivalry, can or will ever act in derogation of the high name of man.<sup>30</sup>

The "eulogy" affords an excellent example of the tastes of periodical readers of the age, to whom improbability of plot and tediousness of detail constituted no serious fault in a story, provided only it treated of a sufficiently "lofty" subject.

To John Tomlin, Esq.

Lines

Composed on reading his "Theodoric of the Amali" published in the May and June nos. of the "Gentleman's Magazine" for 1840.

As a bright swan floats on a crystal river,  
So down the silver current of thy style  
Thy story glides,--and like a "joy forever,"  
Wins [wends?] its glad way; charming us the while

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<sup>30</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, December 12, 1841.  
Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

To hear the mad thunders of the Hippodrome  
 With frantic thunders greet the harlot's charms,  
 Anon to see the majestic head of Rome  
 Bowed to the earth before the Gothic arms,—  
 To thee! whose theme now plays with maiden's hair,  
 Now pictures warriors in their dread array,  
 With equal grace and glowing colors rare—  
 This homely tribute of rough verse I pay!  
 But let not scenes like these engross thy pen;  
 For broader plans and loftier themes I ask  
 Than the base manners of degenerate men—  
 Oh! suit thy genius with a nobler task!  
 Declare the story of Virginia's woes,  
 How young Valeria played a Roman part,  
 Or how the virtuous servant girl arose  
 And shared proud Peter's throne, and reigned o'er all his heart.

T. E—<sup>31</sup>

The subjects suggested by T. E— were never, so far as any published story reveals, utilized by Tomlin. For the setting of his next serial story he turned to contemporary Spain and the internecine battles between the Carlistas and the supporters of the Queen. "The Damsel of Basque" was published in the Southron, May–November, 1841. There were nine chapters. How many more Tomlin planned is not known; he had none ready for the December issue, and after that the Southron suspended publication.

This uncompleted serial is concerned with the adventures of a young Englishman, Julian de Vere, in Spain in the 1830's. First attracted to the Queen's cause, Julian soon falls in with a group of "contrabandistas" in the Pyrenees and joins them in battle against the Carlistas. In the home of the smugglers' leader, Julian encounters the latter's daughter, Marinasha, and a phrenologist, Dr. Diderot, who has attached himself to the "contrabandistas" because their many fights give him an unparalleled opportunity

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

to study human heads. Wounded in a second battle, Julian is nursed by Marinesha. They fall in love, but feeling he must prove himself before marriage, Julian leaves without a declaration. In his travels he makes new friends, among them two amiable goatherds, Don Sleepy and Don Lazy. With the introduction of these two characters, Chapter IX ends. And no more was published.

"The Damsel of Basque" is representative of mid-nineteenth-century American Romanticism in its setting, its sentimental hero with his passionate love of freedom, and in its many long descriptive passages. Here Tomlin displays that propensity for Gothic atmosphere manifested in the earlier "Theodoric."

It was midnight—an ominous hour—and the moon was riding in a silver chariot amid the drapery of fleecy clouds that hung around her noon—and the owl had hooted twice from an ivied tower of the Moors, hard by—and the moon's shadow of the mountain was coming on the valley of the smugglers—and the green snake lay half torpid in her wintry house, underneath the grey stone—and the stars were all covered by the thin pall of the lighted moon, save the god Jupiter and the fiery Mars.<sup>32</sup>

But "The Damsel of Basque" is not all moonlight and gray-green landscape. Tomlin achieves a neat balance for his melodrama in some hearty humor. The three comic characters, Dr. Diderot, Don Sleepy, and Don Lazy, are all caricatures, but reasonably amusing. In Dr. Diderot, Tomlin was inviting his readers to laugh with him at a reductio ad absurdum of phrenology. And the goatherds with descriptive names might have stepped out of a Renaissance "humors" play, although they probably came to Tomlin

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<sup>32</sup> The Southron, I (July 1841), 224.



from a nearer source, either his British idol Dickens or his American idol Poe.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of origin, however, they do add the relief of laughter to an otherwise melodramatic tale.

One additional element may be noted, the introduction of a personal allusion into the text of the story. John Tomlin's marital troubles were coming to a head at the time "The Damsel of Basque" was written. In verse, he was willing to concede the failure of his marriage.<sup>34</sup> But as he was writing the serial story, his love for his wife was uppermost in his mind and occasionally found expression in passages of the story. In Chapter III, for example, a personal reflection is interpolated into this description of the joys of heaven.

There the crystal waters of the River of God flow without a murmur on golden sands, through the foliage of vines, clustering thickly their tendrils around the rich magnolia and the balmy myrtle. Nymphs—every one, too, as fair as my own Mary—promenade (as I have seen my Mary do on earth, and will again, I hope, ere she leaves for that far-off Eden to give to eternity's crown its brightest jewel) underneath that canopy of vines—and are happy.<sup>35</sup>

A similar passage occurs in Chapter V, which opens with an apostrophe to the seasons.

But more than all these √nature and the seasons and with a mad idolatry, and with phrensied adoration intensely burning,

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<sup>33</sup> In some of Poe's earlier stories, characters very like Don Sleepy and Don Lazy appear. Tomlin had described these two persons as being, respectively, tall and thin, and very short and fat. In Poe's "King Pest," first published in the Southern Literary Messenger in 1835, two sailors of contrasting size are introduced, the six-foot-and-a-half Legs and his four-foot companion Tarpaulin.

<sup>34</sup> See "To My Wife," above, pp. 85-86.

<sup>35</sup> The Southron, I (July 1841), 227. There are interesting anticipations in this passage of Poe's "Eleanora," first published a year later than Tomlin's serial.

I worship a being—and one alone—and her name is Mary! She is so very beautiful that nothing surpasses her—and in her heart there are so many kindly feelings, and she expresses them so sweetly, that she has become the brightest star of my hope of happiness,<sup>36</sup>

No attempt is made to establish any connection between these quasi-rhapsodic outbursts and the plot of the story. For nineteenth-century periodical readers none was necessary. Sentimental digressions were in order, and if the identity of the adored being whose charms were thus celebrated was uncertain, so much the better. Reader sympathies embraced with equal readiness an author's fictitious characters and those objects of his personal affection whom he chose to honor by veiled allusion.

Tomlin's third and last published serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," appeared in a frankly sensational periodical, Holden's Dollar Magazine. The story is a curious blend of wildly imaginary fiction with actual letters Tomlin had received from contemporary celebrities. Since these letters properly belong to the literary history of the time, they will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. But it is necessary to note here the use to which they were put. As has already been stated, Tomlin was an indefatigable correspondent, and both before and during his postmastership amassed a sizable collection of autographs.<sup>37</sup> For his serial, he strung the letters loosely on a long thread of rambling fiction. Holden's played up this autographical angle in preliminary announcement:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., I (August 1841), 265.

<sup>37</sup> See above, pp. 22-25.

To Our Readers  
Original Letters and Autographs of Distinguished  
Characters of the present day.

In the next number of our Magazine we shall commence an original and unique Tale entitled "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac; from original Manuscripts now in possession of the Toddlebar family. Edited by Joe Bottom."

This work will create a sensation unparalleled in the annals of Magazine Literature, as in it will be incorporated letters of nearly all the distinguished men of the present day, copied from originals now in our possession. Some of these will be valuable only as mere private letters of their authors, while others will be prized as containing many new thoughts and ideas never before given to the world. To render the series more interesting and valuable we shall to each letter attach a facsimile of its author's autograph. Our subscribers will thus at the conclusion of the articles possess autographs of all the most eminent men of our times, with no extra charge attached. AS THE EXPENSE OF THIS WORK IS VERY HEAVY, WE WISH TO REQUEST EVERY SUBSCRIBER NOW ON OUR BOOKS TO INDUCE SOME FRIEND TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE MAGAZINE, AND FOR ONE DOLLAR SECURE NOT ONLY THE INVALUABLE PAPERS ANNOUNCED ABOVE, BUT SEVEN OR EIGHT HUNDRED PAGES OF CHOICE READING MATTER BESIDES. IF EACH SUBSCRIBER WILL BUT DO THIS, WE SHALL BE IN SOME DEGREE COMPENSATED.

We shall print an extra edition of November numbers to supply the great demand for the first part of the autobiography. The first chapter will contain an original letter, and an exquisite sonnet of Sergeant Talfourd's—also a letter from a distinguished author of Philadelphia.<sup>38</sup>

"The Autobiography" appeared monthly, November 1848–January 1849 inclusive and, after a three-months break, May 1849–November 1849. The title may have come from an otherwise dissimilar story which had been published in the Southern Literary Messenger several years before,<sup>39</sup> and the "autography" was almost certainly suggested by Poe's series of that title which had appeared in Graham's in 1841–1842. But the story itself is, as Holden's claimed, both original and unique. It is doubly pseudonymous, since it

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<sup>38</sup> Holden's, II (October 1848), 624.

<sup>39</sup> T. H. E., "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Southern Literary Messenger, VII (October 1841), 665–685.

purports to be Joe Bottom's edition of the autobiography of one James Toddlebar. This ingenious plan, which makes it possible for Tomlin as Joe Bottom, editor, to comment on remarks made by Tomlin as James Toddlebar, autobiographer, is made clear by the lengthy heading of Chapter I:

The Autobiography of a Monomaniac  
or  
The Veritable History and Surprising  
Adventures of James Toddlebar.

Comprising the whole of His Extensive Correspondence with the  
Literati of the New and Old World, With Remarks upon Auto-  
graphical Dedication of Personal Character. From Original MSS.  
Now in the Possession of the Toddlebar Family.

Edited by Joe Bottom, Esq.<sup>40</sup>

Tomlin consciously put a great deal of himself into the hero, James Toddlebar. The initials are his, and the surname appears to be a wryly humorous allusion to his own besetting sin. He did not, like Hawthorne portraying his own approaching senility in The Dolliver Romance or Poe his dual nature in "William Wilson," analyse his own alcoholism or even the other, less obvious flaws in his character. He was not sufficiently skillful. What he does in "The Autobiography" is to create a hero very much like himself, to whom things happen very much as they happened to himself, except that his imagination touches with bright and gaudy colors the intrinsically dull events of his life, and leads Toddlebar into such romance as Tomlin never experienced.

James Toddlebar, like John Tomlin, was born "in a remote village of one of the most southern States of this confederacy."<sup>41</sup> Although Tomlin was grown and married before coming to Tennessee, Toddlebar is

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<sup>40</sup> Holden's, II (November 1848), 644.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 645.

brought at the age of ten to "one of the Western states in the great valley of the Mississippi."<sup>42</sup> Here he lives a happy boyhood, but at his father's death when James is nineteen, the care of his mother and sister devolves upon him. At this point, romance is first introduced, in the person of Toddlebar's cousin, Delia De Saussure, of whom Tomlin writes, in Poesan phrase, "The sweetest of sympathies, as the lute-strings of the angel Israefel's heart, trilled with the softest symphony on the chords of her affection."<sup>43</sup> There is an additional echo of Poe here, for like the narrator in "Kleanora," James had loved this cousin in childhood, and now longs for the time when he can return to his boyhood home and claim her for his own.

A few months after the death of Toddlebar's father, his mother and sister die, and he removes to "the little village [Jackson] that had sprung up in the last few years, as if by the hands of enchantment, from the deep wilderness of forest." Now Toddlebar begins his correspondence, which parallels Tomlin's in both inception and response.

As a respite from this sad and forlorn condition, for I could not associate with the creatures around me, I commenced the writing of long gossiping letters to distinguished literary men of both Hemispheres. I was but poorly fitted to the task, either by education or any previous qualification, yet somehow or other, I was enabled to touch with my own feelings a tender place in their affections, for almost always I received courteous replies to my letters.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 646.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

As the story continues, Toddlebar learns that his beloved Delia is dead, and the even more disquieting news that before her death she had been insulted by Henry Leneau, against whom he vows vengeance. Toddlebar sets out for the state of his birth to carry out his plan, but is stricken by brain fever en route, and forced to stay in the Willoughby home, where he is attended by the beautiful daughter of the house, Sulma Willoughby. His harmless dalliance with Sulma ended by his recovery, he makes his way north to Philadelphia, where he is attracted by the beautiful Laura Todhunter.

The Todhunter episode accounts for the introduction of the one letter whose authenticity can reasonably be questioned. Toddlebar, having written impassioned notes to Laura and extracted from her the promise of her miniature by Sully, receives a letter from Godey, asking his intentions toward the girl. This letter, like all the others in the serial, was printed with a facsimile signature, Godey's in this case,<sup>45</sup> which Tomlin may have had from business correspondence pertaining to his contributions to Godey's Lady's Book. If Mr. Godey objected to figuring as a character in the story and to the questionable use of his signature, there is no record of that objection. What is more likely is that he welcomed the publicity thus secured.

Having extricated himself from his embarrassing involvement with Laura, Toddlebar turns southward again. In Charleston, his vengeance overtakes Leneau, whom he kills without compunction, since he "had only

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., III (January 1849), 26.

avenged an injured maiden, and for a wrong committed against a woman even in thought there is no vengeance too heavy for the culprit.<sup>46</sup>

A prudent care for his own skin forces him away from the scene of the murder, and he leaves Charleston for New Orleans, and other romantic adventures. His primary purpose in New Orleans is to search for Mary Toulmine, "the idol of my heart," a very obvious reference to the author's own Mary. Before Toddlebar succeeds in this quest, however, he involves himself in two more affairs, with the chaste Sarah Wilson, and the unchaste Ulama de Leon Tallahassee, who unwittingly cures him of his infatuation by allowing him to surprise her in the arms of another lover. When Toddlebar and Mary Toulmine meet, she promises to be his, but the promise cannot be kept because a husband she had believed dead turns up alive. The chastened monomaniac then endeavors to find his happiness with Sarah Wilson. They plan to leave New Orleans and begin a new life. When Sarah, who by now, through auctorial carelessness, has become Susan Wilson,<sup>47</sup> is preparing to embark with Toddlebar for a new country, she falls overboard and is drowned.

This untimely catastrophe allows Tomlin as the editor, Joe Bottom, to bring the story to an end, with the following:

Note by the Editor. The MSS of Mr. Toddlebar ends at this point very abruptly; and feign [sic] would I give the sequel to his momentous and very curious history if I had it in my possession. But as I have it not, I must perforce be silent

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., III (June 1849), 329.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., IV (August 1849), 457.

in all that appertains to the future history of the "Monomaniac." He was a singular being and in every respect different from all others.<sup>48</sup>

As the synopsis above clearly shows, the narrative serving as a framework for "autography" is involved, incoherent, and often nightmarish. On one familiar with the events of the author's life, the story's distortion of those events has the affect of a bad piece of surrealism. Even the meaning of the title is twisted; an explanation of the autobiographer's "mania," withheld for no apparent reason until Chapter XII, reveals that the monomaniac has not one obsession but two, "love and autography."<sup>49</sup> But subscribers to Holden's were not inclined to be over-critical, and there is no evidence that readers found "The Autobiography" objectionable.

At least one of those readers saw no difference between Tomlin's story and the carefully planned work of the master craftsman Poe. George W. Eveleth was evidently following the Toddlebar adventures with interest and pleasure when on February 17, 1849, he wrote to Poe: "I think you are the Autobiographer of Holden's Dollar Magazine. And I guess this same weebegone personage could now look in the glass and point out one Joe Bottom, Editor of his posthumous papers."<sup>50</sup>

Additional evidence that "The Autobiography" was a favorite of

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., IV (November 1849), 656.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., IV (August 1849), 456.

<sup>50</sup> Mary E. Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe the Man, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1926), II, 1372.



nineteenth-century periodical readers is found in its republication. Two years after Tomlin's death, at least one newspaper, the Philadelphia Sunday Mercury, was printing his curious serial for the delectation of its readers.<sup>51</sup> Apparently the hodgepodge of autobiography and wildly sensational romance had continuing reader appeal.

"The Autobiography of a Monomaniac" contained, in addition to the story outlined above and the actual letters incorporated into it, scattered comments on literary men which relate it to the third group of Tomlin's prose writings to be considered, his critical essays. But since these comments occur only in conjunction with the letters, they will be discussed under the heading of literary correspondence. For a detailed analysis of Tomlin as critic, six pieces are now to be considered: two letters in "Editor's Table," The Southron; "Original Letter from Charles Dickens" in Graham's; and "Western Literature," "L. A. Wilmer, Esq.," and "The Writers of the Southwest: A. B. Meek," all published in The Guardian.

Although Tomlin was able to discern real literary merit, whatever its national or sectional origin, his primary interest was in the South. He saw in Gaskill's Southron a vehicle for the expression of his views on the state of Southern literature. Gaskill published the Jacksonian's first letter with this editorial comment:

A gentleman to whose perusal we submitted the manuscript of the foregoing letter pronounced it decidedly superior to

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<sup>51</sup>

Philadelphia Sunday Mercury, II (October 31, 1852), 1.

anything we have published from the same pen. As it contains strong expressions of personal kindness to ourselves, it would not be proper for us, perhaps, to say how nearly we accord with that position.<sup>52</sup>

The thesis of Tomlin's letter is very clearly stated: "Southern men are opposed to Southern literature—and it will be so until they learn to know themselves."<sup>53</sup> This was very much the same complaint Simms was making in his personal correspondence.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, continues Tomlin, everything foreign is greeted with indiscriminate approval which moves him to hyperbolic indignation.

Let but a foreign Annual find its way into this vast wilderness of forest—and it is worshipped. Every article that appears in some foreign Journal, mustachioed like those in *La Belle Assemblée* and flavoured with Rhenish wine, or coxcombed as the veriest trash in Bentley's *Miscellany*, and smelling strongly of London Beer, is with us excellently good. Vishnu is not worshipped with a more holy fervency, nor are the Veda preserved with more care, than is our idolatry for Bulwer and Ainsworth; and our carefulness in the preservation of the London Quarterlies.<sup>55</sup>

After this outburst, Tomlin warns the editor of The Southron that his periodical, worthy as it is in purpose and content, has little chance of succeeding in the face of opposition. South of the Potomac, he says, only one good periodical, the Southern Literary Messenger, has succeeded.

<sup>52</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 359.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>54</sup> See Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves, eds., The Letters of William Gilmore Simms, (Columbia, S. C., 1952), I, 5.

<sup>55</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 358.

Tomlin's conclusion as to the main factor in the success of the Messenger, although as extravagantly couched as his condemnation of Southern devotion to "foreign Annuals," is more logical, and has, in the main, been sustained by twentieth-century scholarship.

I really believe that if this work at its commencement had not secured the services of Edgar A. Poe as Editor, that before this it would have perished for the want of that meager support which it now receives. Bringing to its aid the powers of a highly cultivated mind, rich in a fertile imagination—and a poignant wit—and a keen satire—he so scared the critics out of their venom, that instead of condemning the work they praised and they became afraid to attack either the "Messenger" or its coeur de lion Editor.<sup>56</sup>

After conceding Southern support of this one exception to his thesis, Tomlin cites, as proof that Southern men will not support Southern literature, the precarious position of the Magnolia, under the editorship of P. C. Pendleton at Savannah. He speaks of contributions from "W. Gilmore Simms, Esq., author of the Yemassee, &c. and Dr. Caruthers, author of the 'Cavaliers of Virginia'," adding that in spite of such noteworthy contributors, the Magnolia "scarcely pays the expenses of its publication."<sup>57</sup>

His postmaster'ship, he says, has given him certain knowledge that Eastern periodicals are better received than Southern. At the thought of this enthusiasm for Northern publications he again waxes indignant.

"Dollar Magazines" such as are gotten up by the Willises or "Brother Jonathans" are taken here by the dozens—and as they receive them from my hands as Post Master they exclaim (the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

subscribers) (and honestly too), "Oh, how excellently good they are." Such things as these quite overcome me, and with a despairing prayer to my countrymen, that such things may be no longer, I retire with a wounded spirit, and muttering cry, "These fools are my friends."<sup>58</sup>

He laments the fate of "genius" in Tennessee, as exemplified in the author of "The Struggle of Letters," the editor of the Nashville Union, who has been assailed by carping critics for his literary efforts. And he concludes with good wishes for the Southron, partly negated by doubts concerning its survival.

Permit me, my dear sir, in conclusion, to offer you the heart's gratitude for your laudable ambition, as is evidenced by the task voluntarily imposed, in the getting up of the "Southron." Instead of you being a debtor to the people—they owe you ten thousand obligations, for the very handsome manner (all things considered) in which you have gotten up the "Southron." When will they cancel the debt and become your equal? Never, I fear! Public opinion is against you—a fearful mildew—and who can stand against it? Everything succumbs to it—It is the avalanche crushing an opposing obstacle—a something pulling down every thing infecting its progress. With the best wishes of my heart for yourself—and with a sincere hope for the success of the "Southron," I am, dear sir, faithfully and cordially yours,

J. Tomlin<sup>59</sup>

In reply, Gaskill very sensibly suggests that the greatest obstacle to literary production in the South and West is indifference rather than opposition, and that even that indifference is understandable, since the region cannot yet compete with the North in periodicals. The reason, he says, is that expenses are greater in the South, for both materials and labor. With admirable editorial tact, Gaskill observes,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 358-359.

"Our correspondent writes feelingly, but we hope the 'Spanish Damsel' has not come to a premature end by any cause like some of those mentioned in his letter above."<sup>60</sup>

Whether Tomlin was convinced by Gaskill's arguments or not, he did not return to the attack on Southern opposition to a native literature.<sup>61</sup> His next letter to the Southron, published in November, is mainly quotation from a London correspondent, who is identified only as "a friend of mine now residing in England."<sup>62</sup> Tomlin passes the letter on to Gaskill because of its information on the "English literati." The letter, as quoted by Tomlin, tells of having seen Charles Dickens, whom Tomlin's

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>61</sup> About a year later he addressed a letter containing similar expressions of opinion to the Magnolia, by this time moved to Charleston, where Simms was joint editor with Pendleton. The Tennessean's letter elicited this comment from the editors: "We have a letter from Mr. John Tomlin, of Tennessee, on the subject of American letters, and Southern letters in particular, to which we should certainly give place, were it less fervidly expressed, and did it relate less to a department of the subject which has already been handled more than once in the pages of the Magnolia. He thinks correctly on this subject, and as a Southron should. We certainly have been very long, and are still, under a most humiliating bondage—a bondage to those who are themselves bondsmen. We have a proper pride and hope in American letters—in what has been, and what may yet be, done; but our pride prompts us to insist that the South shall do her share of the work, before she can demand her portion of the glory. This is plain sense and plain sailing, surely." "Editorial Bureau," The Magnolia, N. S., I (September 1842), 200.

<sup>62</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (November 1841), 391.

correspondent considers much over-rated, Lady Blessington,<sup>63</sup> "a very intellectual-looking old lady," and the latter's admirer, Count D'Orsay,<sup>64</sup> "a most magnificent specimen of the creature man." More chatty news of the literati follows, including this juicy bit on the marital troubles of the author of The Last Days of Pompeii.

Bulwer is writing critiques on his wife in the Westminster, while she is cramming all the fashionable Journals with Squibs on the immorality of his private life—she says he spends the half of his time at the writing desk, and the other in the various Temples dedicated to Venus in the great Metropolis. I believe myself she is somewhat cracked—there is no doubt, however, of his being a gay man, tho' not very dissipated.<sup>65</sup>

There is an expression of pity for "poor Mrs. Norton,<sup>66</sup> a broken-hearted but not despised woman," who "was certainly imprudent but not guilty," and who "still sings from out her solitude, for such it is—and her notes are the more tender because the more mournful."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, was a minor novelist whose works were very popular in America. After her husband's death, she and Count D'Orsay were London social leaders for nearly twenty years. Among their most intimate friends was Byron, who wrote poems in praise of Lady Blessington's charm and beauty.

<sup>64</sup> These are almost the exact words used by N. P. Willis in describing D'Orsay, said to be the handsomest man of his time. An artist of considerable reputation, he painted nearly all the celebrities of his day. Among his most famous portraits are those of Byron and Wellington.

<sup>65</sup> The Southron, I (November 1841), 391.

<sup>66</sup> Mrs. Caroline Norton, grand-daughter of Sheridan, after being falsely accused of revealing confidential political information, was sued by her husband for her earnings for her writings. American sympathy for Mrs. Norton was reflected in an article by Park Benjamin, Graham's, XX (February 1842), 91-95, in which, after detailing the circumstances of her husband's suit, the author called Mrs. Norton "a lady who has every claim upon the protection, the respect, the admiration, and the love of mankind."

<sup>67</sup> The Southron, I (November 1841), 391-392.

Tomlin's comments on the London letter indicate his own admiration of Dickens. Before quoting his friend's missive, he states, "To one portion of it--his allusions to 'Bos' with a hearty condemnation, I denounce." And to make doubly certain that his correspondent's attitude toward the British novelist shall not be mistaken for his own, he writes, "I certainly felt hurt, Mr. Gaskill, to find a friend of mine believing in the 'ephemeral existence' of the works of Charles Dickens, whose genius in my opinion is more elevated than any other being now living on earth."<sup>68</sup>

The admiration for Bos displayed in the Southron letter is expressed more fully in Tomlin's little critique which Poe published, together with the letter that inspired it, under the title of "Original Letter from Charles Dickens" in Graham's.<sup>69</sup> The sketch opens with an admission of the difficulty of appraising impartially a living person, particularly if one admires him. As a "backwoodsman," says Tomlin, he himself is hardly capable of criticism of Dickens, "the great English author--who lives in London amid the exciting scenes and struggles of this world's great Metropolis." And of Dickens' writings he can only say, "so long as there is mind to appreciate the high conceptions of mind, and a taste to admire purity of thought," so long will Dickens' work live. What the Tennessean wishes to stress is a quality of Dickens' nature that makes him truly great, his kindness. As proof of that kindness, he offers Dickens' letter to himself.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>69</sup> "For the truly characteristic letter here published, and for the sketch which accompanies it, we are indebted to the obliging attention of Mr. John Tomlin of Tennessee. With our own warm admiration of the writings and character of Dickens we can well understand and easily pardon the enthusiasm of our friend." Graham's, XX (February 1842), 83.

Although the letter is, as Tomlin recognized, a kindly missive, expressing the novelist's sincere gratitude to his "backwoods" admirer, it scarcely merits Tomlin's extravagant praises of its "gem-like thought," its "sparkling observations," and a "tenderness breathing its seer-like influence on every thought." As he continues his discussion, however, Tomlin hits upon a distinction between Dickens and some greater writers which is not unperceptive. For, whatever biographical research has revealed concerning those inconsistencies in character which rendered Dickens a far less integrated personality than Tomlin imagined, the fact remains that the Britisher's novels set in motion reforms that went far to wipe out the evils he deplored. And if it is true that human character is best known by its fruits, then Dickens was, as Tomlin perceived, an essentially kindly man. At any rate, Tomlin's essay goes on to compare Dickens as a person first with Napoleon and then with Byron and Shelley, arriving at this conclusion:

With all the genius of these three beings, Charles Dickens has a good heart. . . . In the world's history, so far back as the memory reaches into the past, we have seen the most brilliant minds associated with some of the worst qualities of the heart. There is occasionally some solitary instance, standing as some beautiful relief on the epoch of time, of beings whose splendid endowments of mind have not been more remarkable in their era of history for talent, than the generous breathings of the holy purity of heart have been for kindness. Such cases as these are few; and happen but seldom. In "Eos" these two qualities have met.<sup>70</sup>

Even after Tomlin's natural and boyish excitement at hearing from

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Graham's, XX (February 1842), 84.



Dickens is taken into account and even though the results of twentieth-century scholarship have dimmed the luster of Dickens so that Tomlin's hyperbole becomes faintly amusing, there remains in the "backwoodsman's" tribute to the Victorian genius enough undeniable truth to redeem it. It is easy to pardon, with Poe, "the enthusiasm of our friend."

Of Tomlin's six prose pieces concerned with literature or literary figures, three were published in the Tennessee Guardian. The first, "Western Literature," 1842, is devoted to an effort to arouse writers of the South and West to produce the great work of which they are capable. In this little essay, Tomlin echoes the complaint he had made in his September 1841 letter to the Southron, that the South and West have been too long slavish imitators of the East. Now, however, his attention is directed toward the producers rather than the readers of literature.

The essay is headed with Bishop Berkeley's famous line, "Westward the star of empire takes its way," a line repeated throughout, like the text of a sermon. Indeed, "Western Literature" reads very much like a sermon or a hortatory address. Tomlin's thesis here is that the very terrain of the West is conducive to the production of great literature:

Nature has impressed on our Western country her highest and her most magnificent grandeur. She has been to us generous to a fault. Freely she has bestowed, and with a right good will, the gifts of her bounty. See her Mighty Majesty,—the Mississippi, laving the alluvial banks of a hundred cities! The eye of Prophecy through the vista of time sees it, but we cannot, for we will not! Our forests on the future cast their shadows, lengthening until the "star of empire" has its noon over the valley of the Mississippi. The Eagle—'tis the Eagle of our own country, and not of Europe that I speak, is now imaging some of the noble and high qualities of its nature in our institutions.

In our system of society, simplicity is its leading feature—unostentatious, but grand—magnificent, but not gaudy.<sup>71</sup>

However, continues Tomlin, before literary development can equal that industrial production which is sure to come, writers in the great valley of the Mississippi must dissociate themselves from the East.

We cannot have a literature of our own until all models are despised and all criticisms unfeared. We cannot have a literature of our own until our minds grasp their own powers, daringly to speak from the impulses of the heart, and forcibly to impress on the souls of our country-men, lifelike, the burning inspiration of our thoughts. Genius cannot exist when cramped by forms or models. High as the nobility of its own thoughts is its nature, and free as the mountain air must its life be, if it lives!<sup>72</sup>

Looking into the years ahead, Tomlin was able to see future poets plain, and to transmit his vision to his readers.

Poets—and they are Nature's breathing life through her generous and better organized brains of men—will arise among us yet, with the force of a Byron, and with the brilliancy of a Moore. They too will have imaginations as lofty as a Shelley—and will portray the scenes of their native land with the pencil of a Scott—depicting the passions of her people with the magnificent grandeur of a Milton, and the faithfulness of a Shakespeare.<sup>73</sup>

Eight years later, in reviewing Hawthorne's Mosses, Melville was to exclaim with a nationalistic fervor similar to Tomlin's, "Believe me, my friends, that men, not very much inferior to Shakespeare, are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio." An interesting anticipation

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<sup>71</sup> The Guardian, II (January 1842), 9.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

of this phrasing occurs as Tomlin, continuing his prophecy of the various types of literary artists who should arise in the West, writes, "We shall have too our troubadours and our minstrels--and the banks of our Mississippi will become in song as classic as the Tiber, and in romance as famous as the Danube."<sup>74</sup>

In "Western Literature" Tomlin reflects mid-nineteenth-century literary thought in a variety of ways. His concept of society's reproducing the grandeur of Nature is in the best Romantic tradition. Romantic also is his impatience with imitativeness and his emphasis upon absolute originality. And his regional bias is merely a part of a rapidly developing national consciousness. In one sense, however, he was able to transcend his time. His prophecies have proved true. Thirty-three years after Tomlin's death, a prose writer far greater than the troubadours Tomlin envisioned, but with something of their spirit in his nature, was actually to make the mighty American waters "as classic as the Tiber" in Life on the Mississippi. And in our own day "romance" as famous as the Danube" has been created by a great minstrel's poignant "Ol' Man River."

The second piece of Tomlin's literary criticism published in the Guardian has nothing to do with Western literature. However much he deplored imitation of Eastern models, Tomlin, like all Southerners of the time, had to read a great deal from extra-regional authors if he was to have any idea of current writing. "L. A. Wilmer, Esq." was occasioned

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

by reading the Philadelphian's popular satire, The Quacks of Helicon.<sup>75</sup> The review opens with an observation that no great American poetry has yet been produced. In citing a few examples of verse writers he considers as having come nearest to producing true poetry, Tomlin strangely enough omits his great idol Poe, and falls back on Whittier, Longfellow, and Bryant. Conceding that each of these has occasionally produced real poetry, he expresses a hope that American poetry in the future may equal that of other countries. He then explains that his remarks have been elicited by reading Wilmer's satire. The Philadelphian's purpose, Tomlin thinks, is "to stir up the almost expired sparks of genius in the minds of American bards . . . [and to] make them produce something worthy as offerings to Fame."<sup>76</sup>

This is a valid purpose, he says, and capable of accomplishment, for Americans have already proved themselves in the field of novel writing. In citing examples of skillful American novelists, Tomlin curiously fails to distinguish between the novel and the short story, classing Poe's ratiocinative masterpiece with the former genre.

In this department of literature [the novel] we . . . can now compete, and successfully too, with the Bulwers of England and De Kocks of France. J. Fenimore Cooper is Bulwer's equal—

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<sup>75</sup> In October 1842, Wilmer complained to Tomlin, "I have never been able to get a sight of your critique on the Q. of H. in the Guardian. The copy you sent fell into the hands of Poe, who lost or mislaid it before I could set eyes on it. I was vexed at this circumstance, as I intended to have the article copied into some of our city papers. I would have applied to the agents of the Guardian in this city, but I could not ascertain their location." T. O. Mabbott, ed., Nerlin, Baltimore 1827: Together With Recollections of Edgar A. Poe, By Lambert A. Wilmer (New York, 1941), p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> The Guardian, II (May 1842), 78.

and Edgar A. Poe in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" has exhibited powers of mind equal to any living writer.<sup>77</sup>

American achievement in poetry, Tomlin feels, has yet to equal that in prose. And he concludes his brief review by quoting Wilmer's unkind lines on Willis:

What else but whiskers and his trim array  
Made Willis famous and preserved his play?  
What else but favour of the female throng  
Could save that bard or tolerate his song?<sup>78</sup>

John Tomlin could relish a lampoon on a minor Eastern writer like N. P. Willis. But toward his fellow Southerners his critical observation was less discriminating. His last published critique, exclusive of the brief criticisms with which "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac" is generously interlarded, is an encomium for his Alabama contemporary, Judge Alexander B. Meek of Tuscaloosa. Actually, A. B. Meek had less to recommend him as a litterateur than Willis. But the Tuscaloosa jurist had, like the Jackson postmaster, published a considerable amount of both verse and prose in popular periodicals, and had been associated with several abortive magazine ventures. These accomplishments were enough for Tomlin, who hailed the Alabamian as one of the "Western" writers whose emergence he had predicted in 1842.

Intended as the first in a series, which was never completed, "The Writers of the Southwest: A. B. Meek" has a long introduction, in which Tomlin, after explaining his purpose, complains of the difficulties

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

attendant upon literary production. This complaint is more valuable as a reflection of the writer's own experience than as a contribution to literary appreciation. Acquaintances in Jackson, Tennessee, must have recognized themselves and their fellow townsmen if they read these sentences:

Genius and wealth are not often united, and hence, in order to gain a subsistence, our writers are generally compelled to enter upon the duties of a professional or mercantile life. They then soon learn that public opinion has set it down as an axiom that the more a man knows of science and literature, the less knowledge he has of his own profession. He may spend night and day in any kind of dissipation suited to his taste, make every grocery in his neighbourhood ring with his Bacchanalian shouts, and other improving and intellectual amusements of a like nature, with little injury to his reputation; but if it be once known that he cultivates any branch of general literature, especially poetry, he must bid adieu to all hopes of success. Poetry and nonsense are regarded as convertible terms; dunces pass him with a sneer and the half uttered, "Yes, I'd write poetry," maidens titter, unless perchance he may have indited something to their eyebrows; old men shake heads at him, and prefer to entrust their lives, fortunes and souls to some dull machine, whom it would puzzle as much as it did Sir Henry in the Farce, if he were asked who wrote Shakespeare.<sup>79</sup>

Regarding the experiences described above as universal for young poets, Tomlin reflects that it is no wonder the youthful writer soon turns away from "the walls of literature" and becomes as dull and insensitive as Peter Bell. Or if the aspiring poet persists in his chosen course, fame will come to him only after death. In spite of all these discouragements, the review continues, there are a few, "even in the south-west, whose productions give evidence of the highest genius." "In our own

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., IV (June 1844), 85.

state," Tomlin writes, "with perhaps the exception of a sister spirit,<sup>80</sup> the HON. A. B. MEEK is the most extensively known to readers of Southern Literature." Tomlin then mentions Meek's contributions to the Magnolia and the Southern Literary Messenger, and pronounces the Judge "one of the best lyric poets of the South."

In the course of his criticism, Tomlin makes a comment on the importance of technical knowledge which suggests that he may have gone further in actual study of prosody and other elements of poetic skill than some of his own poetry would indicate.<sup>81</sup>

Most of the poetic sketches which appear from our southern writers, although often exhibiting powers of imagination and fancy, are yet written without any knowledge of the rules of art. Now, Poetry has rules of its own, as inflexibly necessary as in any one of the fine arts, a knowledge of which is essential to one who would hope for success.<sup>82</sup>

As general literary criticism the above is impeccable; where Tomlin's critical powers fail is in application to the particular. Judge Meek's writings do not invariably give evidence "that he has carefully studied the laws of Rhythms."<sup>83</sup>

Referring to a work in preparation, "The Red Eagle; Or, The Retribution of Fort Mims: A Romance of Alabama," in which Meek proposes to

<sup>80</sup> Probably Caroline Lee Hentz, of Florence, Alabama, whose verse and drama Tomlin praised.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, the uneven stanzas of "The Heritage," above, p. 73.

<sup>82</sup> The Guardian, IV (June 1844), 86.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, the lines from Meek quoted above, p. 84.

versify some incidents of the Creek War of 1812, Tomlin gives expression to a characteristic Romantic concept of antiquity. He feels that the scene of Meek's intended poem "is laid too near the present," because the remote past is a more apt poetic subject.

As we look upon the past, all that is prosaic and commonplace is lost in the dim mists of antiquity, we see only the bright and picturesque features in the shadowy distance; but with the present we stand too near, we see too much of the real . . . [The poet's] task . . . is more difficult when treating of the present than the past. In the latter case the work is already done by the hand of time; in the former it must be accomplished by the hand of genius.<sup>84</sup>

After praising Meek's prose, Tomlin concludes his review with a paternal blessing, bestowed from the lofty vantage of the Tennessean's ten years' seniority.

To use his own thought, when speaking of a kindred spirit,  
I would bid him God speed, in the bright path which opens  
before him. And in the end, the fingers of love and beauty  
shall weave with threads of burning light, a never withering  
wreath to bind around the brow of the minstrel of the South.<sup>85</sup>

It is easier to forgive Tomlin the last sentence if one remembers that it was an age of flowery writing, and that he was capable, when occasion permitted, of some gratifyingly earthy language.

Tomlin's magazine prose, as analyzed in this chapter, is representative of the period in several particulars. His short stories reflect the vogue for historical tales and for short, purportedly "true" sketches of

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<sup>84</sup> The Guardian, IV (June 1844), 86.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



didactic and moralistic intent. His continued stories capitalize in two instances on a widespread taste for Gothic romance and for adventure in foreign lands, and in the third on the contemporary craze for "autography." Despite clumsily contrived plots, sentimentalism, bathos, and bombastic writing, Tomlin's fiction saw publication, not only in his native state, but also in four of the better Eastern magazines, The Casket, Burton's, Graham's, and the Saturday Evening Post, as well as in two journals of lesser reputation but comparable circulation, Peterson's Lady's World and Holden's Dollar Magazine. Both in theme and in treatment, Tomlin's stories met the standards of these magazines and satisfied the demands of their readers.

His critical writings display, with the exception of his encomia on Dickens and his favorable review of Wilmer's Quacks of Helicon, a marked sectional bias. This predilection for the writers of his own region led him, in some instances, to extravagant and indiscriminating praise for writers whose work has not stood the test of time, but he was able to recognize the potentials for the production of real literature in the South and West, and to predict accurately the future emergence of that literature. Tomlin's treatment of Western literature is representative of the period in two ways. In the first place, his insistence upon absolute originality and independence of all models is in the best Romantic tradition. In the second place, his prediction of a literature embodying both the natural grandeur of the West and its democratic institutions reflects that strong nationalism appearing frequently in nineteenth-century criticism.

## CHAPTER V

### THE WRITINGS OF TOMLIN: TALES OF THE CADDO

In "Western Literature," published in the Guardian in 1842, John Tomlin had expressed his conviction that great writing would come out of the West. Both its natural grandeur and its democratic custom, he felt, were conducive to the production of a native and original literature, free from slavish imitation of the models of the East or of Europe. At that time, however, his own writing was still imitative, being largely influenced by Gothic and sentimental tendencies in Eastern American and European literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But in 1849, near the close of his life, he published a collection of short stories, Tales of the Caddo, which belongs in the category of native "Western" literature.

Growing out of a visit to Texas in the spring of 1848, Tomlin's book treats of the region around Lake Caddo during the early days of the Republic. It is a depiction of the extreme southwestern frontier of the thirties, and, as such, belongs with a group of books written during the thirties, forties, and fifties, and dealing with several sections of the ever shifting American frontier.

Major writers, including William Gilmore Simms, had also dealt with various aspects of the frontier. But for the purposes of this study it has seemed more useful to consider Tales of the Caddo in relation to collections of tales, sketches, and novelettes, published during three decades by minor writers remembered today mainly because theirs were

pioneer treatments of the regions they chose to delineate. For the upper Mississippi Valley there was William Joseph Snelling's Tales of the Northwest, published in 1830. James Hall, in Legends of the West, 1832, had made vivid the frontier life of Kentucky, Michigan, and Illinois. Two years later, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, in Georgia Scences, had immortalized the people and customs of his native state. In 1841 was first published that most famous of all Southwestern folk tales, Thomas Bang Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas," republished in a collection of the same title in 1843. That year also saw publication of two other works related in form and content to Tomlin's book, the pseudonymous Madison Tensas' Old Leaves of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor and the Georgian William Tappan Thompson's Major Jones' Courtship. When, in 1845, Johnson J. Hooper first published in book form his Adventures of Simon Suggs, the Alabama frontier took its place in Southwestern literature. After Tales of the Caddo, such specimens of frontier literature appeared as Joseph G. Baldwin's Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi, 1853, and George W. Harris's Sut Lovingood, first published as a collection in 1863, but probably written much earlier.

Like Tomlin's book, each of these mentioned above presented a vivid picture of American life as it was being lived far from Eastern centers of culture. For a final estimate of Tales of the Caddo it will be necessary to compare it with these immediate predecessors and successors. Before making that comparison, however, consideration should be given to the circumstances which led Tomlin to write the book, and to the individual tales which it comprises.

In concluding his serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Tomlin, as Joe Bottom, referred to "a young friend in Jefferson, Texas, by the name of Hiram Tomlin, with whom I am deeply intimate and for whose character I have a high admiration."<sup>1</sup> This Hiram, who bears the name of John's eldest brother, must have been a son of Samuel, the second brother, who migrated with John from Sumter, South Carolina, to Madison County, Tennessee.<sup>2</sup> Young Hiram was one of the lads from Jackson who served in the Mexican War in the Second Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers. After the war, he settled down in the new country, and became one of the first citizens of Jefferson, Texas.<sup>3</sup>

There John visited him in the spring of 1848, and there the Tennessee uncle gathered the materials for Tales of the Caddo. He attempted to discharge some of his heart-felt obligation to his Texan nephew by this fulsome dedicatory tribute:

To Hiram Tomlin, Esq.  
of  
Jefferson, Texas

While on a visit to you in the spring of 1848 (as you will recollect), the materials out of which the "Tales of the Caddo" are woven were collected in the neighborhood in which you live. Had I never visited you, the Tales had never been written,—and therefore, as you are the cause of their finding birth, you must become amenable, in a certain degree, to the public, for their advent.

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<sup>1</sup> Holden's, IV (November 1849), 656.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> The graves of Hiram, his wife, and two children were located, at the request of the writer of this study, by Mrs. B. Koontz, Jefferson Historical Society and Museum, Jefferson, Texas.

Apart from all this,—and with higher considerations than any of these—the ties of relationship, or any connexion of the kind,—I have other reasons more cogent and powerful, for manifesting in some slight degree my good will towards you.

As a tribute then of respect for the many virtues that adorn your character—for they are numerous and many—and flow like a deep river without noise or murmur—receive, by the inscription of your name on the "Tales of the Caddo," their testimony of my regard and admiration.

The Author<sup>4</sup>

Although, as Tomlin says, he would probably never have written the Tales if it had not been for his visit, he had had previous contact with others interested in the promotion of a Western literature. During the period of Tomlin's greatest literary activity, 1839-1849, Cincinnati was the Western outpost of publishing ventures. Prominent among Cincinnati editors and publishers were W. D. Gallagher, Lucius A. Hine, and Lewis J. Cist. Tomlin knew of the first<sup>5</sup> and had correspondence with the other two.<sup>6</sup> It is consequently not surprising that when he looked for a publisher for his second book he should have turned to this Western center.

The little book, of and from the West, found its way East, however, and to the reviewer's desks of Eastern periodicals. Mrs. Hale, of Godsey's, reviewed the Tales briefly but fairly:

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<sup>4</sup> Tales of the Caddo (Cincinnati, 1849), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> "Repeated attempts have been made in Cincinnati to get up a monthly journal, and among them was that very excellent one, the Hesperian, edited by W. D. Gallagher." "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, III (May 1849), 276.

<sup>6</sup> A letter from Cist to Tomlin is published in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, III (June 1849), 331-332, and one from Hines, Ibid., IV (November 1849), 655.

They are illustrative of life in the Southwest and are written with a fidelity and spirit unusual in sketches of this sort. It is a very entertaining book.<sup>7</sup>

One of the elements which made Tales of the Caddo entertaining to Eastern readers was its description of the Southwestern country. Travel literature was having a vogue, and Tomlin used its stock devices to transport his readers in imagination to the very banks of Lake Caddo.

It was in the spring of the year that I first ascended in a steamboat this singular lake to Port Caddo. This sweet little village lies ensconced on its banks, beneath the dark green foliage of the magnolia, and the sturdy and widespread branches of the live oak. Far as the eye can reach, the waters in the purple of their bosom meet the odors of the redolent breezes, to be fanned into gentle wavelets.

My journey was from Shreveport, Louisiana, the largest and most flourishing town on the lower Red River, situated a few miles below the great raft that has almost completely destroyed the usefulness of the river from above. Indeed, the only way now of approaching the river from above is to ascend the Twelve Mile Bayou into the Caddo, and thence through Red Bayou, an inlet connecting the lake with the upper Red River. Through this channel, when the waters are high, a communication is had with the country above. To remove the raft is a labor of years; and should the eye of Congress ever be directed to it, the benefit resulting from its removal is incalculable.<sup>8</sup>

By the "great raft" Tomlin meant a log-jam then in existence, which actually presented the obstruction to travel of which he complained. It was even thought by some, says Tomlin, to have been responsible for the origin of the lake.

From the deck of the Maid of Osage, the steamboat on which Tomlin made his journey, he eagerly observed every stage of the voyage. His

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<sup>7</sup> "Editor's Book Table," Godsey's, XXXIX (December 1849), 465.

<sup>8</sup> Tales of the Caddo, p. 11.

eager eye took in the red waters of the Caddo, the eagles and wild geese flying over, the great flocks of mallard in which the lake and its tributaries abounded, and the alligators whose wicked heads occasionally protruded through its calm surface. The Maid of Osage made her first stop at Port Caddo, "situated at the terminus of the lake, and at the very spot where the Cypress Bayou debouches into her bosom." Tomlin continued the voyage for ten miles until he reached Jefferson, "a well-built town, and a most enterprising and industrious population. This place," he observed in the most approved travel literature manner, "owing to its advantageous position, will become in a few years the greatest commercial city in eastern Texas."<sup>9</sup>

Like all of the preceding, the portion next to be considered is a part of the somewhat lengthy introductory chapter of Tales of the Caddo. But in it, Tomlin was bringing the reader nearer to the tales themselves, for when he describes an inhabitant of an island in the lake, he is presenting his raconteur.

[On the island] lived in his bland retirement an old man of the forest. He had seen much of life, for he had dwelt in the gay cities of the south, and had been an inmate of the low haunts of the Texan river. Such was Jack Faraday, and now is--the man to whom I am indebted for the crude materials of these veritable Tales of the Caddo. . . . He had associated with the wild Indian, and with him slept in his wigwam. With the hardy pioneers of the west, he had lit his pipe by their campfires, and had smoked the calumet in the council chambers of the roving Comanche. Among the Regulators of Texas, he had witnessed many a wild scene, almost too haggard for belief and too monstrous for a full credence in its horrors.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

Apparently, Tomlin had made at least tentative plans for another book in which Faraday, who might conceivably have become a Southern Leatherstocking, would figure, for he was at pains to hold out a promise of more Faraday adventures:

As to Jack Farady [sic],<sup>11</sup> he became dissatisfied with his home on the Caddo, for the people were crowding him too much, as he finally expresses his feelings on the subject—and left the place for the Moravian Settlements, on the upper Red River. When I last saw him, he promised me that he would keep a journal of the different events which would transpire on his journey. Whether he will keep his word or not, the future alone will determine. But should he do so, I promise you that it will at once be laid before you, for your approbation or condemnation.<sup>12</sup>

By using Faraday in part as a narrator, and by accrediting both language and incident to him, even in the third-person stories of omniscient point of view, Tomlin was able to effect his stated purpose: "Western manners and western habits, as they exist on the most extreme borders of civilization, in their life-like expression, will be painted with a free hand in these sketches."<sup>13</sup>

But even in a "life-like expression" the Tennessean was at more pains to spare the sensitive feelings of Texans than writers have been in more recent days. His depiction of "Western manners and Western habits," he assures his readers, derives from some years back and has no connection with the present.

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<sup>11</sup> The spelling varies, probably because of a printer's carelessness.

<sup>12</sup> Tales of the Caddo, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 14.



Amid the mighty revolutions that take place in the moral conditions of man, none are so palpable as those which occur on the frontiers of the Great West. The truth of this proposition was most clearly defined in my associations with the good people of Lake Caddo, in a visit to them a few years ago. A more intelligent, industrious, and moral people exist not now in the great valley of the Mississippi. What they were years ago, in these Tales it becomes my province to speak. Their deeds of blood, their midnight assassins, are known no more, and if they live at all, it is in their traditionary annals. This change has been effected in a few years, but by what means it is not my task to determine. Such is the fact; and instead of the fierce passions of man running riot in the mighty struggle with his fellow man, all is now peace and harmony.<sup>14</sup>

With such obviation of their frontier crimes and crudities, even mid-nineteenth century Texans might read Tales of the Caddo in smug confidence that everything depicted therein belonged to the past. On the other hand, the more effete Eastern readers could find in its pages a picture of the West which would satisfy their most melodramatic imaginings.

Tomlin's original plan, as set forth in his introduction, called for twelve or more tales, but only eleven are included: "Jack Faraday," "Curators and Regulators," "Dick Haverhill's Revenge," "The Corsair of the Caddo," "The Reformed Freebooter," "Rose Larkin," "Don Pedro's Island," "An Attack by Wolves," "Mike Story's Revenge," "The Emigrant's Daughter," and "Fighting Jim." Although Jack Faraday is supposed to have told all the stories, he is a participant in the action of only three besides the first,— "Curators and Regulators," "The Reformed Freebooter," and "Don Pedro's Island." The following brief synopses will

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

aid in the evaluation of these eleven stories, both as pieces of fiction per se and in relation to the total body of "Western" literature of the mid-nineteenth century.

In the first, "Jack Faraday," the frontiersman tells his own story, accounting for his wandering life and for his solitary condition by a tale which probably owes some of its seemingly fictitious circumstances to actuality, since such experiences with Indians as Faraday recounts were not uncommon at the time. Born in the state of Georgia, in a county adjoining the Cherokee nation, Faraday is early orphaned and subsequently adopted into the Cherokee tribe, where he becomes blood brother of the "High Sachem" Pinicanute. This amicable relationship between white man and red is terminated after some years by rivalry over Minota, a white maiden of sixteen who had been stolen by the Cherokees in infancy. During a battle with his Indian friend, Faraday kills Pinicanute, after which he is forced to escape before the tribe's vengeance shall overtake him. He succeeds in spiritedly Minota away, but in the forest she is killed by lightning, in which, Faraday hints, there is something diabolical, and he is left alone.

By the time of the second tale, "Curators and Regulators," Jack has prudently removed himself as far as possible from the scene of his Cherokee romance, and settled in the valley of the Caddo. The Southwestern Leatherstocking figures only as narrator in this story of vigilantes and of romance unrestrained by convention. "On a balmy spring evening in the genial month of May in the year 1837," two "equestrians" are seen on the banks of Lake Caddo. Their appearance here is explained

by a flash-back to a ball-room in Houston, where a saloon-keeper, Don Jose D'Alvear and his daughter Cora entertain, among other guests, General Sam Houston, and the Byronic hero of the tale, Potter Dismukes. During a conversation with the latter, Cora elicits from Dismukes the story of his past, which includes both political office and a crime of passion. Having agreed with Dismukes that "nature imposes no restraint on her laws repugnant to her harmony," Cora absolves him from blame in murdering his wife's paramour and indicates her willingness to overlook his marital status, whereupon the two happy rebels against convention depart from Houston for the banks of the Caddo, and the flash-back is concluded.

At this point, a new character is introduced, the first of the engaging throng of cut-throats and bandits who enliven the pages of Tales of the Caddo. Joe Woodward is the leader of a vigilante band, the Regulators, founded to enforce law and order but degenerated into such violators as to cause the foundation of an opposing group, the Curators. Potter becomes the head of the latter, but is ambushed by the Regulators and drowns in Lake Caddo. After her lover's end, Cora is seen no more.

Jack Faraday does not appear at all in the third tale, "Dick Haverhill's Revenge." In the slight story those elements of plot which, although not very skillfully utilized, were nonetheless present in "Curators and Regulators" are almost wholly lacking. Dick Haverhill, traveling alone near the Sabine River, encounters Rube Deadrick, whom he had known years ago. The two engage in a shooting match, in front of a small "grocery," and Dick wins fairly. Rube is so incensed by his

defeat that he jumps on the totally unprepared Dick and beats him mercilessly. Later at night Dick, lying in wait for Rube, takes his revenge by shooting and killing Rube and two companions.

The fourth tale, "The Corsair of the Caddo," is pure Romance. Juan Lopez, whom the author apparently attempts to make as Latin as his name, and his phlegmatic Saxon companion, Tim Merton, operate a pirate boat, the Sylph, on the Caddo and waters leading into it. Two years prior to the opening of the story, Juan had rescued from Bayou Pierre, and promptly fallen in love with, the story's heroine, Isabella Devereux. A rival suitor, Descamps, is summarily despatched and the Sylph is destroyed in a storm, after which events Juan claims Isabella for his bride. No stigma is attached to piracy, because Juan is "eminently a man of feeling" and "had committed no atrocities himself, and so far as lay in his power, had prevented any unnecessary cruelties to others."

Jack Faraday again appears as both narrator and participant in the story of "The Reformed Freebooter." The frontiersman encounters the title character, Ike Wayland, in front of a "grocery," or local liquor dispensary, where in a general melee the freebooter accidentally kills the innocuous proprietor, Butterworth. After these incidents, the story is weakened by a shift to the omniscient point of view in a scene which Faraday, who presumably remains the narrator, could not possibly have witnessed. Ike is berated by the mother of his two children for his failure to keep the promises which had induced her to leave her Georgia home with him, to mend his evil ways and to marry her. To Wayland's boasts that he is superior to law, his mate reminds him that he is in graver danger than

any posed by constituted authority, since the Regulators are on his trail. The latter, joined by Butterworth's avenging kin, attack, but Wayland escapes to a Moravian settlement where his reform is miraculously effected in the space of a month. He returns, penitent, to carry out his long-forgotten promises, and the story, which contains some elements of an earthy realism, is concluded on an unfortunate note of bathos.

Faraday does not appear at all in "Rose Larkin," a better story, because more consistent, than "The Reformed Freebooter." Although young lovers, two pairs of them, provide a sop to sentimental tastes, the tale is primarily concerned with the condemnation of an innocent man in a time when the line between law-breakers and law-enforcers was thin. Historical interest is added by linking a fictitious tale with the known operations of Murrell, one of the most notorious of nineteenth-century American outlaws.<sup>15</sup> In Tomlin's story, Joseph Larkin has been traduced by a covetous neighbor, Ben Gurgle, who falsely accuses the former of complicity in the crimes of a band of horse thieves led by Jim Sykes, an associate of Murrell's. Because of a general spirit of lawlessness

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<sup>15</sup> In the 1830's, Murrell and his deprivations were of never-failing interest to newspaper readers, particularly in Tennessee. The National Banner and Nashville Whig, for example, in XXIII (July 29, 1835), 2, printed a chapter from Virgil Stewart's biography of Murel (variant spelling), and on August 19 of the same year printed a statement of confidence in the biographer. And the Nashville Republican, in XI (August 22, 1835), 3, carried a story, "Murel's Gang," concerning confederates of Murrell who had been apprehended at Charlotte, Tennessee. Nationwide interest in Murrell was reflected in the Saturday Evening Post's printing, on October 12, 1839, a story from Washington County, Arkansas, concerning a murder believed to have been committed by his gang, and referring to the extension of these lawless operations to Texas.

and a consequent atmosphere of suspicion, Larkin's neighbors hound him until he dies a "raving maniac." Brought to trial, Jim Sykes admits his own guilt, but eloquently persuades an assembled crowd that he is no worse than Gurgle. When the latter's daughter makes a dramatic appearance to plead for the life of another member of the gang, young Julian Wilson, it transpires that Sykes is actually Eben Wilson of Tennessee, father of Julian. Both are pardoned, and a conventional happy ending includes two marriages, that of Gurgle's daughter to young Wilson, and of Larkin's daughter, Rose, to a faithful suitor.

The seventh tale, "Don Pedro's Island," offers a good illustration of the difficulties besetting the author in his striving for realism, or, as he called it, vraisemblance. Not only was Tomlin predisposed, by all his magazine writing, to the highly Romantic, but the very stuff of these tales upon which he was now engaged was Romance. The wildness and the breadth of nature, the freedom from the restraints of civilisation, the omnipresence of peril and the reckless disregard of life, all combined in this Caddo region to make the realistic the Romantic.

Faraday reappears in "Don Pedro's Island" as narrator and briefly as participant. Like "The Corsair of the Caddo," this is a tale of rivalry and young love, given a Montague-Capulet twist by enmity between Don Pedro and the father of Antoine Dubosque, suitor of Don Pedro's daughter, Neacena. A rejected rival, Harry Templeton, enlists the aid of Long Jim, a bad Indian, in carrying out vengeance. The two villains set fire to Don Pedro's home, but their incendiary malice is thwarted by

Antoine and Faraday, who arrive on the island in time to extinguish the fire and vanquish the arsonists. Afterwards, Antoine's nobility is appropriately rewarded by marriage to Neacena, and the doting fathers happily abandon all enmity.

The eighth tale, "An Attack by Wolves," is the most Texan of them all, because of the introduction of some rollicking humor, to be discussed below. The simple story which serves as a vehicle for burlesque and exaggeration concerns two groups of emigrants who come to the shores of Lake Caddo to look for a camping place, the Browns of North Carolina and the Nesbits of Kentucky. The son and daughter of the respective families, Jacob and Dedona, provide the love interest, and some suspense is created by the convergence on the camp of a band of outlaws, who are themselves attacked and devoured by a wolf pack before they can carry out their nefarious design against the emigrants.

For the ninth tale, "Mike Story's Revenge," Tomlin reverts to the condemnation-by-accusation theme of "Rose Larkin," but in this instance the innocent escape and the sins of those who execute first and investigate afterwards become the means of their own just punishment. Mike Story, a member of a Regulator band, balks at the plan of his confederates, Tom Finch, Rube Dawson, and Dick Turpin, to fire the cabin of old Dick Johnson, unjustly accused of counterfeiting. The Regulators proceed with their ugly business, but are disappointed at hearing no screams from their victims, except those of a cat, who jumps out a window. What has happened is that Johnson's daughter, Eugenia, whose suitor, Alphonse Rembert, tarried far into the evening, heard the approaching Regulators

in time to effect the escape of the entire family. After watching the cabin burn, the Regulators turn their attention to Mike, whom they take to a wood and whip for his defiance. But they do not go unpunished. Mike recovers, and, knowing the Regulators' rendezvous, lies in wait for them and kills all three with one ball.

The tenth, "The Emigrant's Daughter," is a rambling tale, of interest today primarily because of the variety of frontier types it presents. The emigrant of the title is a missionary to the Caddo Indians, the "Rev. Dr." McGullock. His daughter, Ellen, is betrothed to Charley Gibbs, a young lawyer of heretical tendencies but good heart. She repudiates the faithful Charley in favor of a counterpart of Potter Dismukes of "Curators and Regulators," the mysterious George Bascom. The Byronic Bascom had earned Ellen's gratitude by rescuing her from Indian Joe, upon whose savage nature the Reverend Doctor's preachment had had no apparent effect. After Gibbs surprises Ellen and Bascom in embrace, the two men fight a duel in which Gibbs is wounded. Upon learning that Bascom is a divorced man, the missionary forbids further association, but is defied by his daughter, who clings to the sinister Bascom until Charley exposes him as a criminal, wanted in Shreveport for robbery and murder. Two years later, a chastened Ellen begs, and receives, forgiveness from magnanimous Charley.

The last story of Tales of the Caddo, "Fighting Jim," deals, like Longstreet's "The Fight," with a favorite pastime of the frontier. Fights such as both Southern writers had seen many times were not pretty;



"gouging" and biting were common practices,<sup>16</sup> and the loss of an eye or an ear the typical result. The title character engages in such unknightly battles with a rival fighter, Paul Kohlberg. In the first of many battles in the story Kohlberg is bested by the intervention of Jim's mother, Sal, who restfully enters the fray, bringing it to a speedy and decisive end by plucking out Kohlberg's eye. Sal's maternal devotion is further demonstrated by the "love powders" she concocts with the aid of an Americanized incantation adapted by Tomlin from Macbeth. Through the use of the "love powders" Jim attempts to win the affections of "Miss Mary" Hazelton. Mary's propensity for sleep-walking leads her into embarrassing incidents but furnishes the author an opportunity for a chapter division entitled "La Somnambula." The incoherent tale concludes with another sanguinary battle, in the course of which both fighters plunge into Lake Caddo and are drowned. Thus conveniently freed from the unwelcome attentions of the importunate Jim and her eccentricities of behaviour forgiven and forgotten, "Miss Mary" weds a shadowy but honorable suitor, George Summer-ville.

The eleven story outlines above demonstrate the type of incident Tomlin employed in his attempt to present "western manners and western habits as they exist on the most extreme borders of civilization." As is readily apparent, he had not even yet completely escaped from slavish imitation of Eastern models, for, in spite of Western setting, some of

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<sup>16</sup> Ralph C. Rusk, The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier, 2 vols, (New York, 1926), I, 74. See also Thomas D. Clark, The Rampaging Frontier: Manners and Humors of Pioneer Days in the South and the Middle West (Indianapolis, 1939), pp. 34-35.

the tales are predominantly Romantic with Byronic heroes, languishing heroines, and miraculously reformed criminals. But since the same accusation can be leveled at other "Western" books of the period, a comparison of Tomlin's work with that of Snelling, Hall, and other frontier writers will show what place Tales of the Caddo occupies in frontier writing of the thirties, forties, and fifties.

Before a valid comparison can be made between Tomlin's tales and others of the period, it will be necessary to establish certain general characteristics shared by all. In the first place, all of these collections of tales were marked by local color. Among the reasons for this were the author's conscious desire to interpret his section for the East and consequently to insure the publication of his stories; his familiarity with his milieu and the concomitant ability to picture it faithfully; and his realization that the material to be presented was fresh, exciting, and more worthy of attention than the often-used settings of older stories.

A second characteristic of the frontier tales of the thirties, forties, and fifties is the introduction of a historical personage into a fictitious story. After the manner of Scott and Cooper, to whose novels the regional tale was heavily indebted, the frontier writer freely mingled flesh-and-blood characters with the creations of his own fancy.

A third characteristic of frontier tales is the employment of folk humor, distinguished from the elegant wit of more polite literature by its monstrous exaggerations and by a generous admixture of raciness and downright crudity. This humor found a variety of expression, sometimes in description of characters, sometimes in dialect, and frequently in the

tall tale, which required for the complete enjoyment of its consistent hyperbole an even more willing suspension of disbelief than that exacted by airier fantasy.

A fourth characteristic of the frontier tales of the period was the employment of a frame structure. Regional writers generally found the presentation of their material more effective when their stories were represented as being told by a picturesque narrator, either to a group in which the author found himself or to the latter alone. Generally this narrator was himself native to the milieu the story presented, his speech, as a consequence, imparting an additional regional flavor.

A fifth characteristic of frontier tales stemmed directly from the fourth, for the employment of the frame device resulted almost without exception in an intermixture of two distinct styles, the polished, "elegant" prose of the author juxtaposed with the racy, ungrammatical dialect of the narrator. This blended style has been noted also as contributing comic appeal by the incongruity between the rhetorical language of one and the backwoods jargon of the other.<sup>17</sup> Of course, as frontier literature developed and came nearer to the perfection of its kind epitomized in the "Sut Lovingood" stories, folk speech gradually superseded the stilted, mannered language of the introductory essay. Generally speaking, the earlier the work, the nearer its style to Cooper and Irving.

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Blair, Native American Humor (New York, 1937), p. 92.

Thus, in order to evaluate Tomlin's Tales of the Caddo, it will be necessary to determine how it compares with contemporary collections in these five particulars: (1) effective employment of local color; (2) the introduction of historical personages into fiction; (3) skillful utilization of folk humor; (4) the frame structure; and (5) the development, through a blend of the formal and the colloquial, of an artistically pleasing style.

In ability to recognize and to record those elements of the frontier which would be of particular interest to Eastern readers, Tomlin ranks fairly high. A requisite of good local color is detailed and vivid description of places, customs, and persons peculiar to the locality. Notable in its achievement of local color by such use of detail is James Hall's description of a Virginia barbecue in "Harpe's Head," where all classes of Virginia society mingle freely and where the air is vivid with flashing color and redolent with savoury odors.<sup>18</sup> But although the canvas on which Hall draws here is larger and splashier, the picture he produces is no more accurate or arresting than Tomlin's "grocery" and its rowdy patrons in "The Reformed Freebooter." References to these "groceries," or backwoods liquor stores, are numerous in the works of contemporary writers, but in none of them is this peculiar establishment more vividly depicted than in this passage from Tales of the Caddo.

At the time of which I speak, and in the section of the country where the scene is laid, all houses of this kind were called groceries, whether they contained more or less than a keg of

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<sup>18</sup> James Hall, Legends of the West (Cincinnati, 1885), pp. 33 ff.

what is vulgarly called "bald face." Butterworth's grocery was a house of this character, containing on the day on which I for the first time became acquainted with Wayland, two kegs of whisky, and a half barrel of Malaga wine. A quart measure, with a pint and half-pint cups, stood on the head of an old barrel in one corner of the room, and were used alternately as decanters and tumblers, as the inclination or money of each individual prompted or justified. A large clap-board was nailed on a tree opposite the door of the grocery, on which someone had carved in rude letters the following inscription—"Pay to-day, and I will trust tomorrow." A rude board was suspended over the door by twisted hickory withes on which was painted or rather daubed the emphatic and talismanic word, "Grocery." The building was nothing more than a rude shanty, constructed out of the stray boards that had from time to time been collected from the lake, as they were seen floating past the place. With the head of an old whisky barrel for a counter, and a homely bench made out of a sapling split in two, and some few dried coon-skins suspended from the rafters of the room, with the aforesaid two kegs of whisky and half barrel of wine, were composed the effects wholly and solely of Butterworth's grocery.<sup>19</sup>

Among frontier customs which both Tomlin and other Southwestern writers delighted to depict was the primitive fighting which served as entertainment and pastime, however deadly, for the backwoodsmen. As a story, Tomlin's "Fighting Jim" is inferior to others in Tales of the Caddo because too much irrelevant incident is introduced. By the same token, it is not so memorable an account of frontier pugilism as Longstreet's "The Fight." For one thing, the Tennessean's story lacks a Ransy Sniffle, there being no necessity for anyone to egg Jim and Kohlberg on to battle. But for gory detail, there is little to choose between the furies of the Texan and the Georgian battlers. Sal's coming to her son's aid by gouging out the eye of his adversary borders on

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<sup>19</sup> Tales of the Caddo, p. 44.

horror, saved only by its ludicrousness. There is little difference between this mutilation and Bob Durham's losing both ear and finger to Bill Stallings in "The Fight." Both descriptions, however revolting, add to and intensify local color, and in this respect Tomlin's is the equal of Longstreet's.

Another method by which Tomlin achieves local color is emphasis on the amorality of a primitive society. In his recognition of the disappearance of artificial barriers and the disruption of moral codes when people are living elementally, he is superior to most of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries in frontier literature. In neither Hall's nor Longstreet's stories can be found the counterpart of Ike Wayland's faithful, though unwedded, mate or Rube Deadrick's Caddo squaw, described cavalierly as serving the double purpose of wife and cook. The nearest to these unconventionalities is the reference in "Harpe's Head" to the outlaw's illegitimate son, Hark Short. And if Tomlin's fellow writers avoided the subject of irregular cohabitation among their "low" characters, how much more is this true of their depiction of the upper classes. The heroine of "Harpe's Head" is not only as impeccably virtuous but as rigorously conventional as any of Hawthorne's fair-haired heroines. And though Longstreet, as Baldwin, could analyze the qualities which made the "charming creature" an unsatisfactory wife, including an improper boldness toward other men, he never wrote of a young woman, who, like Tomlin's Cora D'Alvear, was willing to overlook a lover's being married, or who, like the "emigrant's beautiful daughter," found nothing dismaying in divorce.

These characterizations of Cora and Ellen afford evidence that there is a definite type of "female" the Tennessee writer enjoyed presenting: a pert and often bold young thing, with a ready tongue, an abundance of seductive beauty, and an impatience with prudery and restraint. In earlier stories, she was occasionally an out-and-out bad woman, like the Comito in "Theodoric of the Amali;" but in these regional tales she is merely daring and unconventional. One amusing scene in "The Emigrant's Daughter" affords a good illustration of Tomlin's method of characterizing his female type. In the passage below, Charley Gibbs has just come upon Ellen and Bascom in close embrace:

Ellen was the first one to discover him, and on doing so released herself from her new lover, and as if nothing had happened, approached her quondam sweetheart, and in the blandest accents imaginable, desired him to take a seat on the bench beside her.

"This is my friend, Mr. Bascom," spoke the maiden, as she looked up into the eyes of Gibbs, "and I hope you will treat him as such." The impudence of the maiden, instead of cooling the fiery blood of Gibbs, as was intended, inflamed it the more.

"The h---l he is," was the very emphatic ejaculation of the excited youth.

"It is not polite," replied the maiden, "to use such language as you have done, in the presence of ladies."

"I have only one question to ask you," spoke Gibbs, "is this man," pointing to Bascom . . . , "a relation of yours?"

"He is not."

"Then I have no more to say, but farewell,"

"Good-by, Charley," responded the maiden.<sup>20</sup>

Although the above reads very much like a scene from the more melodramatic show-boat productions which provided theatrical fare for

dwellers along the Mississippi, at the same time it demonstrates Tomlin's attempt to create a kind of "new woman." Far from the quasi-intellectual circles which produced the emancipated woman dealt with so severely by Hawthorne in The Blithedale Romance, the Tennessean evinced little knowledge of or interest in the bluestocking whose morals were sometimes as advanced as her philosophy. His were frontier lasses, and, although he preferred to refine them slightly before putting them into his stories, they retain, as in Ellen's case, much of the audacity, if not the earthiness, of their real-life prototypes. In their breezy speech and actions, they contribute materially to the local color of Tales of the Caddo.

In only one respect can Tomlin's local color be found inferior; that is in his depiction of the Indian. That he had an intense interest in the American aborigine has been mentioned elsewhere in this study.<sup>21</sup> And he brought the Indian into both fiction and poetry long before writing Tales of the Caddo.<sup>22</sup> But he was never able to profit sufficiently from his observations in the Caddo region or elsewhere to present an entirely convincing characterization. Pinicanute is a shade too noble and Long Jim and Joe are faintly sinister comic characters. A comparison of these with Snelling's Indians is perhaps unfair, since the author of Tales of the Northwest had far greater opportunity to study the red-skin than the Tennessean ever had, but it cannot be denied that none of

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<sup>21</sup> See above, p. 109.

<sup>22</sup> See above, pp. 58-60, 107-108.



Tomlin's Indian characterizations ever approaches Snelling's. However, the same criticism can be made of Hall's red men, who as John T. Flanagan points out, are "portrayed without sympathy as the inveterate enemies of the frontiersmen, delineated as 'varmints' that ought to be exterminated."<sup>23</sup>

If Tomlin's delineation of the Indian leaves much to be desired, there is still another type beloved by regional writers of the West and Southwest who is entirely absent from the pages of Tomlin's book. The backwoods preacher looms large as a comic character in most of the other early local colorists. James Hall's Zedekiah Bangs, whose one vice of rapaciousness leads him into superstitious folly in "The Divining Rod," is a good representative of the breed. Both the "passum" of Texas' "A Tight Race Considerin'" and Brother Bela Bugg of Hooper's "Simon Suggs Attends a Camp-Meeting" afford considerable fun. But Tomlin never uses a preacher as a comic character. The two preachers who appear in Tales of the Caddo, one very briefly as the officiating minister at Joseph's funeral in "Rose Larkin" and the other as a major character in "The Emigrant's Daughter," are not comical. It would seem that Tomlin never found anything ridiculous in the Protestant ministers he encountered in Texas.

Tomlin put to advantageous use one other aspect of frontier life which lends itself readily to securing local color. That is the thin line which exists between the lawless and the law-abiding in a frontier

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<sup>23</sup> William Joseph Snelling, Tales of the Northwest, introd. John T. Flanagan (Minneapolis, 1936), p. xx.

society, one result of which is an atmosphere of suspicion and over-ready condemnation. In "Rose Larkin," Tomlin made a still pertinent observation on guilt by association.

Their [the thieves'] central quarters being Tennessee, on the Big Hatchie, with Murrell, the master-spirit of the organized corps, presiding, they were enabled to diverge from the great center with a facility not only astonishing, but in a manner so secret as nearly always to elude detection. The great mart of their stolen goods was in the Mississippi bottoms, a few miles above Randolph, on the Arkansas side of the river. There they had their rich store-house, receiving almost daily valuable accessions to their plunder from the states of Arkansas, Missouri, and Tennessee. Many men of accredited standing, and belonging to good families, if not in actual league with these pirates, connived at their rascality; and instead of aiding the sufferers in bringing them to justice, did all in their power to prevent detection. In such a state of affairs, with suspicion excited, and neighbor jealous of neighbor, it is no wonder that very many virtuous and good citizens became implicated in nefarious transactions of which they were perfectly innocent. Suspicions being once, however, directed to an individual, there was no power sufficient to release him from the calamity. . . . In the panic that then existed, people did not stop long enough to think. No, that was consuming too much time; but they condemned first and investigated afterwards.<sup>24</sup>

Another result of vague demarcation between innocent and guilty is idealization of the lawbreaker. Tomlin secured local color in his depiction of this frontier sentimentality. Although he showed no more sympathy for the brutal killer, Murrell, than did Hall for Micajah Harpe in "Harpe's Head," there are frequent instances in Tales of the Caddo where the violator of laws is a more attractive character than those who execute punishment on him. Eben Wilson, alias Jim Sykes, is such an outlaw-hero in "Rose Larkin,"

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<sup>24</sup> Tales of the Caddo, pp. 55-56.

and an even better example of the law-breaker as a gallant figure is Juan the pirate in "The Corsair of the Caddo."

Tomlin employed local color as effectively, with the exception of his treatment of the Indian, as the other writers in whose category he belongs. Let us see how well he exemplifies a second characteristic of the regional writer of the thirties, forties, and fifties, the tendency to introduce historical persons into fiction, sometimes by allusion only, sometimes as characters in the story. James Hall had made effective use of the notorious Micajah Harpe as the villain of "Harpe's Head." Although Tomlin never uses an actual person as the chief character in Tales of the Caddo, he frequently brings into his stories the names of those whose fame or notoriety would make them instantly recognizable to his readers and thus lend "vraisemblance" to fiction.

The raconteur Jack Faraday, for example, says of himself, "Being the last of my race . . . like Logan of old, I have no ties."<sup>25</sup> Such allusions to the Indian chief made famous by Jefferson's Notes on Virginia occur frequently in other stories of frontier life. Snelling, for example, made Logan speak for himself in correct, if incongruous, blank verse:

I oft have striven as becomes a man  
With red and white. Ay stranger, and for sport  
Have grappled with the grisly bear. But now  
I am alone on earth; there runs no drop  
Of blood akin to mine, within the veins  
Of any, save one only, who do live.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

Destruction dogg'd the footsteps of my race,  
And sank them sudden in one bloody grave.<sup>26</sup>

In Tales of the Caddo, Murrell the outlaw features in more than allusion, for he and his gang are a component part of the plot of "Rose Larkin." But Tomlin's most effective use of an actual person occurs in "Curators and Regulators," where General Sam Houston appears as a guest at the D'Alvear ball and his impeccably gallant behaviour toward Cora affords opportunity for this observation:

He had not sought it [the place of honor] in the same envious spirit which animated the bosoms of others. His aspirations were too lofty for any subterfuge, either in war or love; for his upright bearing and dauntless courage had made him successful in both. His was the true gallantry of a noble heart.—That low and grovelling spirit which haunts as with an incubus the heart of the envious man, had not found a place in his generous soul.<sup>27</sup>

In the third characteristic of frontier tales, the employment of folk humor, Tomlin's stories compare favorably with those of other writers in the group under consideration. The depiction of the "low" characters in Tales of the Caddo is almost invariably humorous, and generally couched in the vernacular. Rube Deadrick, for example, in "Dick Haverhill's Revenge," is said to have eyes "looking two ways for Sunday." An even better example of that combination of crudity and burlesque exaggeration which Mark Twain was later to use so successfully is found in the picture, or caricature, of Rube's dog, Snapdown.

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<sup>26</sup> Snelling, Tales of the Northwest, p. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Tales of the Caddo, p. 23.

He had none of the qualities that usually belong to the canine race, but was wholly wanting in every social quality which so eminently distinguishes the genus. He was a very spiteful and ill-natured whelp, a most wolfish and degenerate dog. He was as lank as a grayhound, turbulent as the bull, with all of the evil and none of the good qualities that meet so opposingly in the character of the whole cur tribe. His ill-nature was of such a character, and in its quality so spiteful, that he would not suffer a particle of hair to grow on his body. He had bitten the whole of it off, except that portion along the back where his teeth could not reach. He was a mangy dog, too; and from his disposition one would think that he had the mange from choice. He had no tail, for in a mad moment he had gnawed it off, leaving scarcely a stump. His legs were bandied, and did not stand under him straight like a respectable dog's legs. The fore legs were knock-kneed, while the hind ones were bow-legged.<sup>28</sup>

Snapdown furnishes the final bit of humor in the story by being the only one of Rube's entourage to escape Dick's revenge, the implication being that he is too spiteful to let himself be shot.

Folk humor is employed to good advantage in "An Attack by Wolves." Here, as in "Dick Haverhill's Revenge," Tomlin discards his usual bookish language for the colloquial, when he describes Reuben Whitlew, one of the highwaymen who plan to attack the "emigrants," as "a lank-sided, frog-eating, pumpkin-colored son [either auctorial delicacy or editorial prudery truncated the term] from Old Tar River, away down in the lower part of the State of North Carolina, where the people live on blackberries, and beg every traveller they meet for a chaw of tobacky."<sup>29</sup>

It is in this story also that Tomlin most nearly approaches that perfection of exaggeration achieved by James Thorpe in "The Big Bear of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

Arkansas." Tomlin's tall tale concerns a Texas norther. It is introduced casually enough by a reference to the emigrants' tents having been blown down the night before the opening of the story. Since it is January, such an occurrence is well within the bounds of probability; but mention of the winter storm leads narrator Faraday into a digression, solemnly relayed by Tomlin, on the raconteur's own experience with a norther. Ten men, says Faraday, were crossing a plain in going from the Sabine to the Red River on a hot July day. They took refuge from the heat under a large live-oak. A low, rumbling sound was heard in the distance, accompanied as it came nearer, by a breath of cooler air.

For a few moments, and for a few moments only, the sensations which it produced on the system were very agreeable, but as it came whiffling along, and surging in its fury, the colder feeling which followed made us wish for our blankets. These, however, had been left behind, and . . . in less than half an hour, out of the company of ten men, six were frozen to death.<sup>30</sup>

In the same vein is the account of the emigrants' diligent search for a hill with a southern side to it, a great rarity in Texas, where most hills have northern sides only. "The anomaly," Tomlin blandly explains, "of a hill with only one side is as clearly demonstrable in Texas, occularly [sic], as is the simplest problem in Euclid, by figures."<sup>31</sup>

A fourth characteristic of successful frontier tales is their

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

employment of frame structure. As has been indicated in the synopses of tales above, Tomlin did not consistently employ the frame, since in seven of the stories Jack Faraday's name does not even appear. Another defect in Tomlin's method is failure to indicate clearly where his own words and phrases cease and Faraday's begin. In his introduction Tomlin had said, "I do not hope, however, to preserve the graphic and unique style of the relator--that is impossible, yet I hope to retain at least a portion of his dramatic energy if not some little of the peculiar and charming style of his narrative."<sup>32</sup> It would have been better to attempt the impossible, for in his failure "to preserve the graphic and unique style of the relator" and in substituting his own frequently grandiloquent phrases for an earthy directness, Tomlin is guilty of the same stylistic blunder committed by Joseph Baldwin when the latter repeatedly asserts that Ovid Bolus is a champion liar, but never gives an example of the great liar's artistry.<sup>33</sup>

An additional flaw in Tomlin's use of the frame is a too abrupt shift in point of view, as has already been mentioned in the discussion of "The Reformed Freebooter." If Tomlin could have provided Faraday with an admiring audience, as Thorpe did for the Big Bear, or even one appreciative listener, as Harris did for Sut, the Caddo tales would have been better as frame stories. But even with their defects, they make better use of frame structure than Georgia Scenes, for the simple reason

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Blair, Native American Humor, p. 78.

that "Baldwin" and "Hall," who narrate respectively Longstreet's stories dealing with women and those dealing with men, are colorless individuals whose only excuse for being is their function as narrators, while Faraday is himself an embodiment of the glamor and adventure of the frontier.

There remains one further element of frontier literature in which Tomlin's work may be measured against that of his contemporaries, the juxtaposition of pompous rhetoric with the pungent language of the frontier. All of these men, Tomlin included, who attempted to transmit the flavor of the West to their readers were inheritors of a literary tradition that imposed a ponderousness of style. When they first began to write of the fresh, exciting, and vigorous life of the frontier, they employed that medium of communication to which they and their readers were most accustomed. As a result, the form of their sketches and stories was ill adapted to the content. Certainly, nothing in Tomlin's magazine writing, concerned as it had been with Gothic heroism or Southern gallantry, had fostered the cultivation of a brisk and vigorous style. Consequently, it is not surprising to find him beginning one of his tales with the following orotund sentence, reminiscent of Scott and Cooper:

It was on one of those dark, gusty days that so often clothe, in a southern clime, the latter portions of November with a penumbral mistiness, that a footman, solitary and alone, was seen, with his trusty rifle, threading his way through the wide prairies that skirt the upper waters of the wild Sabine.<sup>34</sup>

Such an introduction was a favorite of the times; indeed, James Hall used a very similar opening sentence in "Harpe's Head."

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<sup>34</sup> Tales of the Caddo, p. 28.



At the close of a pleasant day, in the spring of the year 17—, a solitary horseman might have been seen slowly winding his way along a narrow road, in that part of Virginia which is now called the Valley.<sup>35</sup>

Both Tomlin and Hall, however, in spite of trite introductory sentences, employ more vigorous language later in their stories, Hall confining his vernacular to direct quotation, Tomlin occasionally introducing folk language into the expository portion of his stories, as in his description of Snapdown or of Snapdown's master.

When Tomlin's style is compared with that of Longstreet, it becomes apparent that the latter used folk speech to better advantage, especially in instances where he devoted an entire sketch to a faithful and quasi-phonetic reproduction. None of Tomlin's tales depends for its effect so completely on the speech of its characters as does Longstreet's "A Sage Conversation," where the conversation of three old women consists largely of such expressions as "Why lai messy on me," and "Well, the law me, I'm clear beat."<sup>36</sup>

Unlike Longstreet's, however, the style of Snelling and Hall is hardly superior to Tomlin's in regard to effective use of dialect. In Snelling's "The Bois Brule," for example, the hero, "although the son of a Sioux squaw, talks frequently as though he had never been away from the influence of the drawing room."<sup>37</sup> Nowhere in Hall's Legends of the

<sup>35</sup> Hall, Legends of the West, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Augustus B. Longstreet, Georgia Scenes (New York, 1952), p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Flanagan, "Introduction," Tales of the Northwest, p. xxiv.

West is there any conversation more fully flavored with backwoods speech than the passages quoted above from Tomlin's "Dick Haverhill's Revenge" and "An Attack by Wolves."

Although Tomlin displayed a facility in folk speech superior to Snelling and Hall, it must be admitted that he was inferior in this respect to Hooper, Thorpe, and especially to Harris. Each of these three produced, or reproduced, dialect which in and of itself merits attention, apart from the story it tells. Tomlin, on the other hand, utilized dialect only for the purpose of lending authenticity to the "low" characters he introduced, and of thus "catching the manners, living as they rise." None of his stories was written for the sake of dialect, and, consequently, he has no creation quite the equal of Simon Suggs, the Big Bear, or Sut Lovingood.

This comparison of Tales of the Caddo with contemporary frontier writings leads to certain conclusions. Tomlin used local color as effectively as other minor Western and Southwestern writers. His depiction of historical characters, particularly that of his fellow Tennessean, Sam Houston, is as pleasing and as accurate as any achieved by the other writers in the group under consideration. Tomlin employs folk humor more effectively than Hall and as successfully as Longstreet, but he never achieved the mastery of the tall tale displayed by Thorpe. In employing the frame device, Tomlin is more skillful than Longstreet, but less so than slightly later frontier writers, especially Thorpe and Harris. Tomlin's style is the equal, and occasionally the superior, of Hall's and Snelling's, but, because of his failure to utilize fully folk

speech and backwoods dialect, is not so good as Longstreet's, Hooper's, Thorpe's, or Harris's.

Because it is generally assumed that the chief value of frontier literature resides in its humor and in local color, Tales of the Caddle has been considered mainly with regard to these elements. But the fact remains that Tomlin's Western stories have considerable merit in themselves. Because Tomlin never fully mastered plot, his awkward handling of the events he reports often detracts from their interest. Nevertheless, the stories are exciting and memorable. Some of Tomlin's characters, notably Charley Gibbs, Rube Deadrick, and Ike Wayland, are very nearly flesh and blood. His moralizing digressions frequently become more than stale literary conventions, particularly as he comments, in "Curators and Regulators," on the lawlessness of unauthorized law-enforcers, or, in "Rose Larkin," on the viciousness of condemnation by accusation. He succeeds also, at least occasionally, in driving his moral home through arousing reader sympathy. But the moral was not his primary object. This Tennessee-postmaster-turned-Western-writer was mainly concerned with entertaining his readers. And if, in the earthy humor of his "low" characters and the bland hyperbole of his tall tales, he was a humble predecessor of Mark Twain, he was even more, in his melodrama which sometimes barely misses drama and his sentimentality which occasionally approaches true sentiment, a worthy precursor of Bret Harte.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN TOMLIN

The writings discussed in Chapters III, IV, and V did not constitute all of John Tomlin's literary life. During the entire period of his own productivity he was in touch, through correspondence, with a few truly distinguished literary figures and with almost all of the contemporaneously and popularly famous. For a person living, as he himself put it, in the western wilderness, his was an amazingly extensive correspondence. It is the purpose of this chapter to record the details of John Tomlin's literary friendships, and thus to demonstrate how the Tennessee postmaster entered into the literary life of mid-nineteenth-century America and Great Britain.

Unluckily, neither John Tomlin nor any considerable number of his correspondents were disposed to preserve all letters received. It is consequently highly probable that many letters addressed to or by the Tennessean are lost, letters which today would afford as much interest and pleasure, even if not of themselves of so much value, as the four lost Poe letters discussed below.<sup>1</sup> But a respectable number are extant: in the one sizable collection of Tomlin's own letters, the Rufus Wilmot Griswold Collection in the Boston Public Library; in Tomlin's own or other letters containing references to him in various collections; and

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<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 182, 186, 193, 195.

especially in those reprinted in Tomlin's curious serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," the raison d'etre of which was its valuable autographs.

Taken together, these letters demonstrate that Tomlin wrote to and received replies from forty-one contemporary notables. All but six were literary figures, and of those, five were prominent in American politics, three of them nationally. Of the thirty-five writers and persons of literary connections from whom the Tennessee poet-postmaster received letters, nine were British, the rest fellow Americans, though one, Lunt of Newfoundland, was beyond the boundaries of the continental United States. Among the forty-one are many whose popularity ceased at the close of the century, but at least nine earned an enduring place as major writers.

Tomlin's correspondence with three of the better writers with whom he exchanged letters, Poe, Simms, and Dickens, was fairly extensive. With one minor writer also, Lambert A. Wilmer of Philadelphia, a cordial relationship was established through the exchange of letters.

There was an affinity of spirit between John Tomlin and Edgar Allan Poe which did not require personal contact for sustenance. Parallels exist between certain sets of circumstances in their lives, the more obvious being alcoholism and marital difficulties. Both felt alien to their respective environments and misunderstood by associates. Neither was above pretension to more learning than he possessed. In short, a similarity of temperament contributed to the continuation of a correspondence which had its beginnings in a purely literary association.

The correspondence between Poe and Tomlin covered a little more than four years, from October 1839 through February 1844, and included twenty-one letters, fifteen of which are extant in manuscript and/or print. It was opened by Tomlin, who sent to Poe, then editing Burton's Gentleman's, his two-part story "Theodoric of the Amali," accompanied by a brief note in which he designated himself a "brither sinner," a phrase likely to arouse a responsive chord in Poe, and closed with a suggestion that "the Author of 'Theodoric of the Amali' would feel proud in having Edgar A. Poe as a correspondent."<sup>2</sup>

Poe accepted the story and published it in the May and June, 1840, issues of Burton's. Later in the year he apparently wrote to his Tennessee friend, outlining his plans for establishing the Penn magazine and asking for aid in securing advance subscriptions.<sup>3</sup> This was the kind of project dear to Tomlin's heart; he was already aware of the success Poe had made of the Richmond Messenger, and his own desire for more successful Southern magazines would not prejudice him against an Eastern magazine with a distinguished Southerner as its owner and editor. Imparting his own enthusiasm to his friends and acquaintances, he secured nine subscribers to the Penn, the list of whose names is unfortunately lost. But it almost certainly included Wiley P. Hale, the fellow Jacksonian whose own literary interests are indicated by a story published in Burton's in the same year

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<sup>2</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, October 16, 1839. Griswald MSS, Boston Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> John Ostrom, ed., The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), II, 582.

in which Tomlin's "Theodoric" appeared.<sup>4</sup> The list was sent to Poe in a letter offering one of Tomlin's own stories for the Penn, "The Devil's Visit to St. Dunstan."<sup>5</sup> Poe, touched by this zeal in his behalf and encouraged by subscribers from relatively remote West Tennessee, replied to Tomlin's letter on September 16, 1840, apologising for delay occasioned by his being out of town for a week and thanking Tomlin most heartily for his efforts.

"I hope," Poe assured his correspondent, "you will think me sincere when I say that I am truly grateful for the interest you have taken in my welfare. A few more such friends as yourself and I shall have no reason to doubt of success."<sup>6</sup>

The encouragement Poe's "brither sinner" felt at this development in his career can only be imagined. It was a good year for him. In February his story of De Soto, "The Spanish Adventurer," had been published in the Casket, where his poems, "Stanzas" and "The Farewell," had also seen print in May and June. And in these two months, "Theodoric" had appeared in Burton's. With his store-keeping almost over and the prospect of a comfortable livelihood through government employment, he could look forward to the happy continuance of a literary career now

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<sup>4</sup> "The Gladiator," Burton's Gentleman's, VI (October 1840), 198-200.

<sup>5</sup> Letter and story are both lost. See Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, II, 582.

<sup>6</sup> Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, I, 146. The letter was written on a blank page of a prospectus of the Penn. See James A. Harrison, ed., Edgar Allan Poe, 17 vols. (New York, 1902), XVII, 57-58.

successfully launched. In that career he could not have wished a better associate and mentor than the former editor of the Messenger. Now the Tennessean was to be a contributor to Poe's own magazine! On November 22 he wrote to Poe at great length: he wished to know the most preferable state currency in which to remit subscriptions to the Magazine (no title necessary here—to both men there was at the time only one); he expected to be under an obligation to Poe for "some emendation of the Devil's Visit;" he suggested that "W. Gilmore Simms of Charleston" could be of service to Poe's career; and he promised to secure, during a forthcoming visit to Nashville, still more subscribers for the Farm.

Besides those matters, the letter included a fervent assurance of support and aid:

The abiding interest which I feel for your welfare gives at all times the most cheering hopes of your success. It cannot be that you will not succeed! For the warm-hearted Southerners by whom you are known will not let the Work die for the want of patronage. They are your friends, for they know you will, and will sustain you.<sup>7</sup>

The closing of the letter also gives evidence of the warm kindness Tomlin felt for Poe; it is signed "Sincerely your friend." Alas for the bright expectations and buoyant hopes of Poe and his friend! The never-abandoned, though never-to-be-realized, dream of Poe's own magazine had to be laid aside. A living had to be made, and Graham's offer to Poe of the position of literary editor of his new magazine was too good to be refused.

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<sup>7</sup> Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 62.



Poe's assumption of the position and consequent postponement of the Penn caused disappointment to his Tennessee friends, a disappointment made verbal by Tomlin, who wrote on March 13, 1841, to inquire whether publication of the magazine had been indefinitely postponed. But the tone of the letter, though distinctly regretful, is in no wise bitter. Tomlin's remonstrance was softened by an admission of extenuation:

I know that if you have abandoned entirely the notion of ever commencing its publication--the abandonment was caused by no ordinary circumstances. Again I repeat that your friends here are disappointed. If you have come to the conclusion on mature deliberation, that this is not an auspicious period for the appearance of the Journal, perhaps your friends here may possibly forgive you.<sup>8</sup>

And through the conclusion shines that generous and unselfish friendliness which the lesser writer was always to manifest toward the greater, regardless of the latter's shortcomings:

At any moment, that you may deem any service of mine, necessary in the aiding or the carrying out to the fulfillment, of any scheme or plan you may project, believe that a call from you, on me, will receive the best attention of

Your friend  
Jno. Tomlin<sup>9</sup>

Meantime, Tomlin, no longer able to anticipate years of association with Poe in literary creation, busied himself elsewhere in furthering his own interests. At Nashville and Gallatin, D. C. Gaskill was editing and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

publishing his literary magazine, the Southron, and Tomlin had begun in January 1841 the contributions which continued throughout its one year's duration. In February he had assumed the postmastership which was to give him, for six years, both an assured income and hours of leisure for writing. Both these circumstances helped to mitigate, though not to remove, his keen disappointment. It was by no means the end of the friendship.

Although Poe, too, was very busy at this time in his newly assumed editorial duties at Graham's, he felt his friend's chagrin at his apparent defection and wrote on April 15 to offer what reassurance was possible.<sup>10</sup> Tomlin's reply betrays no coolness, but indicates a primary concern with his own career. His letter opens somewhat abruptly: "Will Mr. Graham publish the 'Devil's visit' in his magazine? Show him the MS. and get his consent to publish it in the June or July no."<sup>11</sup>

This opening is followed by an assurance that Tomlin still stands ready to aid his friend in "any enterprise or scheme" he may have in view. The letter closes on a note of anxiety occasioned by Tyler's succession to the presidency.

If John Tyler, Esq., President of the United States, removes me from office for being a loco-foco, I will certainly be opposed to him—and the measure.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The letter is lost, but cited in Tomlin's of April 20. Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, II, 584.

<sup>11</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, April 30, 1841. Griswald MSS, Boston Public Library.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Whether Poe felt "The Devil's Visit to St. Dunstan" was not up to his editorial standards, or whether Tomlin's story was simply overlooked in the mass of contributions elicited by Graham's policy of paying well is not known, but "The Devil's Visit" never saw publication. Nor was there any further correspondence between editor and postmaster for six months. In this interim, however, Tomlin took occasion to heap public praise upon Poe and his works. A letter which appeared in the "Editorial Bureau" of the Southron in October gave Poe full credit for the success of the only Southern magazine comparable in both quality and circulation to those of the East, the Southern Literary Messenger.<sup>13</sup>

On October 29, 1841, Tomlin, who in addition to his magazine writing, had been engaged in extensive correspondence with other literati, broke the silence by an excited announcement. He had received a letter from Thomas Noon Talfourd, British barrister and author, enclosing his "last effusion," a sonnet composed upon his eldest son's entrance at Eton College. Tomlin sent the sonnet on to Poe with this comment:

I feel proud of having it in my power of sending to you for publication in "Graham's Magazine" an original article from the pen of this high minded and gifted individual. Powerful as his intellect is, it is not more powerful, than his heart is tender and warmed by a parent's feeling! . . . With the sincere wish that this effusion may prove as acceptable to your numerous readers as it will be gratifying to you in receiving it.<sup>14</sup>

Although Tomlin's letter undoubtedly gave Poe carte blanche for

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<sup>13</sup> See above, p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, October 29, 1841. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

any disposal of the sonnet, the latter's mode of publication displays a cavalier attitude toward his Tennessee friend and correspondent. He made no mention of Tomlin's being the original recipient of the sonnet and letter, but blandly appropriated part of Tomlin's comment, quoting it as from Talfourd himself. Tomlin had written to Poe:

Sergeant N. Talfourd Esq. of London says to me in his letter of August the 11th, 1841—"I transcribe my last effusion—on an occasion very dear to me." The following Sonnet composed in view of Eton College after leaving his eldest son there for the first time, is the effusion he alludes to.<sup>15</sup>

In his editorial introduction to the sonnet in Graham's, Poe wrote:

It is with high gratification that we present our readers this month with this elegant original poem from the pen of Sergeant Noon Talfourd of England, the author of "Ion," and, perhaps, the first living poet of his age. In the letter accompanying the verses he speaks of them as "my last effusion on an occasion very dear to me—composed in view of Eton College after leaving my eldest son there for the first time."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Graham's, XI (January 1842), 5. It must be admitted that the sonnet as it appeared in Graham's, with Poe's impeccable editorial "emendation," including both punctuation and phraseology, is a better poem than Talfourd's, at least as the latter was transmitted through Tomlin's careless copying. The improvement is particularly noticeable in ll. 5 and 6. Tomlin had copied:

". . . now to me they wear  
There ting'd of dearer thought."

Poe added meaning by a simple change:

". . . now to me they wear  
The tinge of dearer thought."

And in line 8, which Tomlin had sent in as "And by its flickering sparkles, sense conveys," the ever euphonic Poe eliminated the ugly sibilant by the simple expedient of making sparkles singular.

Professor Mabbott, in "Correspondence of John Tomlin," Notes and Queries, CLXIV (April 1933), 294, cites the publication of the poem as "evidence for the authenticity of the correspondence" appearing in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac."

Perhaps Poe considered that his Jackson friend would feel himself sufficiently repaid by the appearance of the sonnet in Graham's. Perhaps Tomlin felt as Poe expected him to feel. At any rate, there were no repercussions from Tennessee.

Not waiting to hear from Poe to see whether he would publish the Talfourd sonnet, Tomlin wrote to his editor friend again on December 1. At this time he could report even more exciting news than before—he had heard from Dickens!

I have Mr. Poe in my possession a communication from "Bos," in its nature so perfectly uniquus—and in its construction so full of the most beautiful thoughts, that I can scarcely get my own consent for any other to see a sparkle of the rich gems in which it is embedded. He sent it to me as a token of his remembrance—and gratefully did I receive it—and most sacredly have I preserved it.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, Tomlin told Poe, he felt it his duty to release this manuscript to the reading public, particularly in view of Dickens' impending visit to America. The Tennessean would therefore, he promised, send the precious missive in time for publication in the February issue of Graham's. And he requested Poe, if he should see the great novelist, to give him Tomlin's "thanks for his notice of his distant countryman."

The concluding paragraph indicates that the December 1841 issue of Graham's was already in the Tennessee postmaster's hands.

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<sup>17</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, December 1, 1841. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library. Parts of the letter are quoted, not with entire accuracy, in Mary E. Phillips, Edgar Allan Poe the Man, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1926), I, 686.

And receive yourself, for the notice you have taken of me in your last magazine, the earnest prayer of an honest heart for your happiness.<sup>18</sup>

The "notice" to which Tomlin referred appeared in Poe's department of "Autography," in which a facsimile of Tomlin's signature was accompanied by a sketch and "analysis":

John Tomlin, Esq., Postmaster of Jackson, Tennessee, has contributed many excellent articles to the periodicals of the day—among others to the "Gentleman's" and to Graham's Magazine, and to several of the Southern and Western Journals. His chirography resembles that of Mr. Paulding in being at the same time very petite, very beautiful, and very illegible. His MSS, in being equally well written throughout, evince the indefatigability of his disposition.<sup>19</sup>

Eleven days after he had written concerning his "communication from Boz," Tomlin sent his editor friend a part of his own fan mail, T. E—'s "Lines composed on reading his 'Theodoric of the Amali' published in the May and June Nos of the 'Gentleman's Magazine' for 1840." Since this verse tribute, and Tomlin's comment thereon, have already been discussed,<sup>20</sup> it is sufficient to mention here that Tomlin apparently shared T. E—'s hope that it would be published.

Either lack of space or editorial disapproval kept T. E—'s tribute from print, but such was not the case with Dickens' letter.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Graham's, XIX (December 1841), 281.

<sup>20</sup> See above, pp. 118-119.

Tomlin kept his promise to send it on in time for the February issue, in which it duly appeared, together with Tomlin's highly laudatory, and basically just, appraisal of Dickens' work and personal character.<sup>21</sup> In publishing both letter and essay, Poe made honorable amends for any injustice done Tomlin in connection with the Talfourd sonnet, since full credit is given the Tennessee contributor.

Now occurred a nine-months hiatus in the correspondence. Both men were busy, and Tomlin, in addition was grieving over domestic difficulties.<sup>22</sup> Neither personal unhappiness, nor literary success, however, could crowd out of Tomlin's mind the man whose genius he recognized and for whom he cherished much affection. With that perceptiveness of the essence of another's character and abilities which was one of his most striking qualities, he saw that Poe would never be happy unless his dream magazine materialized. So once again, on September 21, 1842, he wrote to make inquiry about the Penn, again offering his own services and assistance.<sup>23</sup> Poe replied on October 5, assuring his Tennessee friend that he was fully determined to "commence the Penn Magazine on the first of January next." With characteristic and pathetic eagerness to believe that somehow, at last, things were going to turn out well for

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<sup>21</sup> See above, pp. 135-136.

<sup>22</sup> See above, pp. 45, 85-86.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Poe to Tomlin, October 5, 1842. Ostrem, ed., Letters of Poe, II, 594.

him, he explained to Tomlin why he could now make a definite promise:

I am to receive an office in the Custom House in this city, which will leave me the greater portion of my time unemployed, while, at the same time, it will afford me a good salary. With this to fall back upon as a certain resource until the Magazine is fairly afloat, all must go well.<sup>24</sup>

These hopes, like so many of Poe's, were to be dashed. He never secured that Utopian position of minimum labor and maximum salary. Although it had been promised him by Robert Tyler, the President's son, a Mr. Smith, apparently one of those annoying underlings with whom insistent applicants for political position find themselves dealing, now told the poet that orders from President Tyler banned further appointments.<sup>25</sup> Confronted still with the necessity for earning his living, Poe again had to lay aside his magazine project.

Meanwhile, Tomlin, secure in his own political appointment, went on writing poems and stories, finding publication in whatever substitutes for the Penn might be available. But he did not forget his friend. When Thomas W. White of the Messenger died on January 19, 1843, Tomlin again thought of Poe's former success with the Richmond periodical. Perhaps now Poe could come back to the South, which loved him and to which he belonged. Perhaps his return would mark the beginning of that era in Southern letters of which Tomlin always dreamed, when the South should take her rightful place in literary America, under the direction of her

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I, 216-217.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 218-219.



truly great writers. Inspired by the thought of such eventualities, on March 1 he sent his friend another letter. "Since the death of Mr. White of the 'Literary Messenger'," Tomlin wrote, "I have often thought if you would take charge of it, what a great Journal it would become, under your conduct and supervision." And in an effort to impart some of his own enthusiasm to the post-editor, he continued, "With you at the head of the 'Messenger,' and Simms of the 'Magnolia' (my two most valued friends) we of the South would then have a pride in talking about our Periodical Literature."<sup>26</sup>

The Tennessean's dream of a flourishing Southern periodical literature with his "two most valued friends" as editors and himself, naturally, as contributor and even perhaps advisor, was not to be realized. Matthew F. Maury, who had actually had full charge of the Messenger since White's paralytic stroke in September 1842, remained in his office until the purchase of the magazine in August by Benjamin Blake Minor. Even had the editorial position been offered Poe at the time it is doubtful whether he would have accepted, for his major efforts, aside from his creative work and his duties on the Saturday Museum, were being directed toward establishing the Stylus, as his dream-magazine had now become.

Once more his hopes were high; once again they were dashed, when Lewis Gaylord Clark withdrew support. On June 20, Poe wrote the bad news to Tomlin.<sup>27</sup> Tomlin replied on July 2, telling Poe that he had,

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<sup>26</sup> Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 133.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Tomlin to Poe, July 2, 1843. Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, II, 598.

even before receiving the June 20 letter, seen in the Museum the notice of Clark's withdrawal from the Stylus project. He had previously suspected, he said, that the "devilish machinations of a certain clique in Philadelphia" had prevented the fruition of Poe's plans. The Tennessean went on to cite further efforts he and other Southerners, including Simms and Meek, had made to publicize the magazine project. He concluded with a promise he had so often made: "Should you at any future time, get up your work, I will be as willing then, as I have always been, to extend to you, in its behalf, the entire weight of my influence."<sup>28</sup>

Taken as a whole, the July 2 letter is one of the best, in its palpably sincere friendliness and its reaffirmation of confidence and loyalty. But Tomlin made one mistake. Carried away by sympathy and compassion for his friend he allowed himself a disloyalty to another correspondent. In a violation of confidence quite out of character, this Southern gentleman inquired:

Have you not in your City, some, that thro' a friendship which they feel not, are doing you much evil? I have had a letter quite lately, from one professing all friendship for you, in which some allusions are made to you in a manner greatly astonishing to me.<sup>29</sup>

The letter referred to was from Lambert A. Wilmer, with whom Tomlin was also corresponding at this time.<sup>30</sup> While it actually contained some

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<sup>28</sup> Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 150.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>30</sup> See below, pp. 212-213.

decidedly uncomplimentary remarks about Poe, they were not untrue, and their tone was more pitying than malicious. Tomlin would have done better to forget them.

Poe seems to have replied almost immediately, asking for the letter.<sup>31</sup> Having had time for sober reflection on his own impulsive action, Tomlin quite properly ignored the request. His next letter is obviously an effort to divert his friend's mind from the unpleasant by setting it a task for which it is well fitted, the solution of a cryptograph. The August 9 letter amusingly resembles an attempt to soothe an angry child by a picture puzzle. "I have received," wrote Tomlin, "from the Honl [sic] Alex. B. Meek, of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, a letter, which I herewith enclose, that is as mystical to me, as is any character left by the ancient Egyptians on their monuments to puzzle the future ages."<sup>32</sup> But because accomplishments "not believed in the world's philosophy" were possible to Poe, the puzzled Jacksonian was sending him Meek's cryptograph, which "very many learned citizens" had tried in vain to solve.

The letter only partially fulfilled its purpose. Poe was diverted, but only temporarily. On August 28, he returned his solution of Meek's cryptograph, contemptuously dismissing the Alabamian as a cryptographer: "Mr. Meek's letter is very simple indeed, and merely shows that he

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<sup>31</sup> Implied in Poe to Tomlin, August 28, 1843. Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, II, 598.

<sup>32</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, August 9, 1843. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

misapprehends the whole matter. . . . Mr. Meek knows nothing about the matter."<sup>33</sup> Cryptography and Judge Meek disposed of, Poe petulantly returned to the object of his displeasure:

And now, my dear friend, have you forgotten that I asked you, some time since, to render me an important favor? You can surely have no scruples in a case of this kind. [Here Poe indulged in some gross exaggeration of Wilmer's defects of character, calling him a "villain" and a "reprobate."] Now, I ask you, as a friend and as a man of noble feelings, to send me his letter to you. It is your duty to do this—and I am sure, upon reflection, you will so regard it.<sup>34</sup>

Thus importuned, Tomlin allowed his regard for Poe to triumph over his gentlemanly code, and sent the letter on September 10. His misgivings are fully reflected in the brief note accompanying it.

My friendship for you, and nothing else, has prevailed on me, to enclose you the letter of A. L. [sic] Wilmer, Esquire.—But I much fear that in doing it, I have violated somewhat the rules that govern correspondents in such matters. Believing, however, that your great good sense will but protect my honor in this transaction, I remain with affectionate regard,

Yours ever,  
Jno. Tomlin

P. S. Return Wilmer's letter.<sup>35</sup>

Those who knew Poe better might have warned Tomlin against too much reliance on the former's great good sense. As a matter of fact, however, his anger against Wilmer seems to have spent itself in the

<sup>33</sup> Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, I, 235-236. First printed in George E. Woodberry, The Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 2 vols. (Boston, 1909), II, 39-42.

<sup>34</sup> Ostrom, ed., Letters of Poe, I, 236.

<sup>35</sup> Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 152.

written blast to his Tennessee correspondent, and in securing the letter, in which, among other literary gossip, this paragraph appeared:

Edgar A. Poe (you know him by character, no doubt, if not personally) has become one of the strangest of our literati. He and I are old friends, have known each other from boyhood and it gives me inexpressible pain to notice the vagaries to which he has lately become subject. Poor fellow!—he is not a teetotaler by any means and I fear he is going headlong to destruction, moral, physical, and intellectual.<sup>36</sup>

As Hervey Allen has observed, "it was the pity in this as much as anything else that would offend Poe."<sup>37</sup> But aside from treating his Tennessee friend rather shabbily by ignoring the latter's request to return the Wilmer letter, Poe appears to have done nothing. This was fortunate, for, actually, Wilmer's feelings toward Poe were kindly and he became, after the latter's death, one of his most ardent defenders against the slanders of Griswold.<sup>38</sup>

No more letters are known to have been written by Poe to Tomlin. On February 23, 1844, the latter made one more attempt to renew the correspondence. He wrote congratulating Poe on his review of Richard H. Horne's Orion in that month's issue of Graham's. He reminded Poe also that he had not heard from him since sending the "libellous letter of A. L. Wilmer." And, appearing to have forgotten, at least temporarily, that Wilmer had shown a kindly interest in himself and his works, he

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Ollive Mabbott, ed., Merlin, Baltimore, 1827; Together with Recollections of Edgar A. Poe, by Lambert A. Wilmer (New York, 1944), pp. 36-37.

<sup>37</sup> Hervey Allen, Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe, 2 vols. (New York, 1827), II, 570.

<sup>38</sup> Mabbott, ed., Merlin, pp. xi-xiii.

penned a castigation of the *Philadelphian*, redeemed only by the moderate and hopeful tone of its last sentences:

Did you inflict on him a chastisement equal to the injury he design'd by the publication of such slander? Previous to the reception of that letter, I had entertained a good opinion of the "Quacks of Helicon" man, and it had been brought about in a great measure by your Review of the Book. In his former letters he not only spoke kindly of you, but seemed disposed to become your advocate, against the litterateurs of Philadelphia. I hope that you will forgive him, and that he will go and sin no more.<sup>39</sup>

So far as is known, this letter elicited no reply. Poe did, however, as late as 1845, show Thomas Holley Chivers a letter from Tomlin with a list of thirty subscribers for the projected magazine.<sup>40</sup> Still later, in 1848, Tomlin was trying to enlist aid for Poe among Cincinnati publishers and editors.<sup>41</sup> That same year, Tomlin reprinted in his serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Poe's letter of October 5, 1842, with this comment on the writer:

He is sui generis, and in many respects one of the most remarkable men in the country. The one hundred tales of the "grotesque and Arabesque" are the most remarkable ever written by one man of any in the English or any other language. . . . The "Murders in the Rue Morgue" in the way of tracing the effect to its cause in the palpably obscure and shadowy distinctness, is superior to anything in the way of a tale that has ever been written in America. The "House of Usher" is also a grand and somber building, made up of shadows, but all of its outlines are so distinctly seen that these phantasmagoria may be mistaken for realities. . . . "The Raven" and "Ulaluma" [sic] are the two most remarkable poems ever published on this continent.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Woodberry, Poe, II, 56.

<sup>40</sup> Richard B. Davis, ed., Chivers' Life of Poe (New York, 1952), p. 44.

<sup>41</sup> See below, p. 239.

<sup>42</sup> Holden's, II (December 1848), 718-719.

Ulahanna is an obvious misprint for Ulalume, as Professor Mabbott has pointed out.<sup>43</sup> Tomlin's mention of these two poems, the one first published in 1845, the other in 1847, and his comment on them indicates that he kept himself informed as to Poe's activities regardless of the termination of their correspondence. One of the first Southerners to recognize Poe's genius and to give full expression to that recognition, the Tennessee postmaster would have earned his place in the literary history of America, even if he had written nothing himself, by the relationship recorded in their correspondence.

In spite of the fact that the two writers never met face to face,<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "George W. Eveleth, writing Poe on February 17, 1849, asked Poe if he had written a poem called 'Ulahanna.' Poe in replying on June 26, 1849, denied the authorship. . . . Eveleth . . . asks several questions that show he had been reading John Tomlin's curious 'Autobiography of a Monomaniac' in Holden's Magazine and it is from Holden's for December, 1848, that Eveleth got that curious title. Tomlin, writing under the pseudonym of 'Joe Bottom,' is made by the printer to mention the 'Raven' and 'Ulahanna,' 'the two most remarkable poems ever published on this continent.' Obviously this is merely a misprint for 'Ulalume.' In a flowing hand it is easy for the two words to look somewhat alike, and as Tomlin lived in Jackson, Tenn., he probably had no chance to correct his proofs." "Ullahanna—A Literary Ghost," American Notes & Queries, I (September 1941), 83.

<sup>44</sup> There is one passage in Tomlin's writings which, considered alone, might indicate that they had met. The weight of opposing evidence, however, is against it. One must conclude that the statement is, and was so intended by the author, purely fictitious. In Chapter IV of "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," part of which is quoted above, Tomlin has Joe Bottom as editor of Toddlebar's papers, say: "It will be necessary to maintain here, for the better explanation of one of the above passages [in which there is a reference to Poe's Russian visit] that the American vessel which took Mr. Poe was originally bound for Liverpool, where he himself was to re-ship for Greece. After leaving New York, the captain, he being owner of the cargo himself, changed his direction and instead of going to the place where he had agreed to land Mr. Poe, sailed directly for St. Petersburg. This is the true version of the affair, and the only one to be relied on, for I have had it myself from the mouth of Edgar A. Poe." Holden's, II (December 1848), 718. There is, of course, a possibility that Poe, in a letter now lost, may have amused himself at Tomlin's expense by an account of his mythical Russian voyage.

Tomlin came to regard Poe as a personal friend. His attitude toward the second of his great idols, however, remained that of a worshipper from afar. Although recognizing Poe's superiority to himself, Tomlin could sense a similarity of their two natures which encouraged intimacy. But the Southwesterner was separated from the great Charles Dickens in 1841 not only by a vast ocean but also by the distance between the provincial and the cosmopolitan. Nevertheless, the humbler writer dared to span both physical and social distance. Some time late in 1840 or early in 1841, he wrote a letter to the English novelist, expressing the pleasure he had derived from reading Dickens' works.<sup>45</sup> Which of them he had read is a matter of interesting speculation. At the time Tomlin wrote, these had been published: Sketches by Bos, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, Adventures of Oliver Twist, Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, and parts of The Old Curiosity Shop. Poe had reviewed the first two in the Southern Literary Messenger,<sup>46</sup> and it may well have been these reviews which first called Tomlin's attention to writings in which he was thereafter to take such great delight. His reading of Dickens, however, once started, appears to have continued independently of Poe's critical notice. Certainly he addressed the Britisher as one fully conversant with his work.

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Dickens to Tomlin, February 23, 1841, Graham's, XX February 1842), 83.

<sup>46</sup> Southern Literary Messenger, II (June 1836), 457-458 and (November 1836), 787. And see Gerald Giles Grubb, "The Personal and Literary Relationships of Dickens and Poe," Nineteenth Century Fiction, V (June 1950), 1-3.



Dickens appears to have been both flattered and genuinely touched by this tribute from an unknown admirer. His reply was more than a courteous acknowledgement. He was at some pains to convey to Tomlin his warm pleasure in the reception of a letter from Tennessee.

If you had the presentiment that it could afford me sincere pleasure and delight to hear from a warm-hearted and admiring reader of my books in the back woods of America, you would not have been far wrong. . . . To think that I have awakened a fellow-feeling and sympathy with the creatures of many thoughtful hours, among the vast solitudes in which you dwell, is a source of the purest delight and pride to me, and believe me that your expressions of affectionate remembrance and approval, sounding from the great forests on the banks of the Mississippi, sink deeper into my heart and gratify it more than all the honorary distinctions that all the courts in Europe could confer.<sup>47</sup>

Tomlin's pride in the letter caused him to send it to Poe for publication in Graham's, where it duly appeared, accompanied by Tomlin's own essay of appreciation.<sup>48</sup> Dickens seems not to have disapproved although, as Professor Mabbott has said, he "objected to the printing of his letters in American papers."<sup>49</sup>

In November of that year Tomlin again paid tribute to Dickens' genius in a letter to Gaskell, editor of the Southron.<sup>50</sup> About a year later he wrote once more to the British novelist and sent him the verses

<sup>47</sup> Graham's, XX (February 1842), 83.

<sup>48</sup> See above, p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> "Correspondence of John Tomlin," Notes & Queries, CLXVI (January 1934), 6.

<sup>50</sup> See above, p. 135.

which constituted the title poem of his one volume of poetry, Shelley's Grave.<sup>51</sup> This poem, among his best, had just been published in the Magnolia, and Tomlin was eager to secure British publication also. He asked Dickens to submit his elegy to any of the London magazines, a request the English author courteously but very firmly refused. He found the verses beautiful, he told the American poet, and he was happy to have seen them, but he declined any responsibility for them. "I am obliged," he declared, "to make a rule never to address their [London magazines'] editors on behalf of other writers."<sup>52</sup>

In spite of the keen disappointment Tomlin must have felt at this refusal, his admiration for Dickens remained unchanged. Nor did he allow personal feeling to warp his critical judgment, in which respect he showed a decided superiority to Poe. Six years later, when he published both of Dickens' letters in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," his comment displayed a perceptive evaluation of Dickens and of the American public as well.

The revulsion [after American Notes] would have been the same had he never written an article about us. The truth is, to account for it philosophically, we had raised him so far above our level that we became ashamed of ourselves and determined to pull him down.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cited in Dickens to Tomlin, London, January 13, 1843, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," Holden's, III (January 1849), 30.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

The two literary relationships discussed above were entirely dependent upon an exchange of letters, for there is no evidence that Tomlin ever met either Poe or Dickens. With William Gilmore Simms, however, he had at one time a personal acquaintance. Writing to Poe in November 1840, Tomlin suggested that Simms would be able to aid the former, and indulged in some pleasant reminiscence of the South Carolina author:

Some years ago, he [Simms] was my friend and gave me much good advice. The most pleasant walks I have ever taken in the fields of literature, were made in his company. . . . When I was a boy, I used to hear the Author of "Millechamps" [sic] talk. He said much to interest one of my years. As I grew older, my reverence for the man increased, until in my own mind, I am persuaded, that I shall "never look upon his like again."<sup>54</sup>

In spite of this early acquaintanceship, the Simms-Tomlin correspondence is slender, comprising only eight known letters. However, there is a possibility of lost letters, particularly from Simms to Tomlin, since the latter made no provision for the preservation of his personal papers. Such letters as passed between them were largely concerned with literary matters, persons they both knew, and the autograph collection of Simms' friend, Israel Ketch Tefft of Savannah.

Even before the beginning of the personal correspondence, there was a literary relationship between the two. Tomlin had followed with interest the progress of Simms' career, and had called the latter's activities to the attention of others besides Poe. In a letter to

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<sup>54</sup> Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 62.

Gaskill, for example, the Tennessean mentioned, apropos of Southern periodicals, that one of the contributors to Pendleton's Magnolia was "W. Gilmore Simms, Esq., author of the Yemassee, &c."<sup>55</sup> And when in June of 1842 the Magnolia was moved from Savannah to Charleston and Simms became joint editor, Tomlin promptly began to send his own contributions, the first of which was a letter on the subject of Southern periodicals, a repetition of the views he had previously expressed in the Southron.<sup>56</sup> In the November issue, Simms took notice of another letter from Tomlin on the subject of Indian Mounds.<sup>57</sup> At the same period, the Tennessean was sending his verse to Simms, who found part of it acceptable for the magazine. "Shelley's Grave" first saw publication in the Magnolia for November 1842, and "Sonnet," "Freedom," and "Earth and Ocean" were used respectively in January, March, and April of the following year.

While busily engaged on his own writing, Tomlin did not neglect his efforts in behalf of his good friend Poe. He had already suggested to the latter that Simms might be of aid in the Penn venture. Encouraged by acceptance of his own verse for the Magnolia, he wrote in the spring

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<sup>55</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (October 1841), 358.

<sup>56</sup> See above, pp. 130-132.

<sup>57</sup> The Magnolia, N. S., I (December 1842), 396.

of 1843 to call Simms' attention to Poe's projected magazine. Replying, Simms praised Poe's work highly.<sup>58</sup>

On June 26 of the same year, Tomlin sent more of his verse to Simms, accompanied by a letter which Simms passed on to Tefft of Savannah.<sup>59</sup> Knowing of Tomlin's extensive correspondence with literary figures and other prominent persons, Simms felt that his Tennessee friend could be of aid to the Georgia collector. He wrote to Tomlin suggesting that the latter send his autograph to Tefft.<sup>60</sup>

Either in the letter requesting a Tomlin autograph for the Savannah collector, or in another written about the same time, Simms told of his own plans to visit Philadelphia in the summer of 1843.<sup>61</sup> Ever solicitous on behalf of his friends, Tomlin passed the news on to Poe, adding, "While there any attentions shown him will be reciprocated by me."<sup>62</sup>

For the next few months, both Simms and Tomlin found themselves occupied with other matters and other friends. In spite of the relatively high quality of its literary content, the Magnolia had died, like many

<sup>58</sup> "I had solicited Mr. Simms to make in the Magnolia, a notice of your project, which he has done, I see, in the June number. In his private letters to me, he speaks in high praise of your Endowment as artist." Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, July 2, 1843. Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 150.

<sup>59</sup> Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves, eds., The Letters of William Gilmore Simms (Columbia, S. C., 1952), I, 380, n. 129. And see Holden's, III (May 1849), 231.

<sup>60</sup> Oliphant, ed., Letters of Simms, I, 380, n. 129.

<sup>61</sup> "W. Gilmore Simms writes me that he will be in your city this summer." Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, July 2, 1843. Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 151.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

another Southern magazine, for want of financial support. Its failure, though a source of great disappointment to Simms, released him from an onerous burden, and gave more time for creative work. Tomlin was occupied with a variety of matters, not the least of them the preparation of his verse for publication. Shelley's Grave and Other Poems appeared some time late in 1843, and came to Simms' notice early in 1844. He wrote of it to both James Lawson and Tefft,<sup>63</sup> to whom Tomlin had sent a copy. And, bestirring himself once more on the Savannah collector's account, Simms again directed a request for autographs to Tomlin.<sup>64</sup> The latter replied that he had already sent Tefft some fifteen or twenty autograph letters.<sup>65</sup>

Commenting upon Tomlin's letter and his published verse, Simms remarked to Tefft:

Tomlin writes me with l'air distingue that he will send you more when again taken with the generous mood. He has lately published a volume of poems, a copy of which he sent you, and inquires if it has been rec'd. Pray let him know with your acknowledgements. He can be useful in getting you autographs in quarters difficult of access to your modes or mien.<sup>66</sup>

In blissful ignorance of this superciliousness, Tomlin continued throughout life to regard Simms as one of his "two most valued friends."

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<sup>63</sup> Oliphant, ed., Letters of Simms, I, 407.

<sup>64</sup> Cited in Simms to Tefft, Woodlands, March 8, 1844. Oliphant, ed., Letters of Simms, I, 408-409.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 409.

Simms, on his part, showed occasional courtesies to the Tennessean, sending him in 1846 a copy of his own Sonnets.<sup>67</sup>

In that year Tomlin was working on the idea of a periodical of his own, to be called the New Era. In addition to his lifelong interest in Southern periodicals and American periodicals in general, he had at this time another incentive to such a project. While awaiting the materialization of Poe's Stylus, he had prepared biographical sketches of Southern writers to be furnished Poe at the latter's pleasure.<sup>68</sup> Now he realized, once and for all, that Poe would never use them. This being the case, he might as well put them to use in a magazine of his own. Simms would, Tomlin felt sure, be willing to aid him, at least to the extent of correcting and editing his own biography. He sent the sketch, accordingly, on to Simms, with an explanation of the use to which he proposed to put it.<sup>69</sup> Flattered and pleased, as almost any writer would be, Simms replied in some detail.

I am just in receipt of your kind notice of Areytos, in your new and pleasing miscellany, the "New Era" and hasten to say how much satisfaction I receive from your continued remembrance of me. There are some little mistakes in your article. "Woodlands" is not on the Ashley, but the Edisto, and I cannot longer be considered slender, since, though not corpulent, I now weigh over 160, and am much stouter than in those days of boyhood when

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<sup>67</sup> "I sent you, some time ago, a pamphlet of 'Sonnets.'" Simms to Tomlin, Woodlands, May 19 [1846]. First published in Holden's, III (May 1849), 277, the letter also appears in Letters of Simms, II, 166, where it is dated by references to the Sonnets and to Areytos.

<sup>68</sup> Harrison, ed., Poe, XVII, 150.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Simms to Tomlin, Woodlands, May 19 [1846]. Holden's, III (May 1849), 277.

it was our pleasure to meet. It will always give me pleasure to note your doings in the "New Era," or elsewhere. . . . I am now busy on my life of Capt. John Smith, the founder of Virginia, and propose to publish that and a second series of my Views and Reviews this summer at the North, to which place I go in June.<sup>70</sup>

Three years later Tomlin published the letter in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac," accompanied by some complimentary remarks on the "genius" of his friend.<sup>71</sup>

This was the last letter known to have passed between the two men, but other references to the Tennessean are found scattered throughout Simms' voluminous correspondence. Alexander Meek, Alabama judge and author, writing to Simms on August 21, 1843, poked fun at both Tomlin's sonnets and his intemperance.<sup>72</sup> In January 1844, Benjamin Blake Minor, then editing the Messenger, directed to Simms the following inquiry concerning Tomlin's abilities:

I have wished to ask your opinion of John Tomlin Esq. Jackson, Tennessee. He seems to have great literary seal and sent me some poetry and letters to publish. If he were by, I would candidly point out some defects of his poems, which are too often ruined by obscurity and defective construction. He is a friend of the Messenger and I do not wish to estrange him.<sup>73</sup>

No account of the relationship between Simms and Tomlin would be complete without mention of the posthumous service Simms attempted to

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> See above, p. 23, n. 45.

<sup>73</sup> ALS, Minor to Simms, Richmond, January 8, 1844. MSS Division, New York Public Library.



render his boyhood friend. In 1854, four years after Tomlin's untimely death, Simms was assisting Evert Duyckinck in collecting material for the Cyclopedia of American Writers and in providing biographical information on Southerners. By this time he apparently set some value on Tomlin and his work, for he suggested the inclusion of the Tennessean in the Duyckinck publication. Writing to Duyckinck on November 22, Simms had this to say:

The title of Tomlin's volume is "Shelley's Grave & Other Poems. By John Tomlin. Philadelphia Lyceum Press, 1843." This is a thin 12mo. of 40 pages. Do you wish an abstract or have you got the book? Tomlin is dead. He was born about 1806 in Sumter Dist. S. C.—common school'd, removed to Jackson, Tenn. where he was Postmaster for some years.<sup>74</sup>

Duyckinck not only failed to include Tomlin, but also left out of the Cyclopedia others whom Simms had suggested. These omissions were disappointing to the South Carolinian, who wrote to the compiler, after the appearance of the Cyclopedia in 1856, "I am sorry that you could not find a place for several of our Southern men whose names I gave you and some others whom I took for granted you would remember."<sup>75</sup> It thus appears that Simms felt Tomlin's published works were of sufficient importance to warrant mention in a record of contemporary American letters.

More tenuous were the ties between Tomlin and the fourth of the nineteenth-century literary figures with whom he carried on a correspondence

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<sup>74</sup> ALS, Simms to Duyckinck, Woodlands, South Carolina, November 22, 1854. MSS Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>75</sup> ALS, Simms to Duyckinck, Woodlands, South Carolina, April 18, 1856. MSS Division, New York Public Library.

of any extent, Lambert A. Wilmer. The most conspicuous feature of the correspondence has been noted above in the account of Poe's drawing Tomlin into his quarrel with the Philadelphia satirist and man-about-town.<sup>76</sup> But the unpleasant little episode involving Poe's injured feelings and Tomlin's breach of honor is not the whole story of the Tomlin-Wilmer relationship. It has its pleasant side also.

According to a statement Tomlin made to Poe after the quarrel had blown over, the former's interest in Wilmer was aroused in the first place by reading Poe's favorable review of The Quacks of Helicon.<sup>77</sup> This may well have been the case. Poe's criticism had appeared in the August 1841 issue of Graham's. Tomlin's own review of the Philadelphian's satire did not appear until May 1842, when it was published in the Guardian.<sup>78</sup> And the beginning of the Tomlin-Wilmer correspondence, although it antedated by several months Tomlin's notice of Wilmer's book, also took place early in the year following publication of Poe's review. Tomlin's intention to defend Wilmer's satire against attack, announced in his first letter to the Philadelphian,<sup>79</sup> doubtless was stimulated by

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<sup>76</sup> See above, pp. 194-197.

<sup>77</sup> ALS, Tomlin to Poe, Jackson, Tennessee, February 23, 1844. Griswold MSS, Boston Public Library.

<sup>78</sup> See above, pp. 139-141.

<sup>79</sup> Implied in Wilmer to Tomlin, Philadelphia, March 9, 1842. Mabbott, ed., Merlin, p. 35.

Poe's sympathetic comment. Before receiving Wilmer's reply, Tomlin sent another letter on February 18, making inquiries about the Philadelphian's projected magazine.<sup>80</sup>

Because of delay in the mails, the letter did not reach Wilmer until March 8. On the following day he replied, expressing regret for the delay and surmising that his earlier communication had suffered a similar fate. He repeated his gratitude for Tomlin's design of "vindicating my poem against editorial attack." "I would not," he assured his new champion, "wish to entrust my defence to better hands, and I hope it may at some time be in my power to reciprocate the kindness you have been pleased to show me."<sup>81</sup> Then follows some information concerning his projected magazine and his terms for agents and subscribers. He concluded his letter by bidding his correspondent, "Let me hear from you on all convenient occasions."<sup>82</sup>

Thus encouraged, Tomlin sent on within the next six months two letters,<sup>83</sup> a poem, and a copy of his Guardian review. Ever courteous and obliging, Wilmer promptly acknowledged the letters, "received simultaneously . . . nearly a month after date." Of his disposition of the poetry he said:

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in Wilmer to Tomlin, Philadelphia, March 9, 1842. Mabbott, ed., Merlin, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in Wilmer to Tomlin, Philadelphia, October 5, 1842. Mabbott, ed., Merlin, p. 35.

Your beautiful and truly poetic verses were in type less than two hours after their reception, and were published in the next issue of our paper, a copy of which I caused to be mailed to your address. Mr. Andrews, the publisher of the Express, requests me to add his thanks to mine for the contribution.<sup>84</sup>

Professor Mabbott has noted two indications in the October letter that Wilmer and Poe were, for the time at least, on intimate terms.<sup>85</sup> Wilmer ascribed to "the tightness of the times and the uncertain state of the currency" the postponement of both his own and Poe's magazine ventures, and complained that he had never gotten sight of the copy of Tomlin's "L. A. Wilmer, Esq." because Poe had mislaid it somewhere.

Mentioning a poem he had just completed, "Recantation," which was "an ironical retraction of the opinions set forth in the Quacks of Helicon," Wilmer suggested that he would like to dedicate it to Tomlin. But he did not plan to do so if it would excite any enmity toward Tomlin, and he begged the latter to tell him candidly what he thought of the idea.

Apparently replying to a question from Tomlin about Charles J. Peterson, whose Lady's World of Literature and Fashion was at that time in its first year, Wilmer called the rising young editor "a most odious and contemptible creature," and asserted, "I have lately put him on the rack in such a way as made him a whining suppliant for mercy."<sup>86</sup> Although

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

essentially good-hearted, Wilmer was much given to this kind of remark. In most cases, his bark was far worse than his bite. Tomlin apparently did not take very seriously his correspondent's diatribe against Peterson, for in November he sent a batch of his own verse to the editor of the Lady's World.<sup>87</sup>

It would have been better for all concerned if Tomlin could have dismissed with equal imperturbability Wilmer's derogatory, but not unjust, remarks upon Poe. But Tomlin, incapable of objectivity concerning Poe, allowed himself to be drawn into the quarrel.<sup>88</sup>

There is more to Wilmer's letter of May 20, however, than the portion which involved Tomlin in Poe's feud. Wilmer sensed that the Tennessean, remote from literary circles, was avidly interested in news of the literati, and he obliged with every item that came to mind. "Sumner Lincoln Fairfield," he wrote, "who once ranked high among the writers of our country, has become a common loafer about the streets."<sup>89</sup> Fairfield, the author of two volumes of poetry, The Heir of the World, 1829, and Poetical Works, 1842, would have been known to Tomlin from his contributions to periodicals, annuals, and gift books.

The fame of the next litterateur to engage Wilmer's attention has

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<sup>87</sup> See below, p. 224.

<sup>88</sup> See above, pp. 194-197.

<sup>89</sup> Mabbott, ed., Merlin, p. 37.

extended into the present century by virtue of Ten Nights in a Bar-room. At the time of this letter, eleven years before the issue of his magnus opus, Timothy Shay Arthur was writing highly moralistic temperance essays and didactic stories for children. Wilmer, whose enthusiasms did not always parallel those of the Sons of Temperance, generously conceded his friend's success, but dismissed his labors as "a certain kind of writing" by means of which Arthur had "acquired great popularity" and was "getting along prosperously."

Of the "Philadelphia Clique" Wilmer wrote in such manner as to dissociate himself from it. Particular members he cited were Robert C. Conrad, Joseph C. Neal, and Robert Morris. The clique, averred Wilmer, "has seen its palmyest days and is falling into disrepute;—their association to hold each other up will not avail them."

Gossip about other literati having been generously supplied, Wilmer told his correspondent of his own current work, "Preferment, a political satire, not partizan, or very slightly so." And he closed on a mildly facetious note, "Favor me with a few lines whenever you have time to waste."<sup>90</sup>

The cessation of their correspondence at this point was largely, probably wholly, due to Tomlin's seal on behalf of Poe. After yielding, against his own gentlemanly instincts, to Poe's demands for Wilmer's letter, he could not, without considerable awkwardness and a duplicity foreign to his candid nature, continue writing to Wilmer. Thus a pleasant,

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

if trivial, relation was severed, and the provincial post cut off from a delightful source of metropolitan gossip.

But whatever compunction Tomlin may have felt for his undeniably shabby treatment of Wilmer and whatever regret he experienced at the loss of so entertaining a correspondent could not have been long-lived. The literary postmaster had, during these years, too many correspondents among his distinguished contemporaries to spend any considerable time mourning the loss of one. Besides these four with whom his correspondence was reasonably extensive, an appreciable number of other famous nineteenth-century figures, mainly literary, wrote Tomlin at least one letter in reply to his own. Twenty-eight of those letters he published, along with one or more from his especial friends, Poe, Dickens, Simms, and Wilmer, in "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac."

Before considering the letters in "The Autobiography," however, mention should be made of another group known mainly from a reference in one of Simms' letters to Tefft. Writing to the autograph collector on March 8, 1844, Simms said:

He [Tomlin] tells me that he has sent you letters from a McIver of Scotland, Holmes of Boston, Lunt of Newfoundland, Mrs. Seba Smith, Longfellow, West Thompson, Ann L. Stephens, Dr. Mitchell, E. H. Foster (U. S. Senator from Tennessee), W Allston, Geo. Bancroft, Fernimere Cooper, Fermo Hoffman, Albert Pike and others.<sup>91</sup>

Of those mentioned, Longfellow, Foster, Cooper, Hoffman, and Pike are represented in the "Autobiography," and the letter from Allston is extant in manuscript. Yet to be located are the letters from McIver,

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<sup>91</sup> Olyphant, ed., Letters of Simms, I, 408-409.

Holmes, Lunt, Mrs. Seba Smith, West Thomson (the preferred spelling), Ann L. Stephens, Dr. Mitchell, and George Bancroft. The following entries in the 1867 catalogue of Tefft's autographs may possibly refer to three of these:

- 74 Bancroft, Geo. Historian, 4 ALS, 1838-1842, and signature.
- 75 Bancroft, George, idem, ALS, lto, pp. 2, 1842.
- 651 Holmes, Oliver Wendell, ALS, lto, 1843.
- 951 Mitchill, Saml. L. Author of "Life of Tammany," ALS, lto, 1803.
- 952 Mitchill, Dr. Saml. L. idem, ALS, lto, pp. 3, 1826; ALS, 8vo, pp. 2, 1822; ALS, pp. 1, 1831.<sup>92</sup>

However, even the date of the latest letter entered from Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill probably indicates that it is earlier than any in Tomlin's collection. In view of this dating and of the spelling of the name, it is not even certain that this Dr. Mitchill was the one mentioned by Simms. Tomlin's correspondent might have been John Kearsley Mitchell, physician, scientist, and poet of Philadelphia, Poe's family doctor, and author of Indecision, a Tale of the Far West and Other Poems, which Tomlin probably read.

Even though the letters mentioned by Simms are not extant, it is a relatively easy matter to account for Tomlin's receiving them. Mrs. Smith, West Thomson, Mrs. Stephens, and George Lunt, were, like Tomlin, prolific contributors to periodicals and gift books.<sup>93</sup> Tomlin, encountering their names and reading their stories, essays, or poems, felt free to write to them. And in Mrs. Stephens' case, it is very probable that correspondence

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<sup>92</sup> C. F. Fisher, Catalogue of the Entire Collection of Autographs of the Late Mr. I. K. Tefft, of Savannah, Ga. (New York, 1846), pp. 13, II, 69, 97.

<sup>93</sup> Ralph Thompson, American Literary Annuals and Gift Books, 1825-1865 (New York, 1936), pp. 22, 28, 93, 109, et passim.



also involved his own writing, since she was associate editor of Graham's and later editor of the Lady's World, to both of which Tomlin contributed. Since both Samuel L. and John Kearsley Mitchell were writers as well as physicians, Tomlin's letter to either would have been prompted by reading his work. To the Scottish McIver, still unidentified, and the Bostonian Holmes, Tomlin probably wrote in the same vein as to the famous British and American writers whose letters he used in the "Autobiography." And his own interest in American history, as evinced in his stories "The Spanish Adventurer" and "The Fountain of Youth," could account for the letter to the famous historian Bancroft.

When Tomlin wrote to the painter-poet, Washington Allston, he was probably more inspired by appreciation of the latter's writing than of his painting. Allston's romantic verse would strike a sympathetic chord from the Tennessee poet, and the horror and supernaturalism of Monaldi would endear the novel to him. The artist's reply to what was doubtless a warmly enthusiastic letter was brief and perfunctory:

I beg you to accept my thanks for the very kind opinion you are pleased to express of me and my Works; which is more particularly gratifying as coming from one of my countrymen.<sup>94</sup>

The remainder of Tomlin's known literary correspondence appeared in his curious serial story, "The Autobiography of a Monomaniac." The fictional portion of the serial has already been discussed and need not be repeated here. It is a wildly improbable tale, combining all of the worst elements of nineteenth-century magazine fiction with some slightly

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<sup>94</sup> ALS, Allston to Tomlin, Cambridge Port, Massachusetts, February 3, 1843. Norcross Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

altered circumstances of Tomlin's own life, and is of interest today only as it reflects the reading tastes of the period. But the letters are still of value, in their revelation of authors' personalities and in their demonstration of the remarkable contacts made by a writer living in a relatively remote portion of the United States. Although the order of the letters as they appear in Holden's is not chronological, it has seemed better to follow that order here, both because the letters so considered demonstrate the pattern of Tomlin's own interests during a period of almost eight years, and because they constitute, at the same time, a small segment of British and American socio-literary history.

The earliest letter printed in the "Autobiography" is one from Albert Pike, whom Tomlin calls "the distinguished poet from Arkansas." Writing from Little Rock in March 1840 to thank his Tennessee correspondent for his complimentary remarks, Pike let his fellow poet in on some auctorial secrets. He assured him that the grief expressed in his poem "Isadore" was entirely imaginary, and candidly confessed that he considered "Ariel" the best thing he ever wrote. Commenting on the Arkansan's letter, Tomlin notes, "No man that writes as he does can be devoid of genius--and the State of Arkansas should be proud of such an inhabitant."<sup>95</sup>

In January of 1841, Tomlin had apparently begun to entertain doubts as to his appointment to the coveted postmastership. His sympathies, and vote, having gone to Van Buren, who had lost the 1840 election, Tomlin was reasonably anxious as to whether application made to the latter would be

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<sup>95</sup> Holden's, II (December 1848), 719.

honored now that Van Buren's term was almost over. So the Tennessean made at least desultory effort to secure employment in Nashville, writing to the U. S. Senator from Tennessee, Ephraim K. Foster. He got no encouragement; Foster complained, "I never saw business at such a low ebb in Nashville,"<sup>96</sup> and warned Tomlin that it would be very difficult to find any kind of work there.

By the time Tomlin received the next letter, written by Dickens from England on February 23, 1841, his unemployment worries were over for six years and he could concentrate on his literary enthusiasms. The letter has already been discussed in connection with the Tomlin-Dickens correspondence and it is sufficient to mention that Tomlin considered it of such interest that he used it twice in periodicals, once in Graham's and once again in Holden's.

Like other nineteenth-century American writers, Tomlin had political as well as literary connections. It must be remembered that he held a government position under three presidents, a position which he owed to still a fourth president. It is consequently not surprising to find John Tyler among the postmaster's correspondents. Tyler's letter is introduced into the "Autobiography" by this explanation:

Having had the misfortune to be appointed by Mr. Van Buren to an office in one of the Southwestern States, Mr. Tyler found me administering the duties of my office in a manner that suited my own peculiar views, and not after the manner of the Vicar of Bray. I was written to several times, on the subject

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., III (May 1849), 279.

of my peculiar predilections by the high functionaries composing the elite of the "White House."<sup>97</sup>

Tyler's letter is printed without date, but it gives evidence of having been written shortly after he succeeded to the presidency, probably in 1841 or early 1842. It is not so much concerned with the postmaster's "peculiar predilections" as with a frankly expressed wish to sound out feeling for the new president's policies. Tyler wrote:

The peculiar circumstances in which I have been placed by the death of William Henry Harrison, coupled with the spiteful opposition which the Whig party has taken against my administration, renders it necessary for me to address a few of the leading members of the Van Buren party on the subject of sustaining my views, in relation to the administration of the government. Believing that I will find in you a friend, and one disposed to be generous, even to an enemy, I make free to ask you for an unbiased opinion of my acts since I have been the President of the United States.<sup>98</sup>

In August of 1841, Talfourd, the British barrister and popular writer, sent Tomlin the letter and verses mentioned above.<sup>99</sup> The Sergeant's letter reflects, as do most of the English letters Tomlin received, genuine gratification at a transatlantic expression of appreciation. This may have been partly due to an increasing awareness among English writers of their American reading public. But it may also be attributed to a knack of Tomlin's, in personal correspondence, of transmitting his own genuine warmth and kindness. Talfourd told the American:

Having been on the circuit at the time when your very kind and flattering letter arrived, I only received it on my return yesterday evening. Accept my heartiest thanks for the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., III (January 1849), 28.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> See above, pp. 187-188.

very great pleasure it has afforded me. Although I cannot recognize in my own writings any merits which would seem to me to be capable of exciting such feelings as you have expressed, I am assured by that expression that there is in them something of good, which, however humble in itself, is capable of attracting the sympathies of the good, and inducing them to fancy they perceive excellencies which are only reflected from their own affections.<sup>100</sup>

Although Tomlin was avidly interested in British writers, he did not fail to honor the most popular of his own countrymen. Cooper was one of those whose influence upon the Tennessean is undeniable. Tomlin once said that Cooper was "Bulwer's equal."<sup>101</sup> And in introducing Cooper's letter into the "Autobiography," Tomlin spoke of the former's accomplishments in the novel. After modestly disclaiming the value of "my handwriting," Cooper assures his correspondent of his pleasure in sending it to him. The *New Yorker* then pays a neat compliment to Tennessee and to an illustrious Tennessean:

In this age of railroads, Tennessee is not quite as far from New York as it used to be when the word was first familiarised to my ears, and the time may yet come when we shall consider each other as neighbors. You have more claims than that of being a mere Tennessean, honorable and sufficient as the last might be, for I see you date from "Jackson," Tennessee, which is literally putting the best face on, which is always sufficiently respectable.<sup>102</sup>

The next letter again offers proof of the importance British authors attached to American friendship, especially when, as in the case of the writer, Samuel Warren, they had attained more fame in the States than in

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<sup>100</sup> Holden's, II (November 1848), 649.

<sup>101</sup> See above, p. 140.

<sup>102</sup> Holden's, IV (September 1849), 532.

their native land. Warren, a transplanted Scot living and writing in London, had made so little impress on his countrymen that an English correspondent of Tomlin's, writing from London on August 7, 1841, could say, "I do not know who the author of *Ten thousand a year* is—probably one of the numerous Scotch Clergymen about Edinburgh who despairing of obtaining churches or livings have turned their attention to literature."<sup>103</sup> But the American fame of this author was such that D. C. Gaskill, in whose Southron the letter was published, could reply, "We will merely add for the information of the gentleman across the pond that the author of '*Ten thousand a year*' is Charles [sic] Warren, L. L. D., a Scottish (not clergyman but) lawyer, already favorably known to the American public by his '*Sketches from the Diary of a London physician*' and other Tales."<sup>104</sup> Though Gaskill was vague as to Warren's Christian name, he was quite correct in his opinion of Diary of a London Physician, a group of really powerful short stories. Perhaps because of similar qualities in his own work, Tomlin had been able to enjoy both the rough satire and the squalid melodrama of Ten Thousand a Year, and he addressed his words of praise to the author. The latter was sufficiently gratified to reply on Christmas Day, 1841. Apologizing for not replying sooner, Warren goes on to tell his American admirer:

I have had a very great number of complimentary communications from different parts of the world on the subject of

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<sup>103</sup> "Editor's Table," The Southron, I (November 1841), 391.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

the former work /Diary of a London Physician/. But with the tone of none of them have I been so much gratified as with that of yours. If you really value them, be assured that you have my good wishes for your prosperity and health.<sup>105</sup>

In the early months of 1842, Tomlin was much occupied with correspondence with Lambert Wilmer and with preparing some of his own work for publication. But he was not too busy to write to that producer of "true poetry,"<sup>106</sup> Henry W. Longfellow. Longfellow's reply is kindly and sincere, and his expression of his feeling about the purpose of his work is reminiscent of the British Talfourd's.

I feel sincerely happy when I hear that anything I have written from my own heart finds a response in another's. I feel this to be the best reward an author can receive; as his highest privilege is to speak words of sincerity to those who in sincerity will hear them.<sup>107</sup>

In his comment upon Longfellow, Tomlin voices a criticism which is still valid. Elsewhere he had paid just tribute to the New Englander's poetry. The judgment he now voiced was, and is, especially applicable to the prose writings, notably Hyperion.

Mr. Longfellow is unquestionably a very fine painter, so far as his own individual eye is concerned, but he ever fails to transmute into his own writings the individual character of another. All is Longfellow—every echo being a reverberation for his own voice. His forte is certainly not in dramatic writing.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Holden's, IV (September 1849), 533.

<sup>106</sup> "L. A. Wilmer, Esq.," The Guardian, II (May 1842), 78.

<sup>107</sup> Holden's, II (December 1848), 717.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 718.

From his file of Poe letters, Tomlin chose to use in the "Autobiography" that of October 5, 1842, in which Poe had reassured him that there was no longer anything to prevent his commencing the Penn., since he was to have an office in the Custom House which would leave the greater portion of his time unemployed and still afford him a good salary. In printing the letter, Tomlin prefaced it with some biographical misinformation:

Mr. Poe was born in Virginia in the year 1811, and was adopted by a great-uncle of his, a Mr. Allen, with whom he quarrelled and left most abruptly his uncle's roof for the shores of Greece. He was only then in his fifteenth year. By some mis-hap, instead of landing in Greece, the first place he found himself after leaving home was in St. Petersburg.<sup>109</sup>

It is an interesting coincidence that on the same day Poe was writing the letter which Tomlin used in the "Autobiography" Wilmer should also have been writing to the Tennessean. In his letter, Wilmer had nothing good to offer of a third Philadelphia litterateur, Charles J. Peterson. His derogatory remarks did not, however, deter Tomlin from writing to Peterson.

At the time Peterson replied, he was still associated with Graham in the Saturday Evening Post and Graham's Magazine. He had, however, in January of that year, launched a new woman's magazine. Tomlin had sent him some verse, which Peterson complimented in the course of a long, chatty letter. His comment on Dickens' visit to the United States throws further light on the Poe-Dickens relationship. If Peterson reports

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109 Ibid.



correctly, Poe, although enjoying his interviews with the British novelist,<sup>110</sup> was not blind to certain defects in the latter's judgment.

Peterson told Tomlin:

Box has done as much justice to the country as we deserve, and quite as much as any dispassionate American would ask for. He has been as impartial as he could be considering the character of his mind, for while he notices details accurately he is not capable of comprehensive views, and his imagination, like a woman's, conquers his more reasoning faculties. . . . I didn't see Box, but Poe did, and he said at the time that my estimate of Dickens' character was correct.<sup>111</sup>

There is no evidence that Tomlin's own just estimate of the British novelist was ever altered by any other person's opinion. But there may have been an echo of Peterson's pronouncement in one sentence of the critical comment with which Tomlin introduced his two Dickens letters in Holden's. In that perceptive critique which was published in Graham's in 1843, Tomlin had singled out for especial notice Dickens' kind heart. Nearly six years later he was to make a partial concession to another school of thought. "Whatever difference of opinion," he has Joe Bottom say, "may exist in the minds of the people in relation to the kindly feelings of Mr. Dickens' heart, there are none, I believe, unwilling to award him the possession of high genius."<sup>112</sup> Though Peterson and the publication of American Notes may have shaken a trifle the Tennessee writer's conviction of the universal esteem in which the British writer

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<sup>110</sup> See Grubb, "The Personal and Literary Relationships of Dickens and Poe," pp. 20-22.

<sup>111</sup> Holden's, IV (August 1849), 461.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., III (January 1849), 30.

was held, the Philadelphian had nothing but kindly encouragement for his fellow American, telling him:

Your poetry is often very beautiful. When shall I hear from you again? Have you tried your hand lately at a short tale?<sup>113</sup>

Thus encouraged, Tomlin sent a "short tale," "Herbert Moultrie, a Bad Man of Williamsburg District," to Peterson, who published it in his February 1843 Lady's World.

Very likely it was this association with the Lady's World which initiated a correspondence between Tomlin and Mrs. Ann S. Stephens, associate editor and prolific contributor. Her letter, or letters, according to Simms, were passed on to Tefft in 1844,<sup>114</sup> and were not available to the recipient when he was assembling his autographs for the Holden's serial. Letters from women are decidedly in the minority in this opus; but such slender representation does not indicate that John Tomlin completely neglected the contemporary ladies of belles-lettres. Late in 1842, he addressed himself to a Southern woman whose contributions to current periodicals rivalled those of her Northern sisters in both volume and quality.

Massachusetts-born Caroline Lee Hentz was more ardently Southern in her sympathies and outlook than many a native daughter. Her five years in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where her husband was professor of Modern Languages at the University, had given her a genuine insight into Southern problems and Southern character, reflected in her later pro-slavery novels,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., IV (August 1849), 461.

<sup>114</sup> Oliphant, ed., Letters of Simms, I, 408.

Marcus Warland and The Planter's Northern Bride. At the time when Tomlin wrote to express his admiration of her work, she and her husband, after a few years in charge of a Female Academy near Cincinnati, had settled down in their home, Locust Dell, near Florence, Alabama.<sup>115</sup> Her letter of December 20, 1842, presents a wholly charming picture, of a gracious and amiable woman, delighted with her role as a popular writer and with the tribute that role had elicited, and generously desirous of extending every encouragement to other authors. She was not, she assured Tomlin, offended at this letter from a stranger.

Your name is familiar to my eye, for I have recognized you as a brother worshipper of the Muses, and a fellow laborer in the cause of literature.<sup>116</sup>

In the same month in which the Alabama woman wrote to the Tennessean, an Eastern editor and author, Charles Fenno Hoffman, also penned a reply to Tomlin. The New York editor of the Knickerbocker was of interest to Tomlin on two counts: his connection with a popular periodical, and his attempts to portray Western and Southern subjects in sketches, tales, and one novel, Greyslaer, which dealt, like Simms' Beauchamp and Poe's Politian, with the celebrated "Kentucky Tragedy." Hoffman betrays a slight annoyance at what was doubtless an effusive letter, telling Tomlin that its "strains of excessive eulogy" had first inclined him to regard it as a "hoax." But he continues courteously:

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<sup>115</sup> An informative contemporary sketch of Mrs. Hents was published in The Magnolia, N. S., II (June 1843), 357-360. The most recent notice of this prolific writer is found in North Carolina Authors: A Selective Handbook (Chapel Hill, 1952), p. 60.

<sup>116</sup> Holden's, III (June 1849), 333.

The phraseology is that of a man of education and refinement, and I can scarcely conceive of such a one perpetrating a joke so stupid. I must, therefore, without hesitation, express the pleasure I cannot but feel that any writings of mine should call out a compliment which, however undeserved, appears to be cordial and sincere.<sup>117</sup>

Early in 1843, Tomlin received his second letter from Dickens, discussed above.<sup>118</sup> The following month a letter came from a writer whose literary fame rests largely upon a single production, the widely circulated poem, "My Life is Like the Summer Rose." Tomlin shared with other Southerners a strong enthusiasm for Judge Richard Henry Wilde of New Orleans.<sup>119</sup> From Washington, where he had been attending a session of the Supreme Court, the poet-justice wrote on February 21 to his Tennessee admirer. His letter was in reply to one Tomlin had written in July of the preceding year, delayed in reaching him because of having to be forwarded from New Orleans. Wilde's deprecatory attitude toward his poem appears to be the genuine reaction of a man of manifold talent toward the one work, insignificant in his own eyes, which has caught the popular fancy. He might by now have been weary of encomia upon his sentimental lyric, first published in 1819, but his remarks to his Tennessee correspondent are both modest and courteous.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., III (May 1849), 278.

<sup>118</sup> See above, pp. 200-202.

<sup>119</sup> At Wilde's death, in 1847, Tomlin wrote an elegy, "Lines on the Death of the Hon. Richard Henry Wilde." See above, p. 68.

Having, as I have always . . . a more humble estimate of the merit of the trifle to which you refer, than the public and yourself have been pleased to call it, the very exaggeration of such praise is an additional claim to my gratitude.<sup>120</sup>

The next 1843 letter which Tomlin chose to preserve came from Alexander B. Meek of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, whose writing Tomlin always praised.<sup>121</sup> In introducing the young lawyer-author's letter, Tomlin, as Toddlebar, says, "[He] has for years been favorably known to the readers of the Southern Literary Messenger and Simms Magazine."<sup>122</sup> In his letter of May 24 Meek attempted with patently assumed modesty to disavow all claims to authorship, a disavowal he very promptly negated by furnishing Tomlin with a detailed list of his literary accomplishments. The list is valuable today mainly because of its references to early Southern periodicals, such as the Orion, the Mobile Literary Gazette, the Augusta Mirror, and the Bachelor's Button, to all of which Meek had contributed. The young jurist had also edited the Southron at Tuscaloosa in 1839, and "a thorough-going Democratic journal," the Flag of our Union. He informed Tomlin that he had signed his contributions both by his name and his "anagram," Beaufort H. Keem. And he concluded his lengthy epistle by a promise to send Tomlin a copy of the Bachelor's Button, published, he said, at Mobile by W. R. Smith in 1837 and 1838.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Holden's, III (January 1849), 27-28.

<sup>121</sup> See above, pp. 143-144.

<sup>122</sup> Holden's, III (May 1849), 278.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., pp. 278-279.

Following what appears to be an attempt at sectional grouping, not consistently in evidence in the "Autobiography," Tomlin published Meek's letter in the same chapter as that undated letter of Simms previously discussed. As an introduction, he allowed Bottom a theory of the state of Southern letters which would indicate that the Toddlebar editor's creator had come around to the opinion D. C. Gaskill, editor of the Tennessee Southron, had held in 1841.<sup>124</sup>

The chief cause, in my opinion, why Southern literature has not met with any great success among her own people is that the South can procure a better article from the Eastern market, and at lower rates, than she can get it at home. This is the true secret of her failure. [Here is given a listing of Western and Southern periodicals: Gallagher's Hesperion, Cincinnati; Dr. Macaulay's New Orleans Miscellany; Meek's Southron, Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Caruther's and Simms' Magnolia, Savannah and Charleston respectively; the Lady's Companion, editor unmentioned. Fernfield, Georgia; and two Charleston magazines, the Chicora and Legare's Southern Review. 125] The trials that have been made in these regions have not failed for the want of energy or perseverance on the part of the conductors and supervisors. Something more than this was wanting to successfully compete with the Eastern journals. In the South and West the materials are more difficult to procure, and when procured, generally they are of inferior quality to those that are offered in Boston, New York or Philadelphia.<sup>126</sup>

However great Tomlin's interest in the development of Southern periodical literature, he was equally interested in 1843 in news of British writing and writers. A great deal of such news came to him from

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<sup>124</sup> See above, p. 132.

<sup>125</sup> This is Tomlin's only published notice of the scholarly Review.

<sup>126</sup> Holden's, III (May 1849), 276.

Aubrey de Vere, the Irish poet, who wrote from Dublin on August 29. He told Tomlin of the recent publication of Tennyson's poetry in two volumes, "the latter of which is wholly new, and the former partly so." "His long silence," continued De Vere, "so much to be regretted, is now broken and I hope he will be induced again to give to the world some of those beautiful poems which are lying neglected in his desk."<sup>127</sup> The Irishman agreed with Tomlin that there are "more poetasters than poets," but as for himself he had "a great admiration for the latter class, and no intolerable feeling for the former, occupying, as I think I do, something like a middle position between both." In spite of the predominance of poetasters, some excellent poetry, observed De Vere, had recently been published by five poets. An unfortunate misprint in the Holden's text leaves one of them still unidentified: "Mr. Bowing" may be Browning or Bowring; if the former, De Vere had probably been reading the first five Bells and Pomegranates, which included Pippa Passes and A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.<sup>128</sup> The other four poets mentioned are "Mr. Milnes," almost certainly Richard Monckton Milnes, Keats' biographer and Tennyson's friend; Mr. Hartley Coleridge; Sir Francis Doyle; and Mr. Taylor. Of Taylor's closet dramas De Vere remarked, "[His] last work, 'Edwin the Fair,' you are doubtless acquainted with, as well as his former one, 'Philip Van Arbalde' [Artevelde]."

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., IV (August 1849), 460.

<sup>128</sup> Professor Mabbott says, "It is a pity that this word should not be clear, for while Tennyson was known a little from reviews, Browning was rarely known as early." "Correspondence of John Tomlin," Notes & Queries, CLXIV (April 1933), 293.

which has been republished in America." Having supplied his American correspondent generously with literary news, De Vere closed with a complaint characteristic of poets of any age, "The public have grown of late very refractory in the matter of buying verses--whether from having grown too prosaic to read poetry, or so partial that every man is his own poet."<sup>129</sup>

It was a far cry, in that summer of 1843, from County Dublin to Savannah, Georgia. Residing in that Southern American city was one of the most famous of nineteenth-century autograph collectors, Israel Keesch Tefft, Secretary of the Georgia Historical Society. The inclusion of Mr. Tefft's September 4 letter in the serial was a peculiarly apt touch, in view of the "Autobiographer's" mania for autography.

The Savannah collector thanks Tomlin for his letter of August 18 and for the offer of autographs, and refers to Tomlin's "own familiar correspondence for many years with many of the eminent literary men of both hemispheres." Assuring Tomlin that he will be happy to receive autographs, he adds a flattering request well calculated to insure a favorable response from the Tennessee author:

I am indebted to our excellent friend, Dr. Simms for your note to him of the 26th June, in which you speak of sonnets inscribed with his name and which you designed for the Magnolia. That periodical having been discontinued the sonnets may not have been published--can you spare me a copy from the original?<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Holden's, IV (August 1849), 460.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., III (June 1849), 331.



A nine-months hiatus now appears in Tomlin's correspondence as published in the "Autobiography." Perhaps his embroilment in the Poe-Wilmer feud troubled him too much for extensive letter writing. At any rate, the next letter of which we have knowledge is a reply, brief almost to the point of brusqueness, from Henry Clay. On the thirteenth of June 1844, Clay wrote to the Tennessean, "I take pleasure in complying with the request, made in your letter of the 6th instant, for my autograph."<sup>131</sup> Tomlin's comment, inaccurate as to Clay's ancestry, is an amusing expression of his own democratic attitude:

This tall son of Anak—of the F. F. V.—and O God! tell me who are the first families of Virginia. I know not, and indeed I care not.<sup>132</sup>

Clay's victorious opponent in the 1844 election was also a correspondent of Tomlin's. Although the Polk letter is undated, internal evidence establishes its chronological place with reasonable accuracy some time in the summer of 1844. Polk wrote from his home in Columbia to his fellow Tennessean, whose political opinion he very apparently valued, whether because, as his words seem to indicate, of some knowledge of Tomlin's sagacity in public affairs, or simply because the candidate knew that the postmastership provided the Jacksonian with a valuable listening post:

A long acquaintance with you, and some previous knowledge of your family, have induced me to address you on the subject of the pending Presidential contest. . . . You will therefore, please oblige me by informing me, by return mail, what my

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., II (December 1848), 719.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

prospects are for getting the electoral vote in your state.<sup>133</sup>

The Clay and Polk letters give a predominantly political cast to the 1844 correspondence, as published in the "Autobiography." Actually, however, Tomlin wrote at least once to Poe in that year, and once to his other "valued friend," Simms.<sup>134</sup>

In 1845 the correspondence again becomes mainly literary. The first known letter of that year is from Lucius Hine, the young Cincinnati lawyer who had taken over from W. D. Gallagher the publication of a series of ambitious periodicals, the Western Literary Journal and Monthly Magazine, the Quarterly Journal and Review, and the Herald of Truth.<sup>135</sup>

Hine's letter, written in February, mentioned a manuscript which Tomlin had promised to send him, and assured his contributor, "Your poem 'The Heritage' is printed for the 5th no., which will be out on the 21st of March."<sup>136</sup>

While keeping in touch with Western American publishers, Tomlin was also making additional contact with the transatlantic literary world. Early in 1845, or possibly late in 1844, he had addressed himself to another of the eminent Victorians, Thomas Babington Macaulay. As has been

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., III (January 1849), 28.

<sup>134</sup> See above, p. 206.

<sup>135</sup> Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 3 vols. (New York, 1930), I, 387-388.

<sup>136</sup> Holden's, IV (November 1849), 655.

remarked before, the British correspondents were invariably cordial in reply, seeming to derive much satisfaction from having an admirer in the "backwoods" of Tennessee. The great historian was no exception. He thanked Tomlin warmly for "the kindly tones of your letter and for the good will you express for me and mine."<sup>137</sup> As further token of his regard for his American correspondent, he promised to send him a copy of his History of England.<sup>138</sup>

The 1845 correspondence, like the 1842, had one feminine representative. The recipient of Tomlin's letter of that year, however, was not able to assess her Southern admirer's gallantry at its proper value, nor to reply with the required touch of lightness, so ably displayed by Mrs. Hents. On the contrary, "Grace Greenwood," actually Miss Sarah J. Clark, of New Brighton, Pennsylvania, showed considerable huffiness at being addressed. Tomlin's letter which provoked such asperity is not extant, but there is no reason to believe that it contained anything more objectionable than extravagant praise for Miss Clark's poetry, along with some pretty compliments for the poetess. Any Southern woman would have known how to receive such badinage, and to return in kind. Not so with the prim Pennsylvanian! Writing from New Brighton on October 25, she sternly rebuked Tomlin for what she chose to call his "declaration" and waxed melodramatically indignant at the Southerner's persiflage:

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.654.

<sup>138</sup> Professor Mabbott suggests, in "Correspondence of John Tomlin," Notes & Queries, CLXIV (April 29, 1933), 294, that "probably the Tennessee postmaster offered to buy Macaulay's next work."

As it is not in my nature to make a jest of any deep and serious feeling, I do not precisely approve of your attempt to do so. Had your letter been addressed to a woman girlishly confiding, unlearned in the ways of the world, and in the ways of man, it might have caused great and lasting unhappiness.<sup>139</sup>

Ever the gentleman, Tomlin refrained from commenting on the ridiculously uncalled-for rebuke. He simply placed after "Grace Greenwood's" letter in the "Autobiography" Caroline Lee Hentz's charmingly agreeable letter,<sup>140</sup> leaving the reader to make whatever odious comparisons might be warranted. As further token that he bore no malice, the Tennessean some five years after receipt of the rebuke cheerfully indited a rhymed "declaration" to the Eastern poetess. It was published in Holden's,<sup>141</sup> and if the lady was again offended, she gave no sign.

Besides the Simms letter, none actually received by Tomlin in 1846 appear in the "Autobiography." A fictitious one, however, is provided; it is dated Jackson, Tennessee, June 2, 1846, and is signed "John Tomlin." By its introduction Tomlin apparently hoped to accomplish two things: to divert his readers' suspicion of the identity of Joe Bottom (and James Toddlebar!), and to give himself and his works a puff. He is becomingly modest in carrying out the second purpose, resolutely refusing to capitalize upon his auctorial anonymity:

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<sup>139</sup> Holden's, III (June 1849), 332.

<sup>140</sup> See above, pp. 226-228.

<sup>141</sup> "To Grace Greenwood," Holden's, V (February 1850), 125. See above, pp. 83-84.

To the magazines of the day this gentleman has been for the last eight or ten years a regular and constant contributor. He has published, I believe, one or two books—but from the way in which they have been brought forward they have attracted but little of public attention. He is an amateur author and not a professional one—writing in his leisure hours for the very love of the thing, and without any hope of a future reward.<sup>142</sup>

From 1847 only two letters are extant. The first brought John Tomlin sad news from the Mexican battle-front. On April 25, William T. Haskell, Colonel of the Second Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers, wrote to the postmaster from Cerro Gordo, Mexico. Colonel Haskell informed him of the death of two Jacksonians in the battle of Cerro Gordo, Adjutant Wiley P. Hale and Lieutenant Thomas Ewell. The latter, said Haskell, was complimented for bravery by General Winfield Scott.<sup>143</sup>

The other letter remaining from 1847 is from Frederick P. Stanton of Memphis, Congressman and amateur poet and song-writer. Tomlin had written to compliment the Memphian on a song then in high favor, "Alleghany." Replying on October 8, Stanton displayed suitable modesty regarding his own literary effort and complimented his correspondent on the latter's.

I am under obligations for your flattering favor of the 6th inst. You appreciate my little production too highly—though no man can judge better than yourself, who have long had the reputation of a poet.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Holden's, IV (October 1849), 619.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., IV (November 1849), 655.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., IV (October 1849), 620.

Commenting on Stanton's poetry, Tomlin once more voices his conviction that great writing will come out of the West, a conviction he had first expressed in the essay "Western Literature," published in the Guardian in 1842.<sup>145</sup> As in that article, Tomlin's phrases fall into poetic cadences as he prophesies the coming of a great American writer.

Should a literature ever arise among us, representing our peculiar institutions, the mind that gives it birth will be born on this noble river [the Mississippi]. It is there that the bard will arise, with the intellect of a giant—in the broad prairies of the West, with a spell on his heart as deep as the inspiration on his mind. His vision will be as large as the Savannah around him, penetrating as the sun and deep as the solitudes of her forests. From the two oceans he will look, as he stands on the broad prairie, with a vision that mistakes not its object, and with consciousness that glows with the noble theme of his song.<sup>146</sup>

Tomlin's postmastership terminated in December 1847. In the spring of 1848 he made a visit to his nephew Hiram in Jefferson, Texas, a visit which resulted in his second book, Tales of the Cadde. Consequently, it was a very busy year, for he was preparing the "Autobiography" for publication in Holden's, and working at the same time on the Texas stories. But there was time, also, for some correspondence, which went into the "Autobiography" in 1849. In June there was an exchange of letters between the Tennessee writer and Lewis J. Cist, a lesser member of the Cincinnati literary group with which Tomlin had had contact from time to time. Cist was himself the author of one volume of poems and the editor of a weekly paper. He wrote to his Tennessee correspondent on June 30.

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<sup>145</sup> See above, p. 138.

<sup>146</sup> Holden's, IV (October 1849), 620.

Like Israel Tefft, Cist was an autograph collector. After declining Tomlin's offer of a letter from Simms, he suggests that perhaps Tomlin may aid him in procuring autographs of "some of your public men now deceased." Of greater interest is his concluding paragraph, which indicates that even at this late date Tomlin had been soliciting aid for Poe.

I have ever been a warm admirer of the genius and writings of Mr. Poe, and shall hail with pleasure his return to the editorial tripod. I would I could aid him in his projected enterprise, but such is at this time the stagnation of business here and the real dearth of money that I fear few if any subscribers could be obtained in our city at present. If he, however, will send his prospectus to Mr. C. W. James, or any other periodical agent here, and desire him to acquaint me with the fact, I will with pleasure call the attention of our public to it, through the medium of our papers here, both editorially and by communication.<sup>147</sup>

The second 1848 letter came from another of the political acquaintances Tomlin acquired by virtue of his own minor government position. Solon Borland, the very aptly named Senator from Arkansas, wrote from Washington on August 3. His observations on politics in general and his own political position in particular indicate that Borland was something more than a run-of-the-mill politician.

To receive the warm hearted congratulations of one like yourself, who has ever been kind, is a most grateful incident--truly an oasis in this arid world. "Arid," did I say? Ay! arid, and nowhere is the term more applicable than to the world of politics, for, verily, there is little in it that the heart can lay hold on. And yet, strange infatuation, how even the heart yearns toward it! There is a philosophy in this--but it lies deeper than I can just now dive for it. I sent in your communication to the Union, but, as I have not yet seen it, I

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., III (June 1849), 331-332.

fear my sending it has done it some prejudice; for some reason I am no favorite in that vulture's nest, brooded over by Buchanan, Ritchie, and Co. Perhaps because I sometimes take the liberty to deny their infallibility—and express the belief that they are, in some degree, responsible for the diminution our party has suffered under their management.<sup>148</sup>

Tomlin's own literary interests prompted the last letter of this year. In 1848, Thomas Buchanan Read, who was to achieve lasting fame sixteen years later by that perennial favorite for schoolboy declamation, "Sheridan's Ride," had already a sufficiently well established reputation as poet and painter to be chosen letterpress editor for Sartain's ambitious annual, The American Gallery of Art.<sup>149</sup> The appearance of Tomlin's poem "The Heritage" as one of the "original articles" in this handsome gift book probably furnished the point of closest contact between Tomlin and Read, but each had undoubtedly known the other by name as a contributor to popular periodicals, among them Godley's and Peterson's Lady's World.<sup>150</sup>

On December 4, the poet-painter penned a reply to a letter of Tomlin's. It would appear from his remarks that Tomlin, while writing to the Philadelphian, had had on his mind two unfortunate incidents of his literary correspondence, his betrayal of Wilmer to Poe, and his unintentional insult to "Grace Greenwood." Not that he seems to have mentioned particulars; apparently he spoke with admiration of Lambert Wilmer's

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., IV (September 1849), 534.

<sup>149</sup> See above, p. 75.

<sup>150</sup> Mott, History of American Magazines, I, 546, 587.



satire and made studiedly casual inquiry about "Grace Greenwood." Read replied:

"The Quacks of Helicon" by Wilmer I have never seen. "Grace Greenwood" (Miss Sarah J. Clark) resides in this state, and so far as I am aware has not been over-rated by Mr. Willis.<sup>151</sup>

And wither because Tomlin had asked for news of his idol or simply because Poe was always of interest to the literati, North or South, Read passed on a rumor concerning the tragi-comic affair with Mrs. Helen Whitman, "Poe, I understand, is about to be married to an ancient and invalid heiress somewhere Down East."<sup>152</sup>

There remain of Tomlin's literary correspondence as it appeared in the "Autobiography" four letters which cannot be definitely dated. For the undated letters of Tyler and Polk, previously discussed, internal evidence made reasonably accurate dating possible. This is not the case with the remaining four, for which only conjecture is practicable. Regardless of date, all are significant, revealing as they do how this minor American periodical writer's literary life impinged upon that of the great figures of his age.

Of these four, one is of doubtful authenticity. It is the letter which Godey is supposed to have written James Toddlebar, hero of the "Autobiography," to inquire his intentions toward Laura Todhunter.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Holden's, IV (August 1849), 461.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., III (January 1849), 26. And see above, p. 126.

One solution for this letter has already been offered, that Tomlin made it out of whole cloth and supplied Holden's with an authentic Godey signature from a business letter. But another possibility suggests itself. At the time Tomlin directed his imprudently, and probably unwittingly, impassioned epistle to "Grace Greenwood," that lady was one of Godey's most valued contributors. It may have been that Tomlin, not knowing Miss Clark's actual name or her home address, sent his unfortunate letter in care of Godey. If so, the affronted poetess may have vented her injured feelings on Godey as well as on the writer of the offending letter, with the result that the widely-advertised champion of female purity may have felt called upon to rebuke the rash correspondent. Had he done so, it would have been a comparatively simple matter for Tomlin to make the few minor emendations which would bring the actual letter into line with the fictional pattern of the "Autobiography." Such tampering would have had no more implications of illegality than the printing of an entirely fictitious letter above a facsimile of the authentic Godey signature.

Real or fictitious, or partly both, the Godey letter was followed by an accurate appraisal of the editor's position in the literary world, into which Tomlin tucked some flattery in the form of autographical analysis.

Mr. Godey, so far as I am acquainted, is not a writer of any distinction, yet his autograph is valuable as the writing of one with whom the literati of our country has [sic] had much to do. It is a manly one, and denotes firmness of purpose, and unscrupulous [sic!] honesty of character. The ladies of America, if no other ones, are certainly under great obligations

to him for the fine manner in which he has invariably gotten up the "Lady's Book."<sup>154</sup>

For each of the three remaining letters, the date but not the authenticity is doubtful. All are from eminent figures of Victorian literature, two still accorded eminence, the third of less abiding popularity. There is no reason for believing that any of the three antedated the 1841 letters of Charles Dickens and Samuel Warren, and one bit in the third may place it somewhere nearer 1848 than the other two. Aside from this unsubstantiated conjecture, the letters from Tennyson, Landor, and Charles Lever remain undated, and will be considered apart from chronological position.

Tennyson wrote in cordial vein from Boxley (printed Bokley in Holden's) Hall, Maidstone, Kent, expressing pleasure at "a token of approbation from a stranger in so remote a region of the world." With that conscious awareness of scientific achievement which characterized his thinking, he told his transatlantic correspondent, "It is one of the privileges of this age that men's words can in a short time fly far and reach distant hearts."<sup>155</sup> He apologized for his delay in replying to Tomlin's "friendly letter," which reached him tardily because the American had addressed it merely "London." Perhaps Tomlin in his remote region of the world had a clearer conception of Tennyson's fame than the poet himself; on the other hand, the efficiency of the British postal system may account for the letter's finally reaching the addressee,

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., IV (October 1849), 618.

who said modestly, "London having two millions of people, it was not all at once that the post office found me out."

Whatever Tennyson's estimate of his own eminence, he was stirred at the thought of the natural majesty amid which his correspondent lived. "I should like very well," he told the American, "to shake hands with you on the banks of the Mississippi, that great river which I have often read and heard of and visited in imagination." And the letter was concluded, as it began, with that tone of personal cordiality Tomlin almost invariably evoked from those to whom his own sincere tributes went.

In the meantime, since the Atlantic rolls between us, receive my good wishes, given as warmly as if I shook you by the real fleshly hand--and my thanks for your kindness in writing.<sup>156</sup>

As Tennyson's letter indicates, Tomlin had an almost uncanny instinct for striking the right note in his transatlantic correspondence. Himself aware of the breadth and grandeur of his own country, he had the ability to transmit a sense of its wonders to those who lived in the constricted area of the British Isles. Mississippi was a talismanic word, as Walter Savage Landor's letter, dated only April 20th, indicates. Like Tennyson's, it is a charming letter, demonstrating the writer's genuine pleasure at praise from an American "backwoodsman." Landor mentions his own contributions to Lady Blessington's Book of Beauty and to Blackwood's. Referring to an abusive article in the latter, he confesses that he never reads unfavorable criticism for fear he might "step down to answer it."

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

The letter is concluded by a pertinent allusion to his American admirer's habitat:

I have now given you an account of as curious an animal as any on the Mississippi, and as wise a one as any—except the beaver. By the way, I suppose the beaver does not go so far South.<sup>157</sup>

The writer of the fourth letter in this undated group was Charles Lever, to whom Tomlin referred in introduction as "the celebrated Irish novelist." It was an accurate designation, for Lever's Confessions of Harry Lorrequer and Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon both had a great vogue in the United States. That Lever looked with as kindly eye as other Britishers on an epistle from an unknown admirer from the remote regions of America is evident from his brief but cordial letter. Also evident is that same yearning for publication in British magazines which had prompted Tomlin to send his "Shelley's Grave" to Dickens. Tomlin's letter to the Irish author may have been written in the fall of 1847. At that time his term as postmaster was nearing expiration, and he was anticipating his trip to Texas. His plans might well have included an extension of his western tour to include the Rockies. From Temple Sue [sic] House, County Dublin, the accommodating Irishman replied:

I beg, in reply to your letter of Oct 30th, to state that if you forward to me your MSS of a tour to the Rocky Mountains I shall feel great pleasure in giving it my earliest and best attention with regard to its future publication in the Dublin University Magazine.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., IV (August 1849), 459.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., IV (November 1849), 156.

Whatever letters Tomlin may have written and received after 1848 have not been preserved. It is doubtful that many more existed, for the circumstances of his last year and a half were not conducive to pleasant, leisurely correspondence. But before those lean last months came upon him, Tomlin had entered, through correspondence, into the lives of a great many writers of his age.

With Poe he had made plans for the founding of a literary periodical of a high degree of excellence, generously promising financial assistance and actually securing subscribers. Moreover, he had, for five years, furnished unfailing encouragement and sympathy to one who sorely needed both.

Although his correspondence with Dickens was slight in volume, he had caused a letter from the great Englishman to be printed in a popular American magazine, and had himself furnished a valuable contribution to early American criticism of Dickens.

To his fellow Southerner Simms he had offered steady encouragement and warm appreciation, and had done him, furthermore, the signal service of providing autographs for his friend Tefft's collection. Simms had considered Tomlin's published work of sufficient importance to warrant the Tennessean's inclusion in Duyckinck's Cyclopedia of American Writers.

With Lambert Wilmer, Tomlin had entered into a pleasant interchange of compliment and of literary gossip. That this interchange was unfortunately interrupted is due largely to Poe's irascibility. Both the Tennessean and the Philadelphian were good friends to the sensitive genius, and their cordial letters form a pleasant segment of nineteenth-century

American literary history, in spite of the one dark spot in Tomlin's treatment of Wilmer.

To the great and the near-great among contemporary British writers he had sent ever-welcome tokens that their words were read and approved even in the remoter sections of America. Famous poets and novelists of his own country had been honored by his tributes to their work. Finally, among an extensive group of minor writers he had ranged happily, widening the bounds of his literary correspondence to include a substantial number of those who, like himself, had found a medium of expression in the ever-increasing number of nineteenth-century periodicals.

## CHAPTER VII

### INDIVIDUAL AND REPRESENTATIVE CRAFTSMAN

Throughout this study of the literary life of John Tomlin, emphasis has been laid upon his writings as representative of American periodical literature of the so-called "golden age." Tomlin was actively engaged in literary pursuits during the last fifteen years of that quarter-century from 1825 to 1850 when magazine publication and circulation were increasing rapidly in the United States. During six of those years, from 1841 to 1847, he was in a peculiarly advantageous position to profit from the "golden age." As postmaster at Jackson, Tennessee, he handled all periodicals coming into the town, reading all with interest and acting as agent for some. Thus, his own desire for self-expression through literary creation which had already manifested itself while he was still a storekeeper was enormously stimulated. The more he read from other periodical writers, the more he wished to write. For a decade, beginning a year before he became postmaster and continuing until his death, a stream of verse, stories, and literary essays flowed from his pen and poured into the editorial offices of a number of popular magazines. An appreciable number of his contributions were published, sufficient in quantity to warrant the assumption that both editors and readers found them satisfactory.

When this published work of John Tomlin is analyzed and compared with contemporary periodical writing, it is found to be representative of



the "golden age" in four major characteristics: the variety of magazines to which he contributed; the literary forms in which he wrote; the influences apparent in his work; and the nineteenth-century fads and interests he touched upon. To this degree, John Tomlin's literary life may be said to parallel that of any or all of a large number of minor periodical writers who exerted a reciprocal influence on the tastes of an ever increasing number of readers in the mid-nineteenth century. It will be profitable now to consider other characteristics which, taken separately, are also representative of the period, but which, as they combine in John Tomlin's literary life, serve to individualize him as a writer.

Worthy of note is the breadth of his interests as compared to the relative narrowness of his milieu. Although his early life on a South Carolina plantation included such cultural elements as books, music, and religious instruction, his formal schooling ended in his early teens. His only early travels were the trips back and forth from his plantation home to Mr. McDougal's school in Sumter, with an occasional visit to Charleston. And although the removal to the "western wilderness" of Tennessee was, in 1827, an exciting adventure, it scarcely improved his cultural advantages. There is evidence that some of his Jackson friends shared his literary interests, but, on the other hand, we have his own testimony that his poetic aspirations were the object of much ridicule. Allowing for the natural tendency of a conscious artist to exaggerate his separation from ordinary mortals, it must still be admitted that he had no part in a congenial literary and artistic circle. Such contacts

as Tomlin had with the world of ideas and of creative activity he had to make for himself, first through reading and then through an ever widening circle of correspondents.

Through his correspondence, Tomlin, in his "western wilderness," kept in touch with editors, publishers, and writers all over the South and West, and in the great literary centers of the East. Nor did he confine himself to his own country, but extended his literary contacts to include many of the British Victorians, among them his particular idol, the great Charles Dickens. Thus, his literary correspondence led him into stimulating relationships with major and minor writers of both countries.

Among Poe's numerous correspondents, Tomlin occupies a nearly unique position because of the very practical aid he gave toward the establishment of the Penn and/or Stylus. Poe's magazine project carried an especial appeal for Tomlin, who was as much interested in the dissemination as in the creation of literature. In addition to encouragement and sympathy, he provided Poe with substantial proof of his interest and backing in the form of a goodly number of advance subscriptions. It is safe to say that if all of Poe's well-wishers had followed Tomlin's example, Poe's long cherished dream would have been far more likely to be translated into reality.

In addition to his general interest in contemporary American and English literature, Tomlin was particularly occupied with the idea of promoting Southern writing. However busy he might be with his poems and

stories for Eastern magazines of extensive circulation, he never failed to offer encouragement to editors of struggling Southern periodicals. His work appeared in the two ante-bellum literary magazines of Tennessee, the short-lived Southron and the hardier Guardian. He read and contributed to the Messenger, the Magnolia, and the Southern and Western Magazine. And at least once he made an effort to establish a periodical of his own, to be called the New Era and designed principally as a vehicle for the publication of Southern writing.

So great was Tomlin's predilection for the literature of his own region that it often blunted his critical faculties. That he was capable of recognizing actual greatness is apparent from his opinions of Dickens and Poe. But if a writer was Southern, Tomlin was ready to heap praise on him, with the result that he made no appreciable distinction between a person of average talent like Alexander Meek and a really gifted writer like Simms.

Of even greater significance as a matter of literary history is Tomlin's "Westernism." Living and writing at a time when the drama of the westward movement of civilization was being re-enacted almost daily upon this continent, Tomlin was fully aware of the potentialities for literary grandeur in what was at the moment the "West" of the United States. To him, all the breadth and nobility of the "West" were present on the banks of the Mississippi, and there, he felt, would the great literature of America originate. He put his vision of the future into critical writing which still retains some of the poetic quality always inherent in true prophecy. His "Westernism" took him one step further.

A visit to Texas resulted in a collection of short stories, Tales of the Cade, his second published book and one of the earliest pieces of fiction dealing with that particular segment of the American frontier.

One or more of these additional representative qualities may be noted in other writers of the period, but seldom are all so strongly evidenced in a single literary life as in Tomlin's. Nor did any other writer of the period stand in exactly the same relation to Poe. Tomlin's early recognition of Poe's abilities and the very substantial assistance the Tennessean was able to give his friend have no counterpart.

Let us now turn to certain noteworthy features of Tomlin's own writing. Mediocre as this writing was, and representative in its mediocrity of the average periodical verse and prose of the mid-nineteenth century, it is not wholly without merit. In the poetry, too often marred, as B. B. Minor once noted, by obscurity and defects in construction, there are, nevertheless, lines notable for their evocative quality or their forceful expression of valid ideas. Tomlin's elegiac verse frequently transcended the prevailing bathos of its kind. He was capable on occasion of acute perception and flashes of insight which resulted in such an almost totally un sentimental poem as "The Old Man," in which no attempt is made to gloss over the inescapable sadness of age. Equally realistic and free of the pathetic fallacy too often present in Nature poems of the Romantic school is his brief meditative lyric, "Earth and Ocean," in which the sea is designated, with considerable poetic power, as a "foe to human deeds and dust." Other lines and phrases linger in the memory and merit repetition, such as these from the religious poem,

"Trust in God," in which the Christian is enjoined to follow the example of Moses:

With the golden, charmed rod,  
Break the waters from the rock.

Tomlin's handling of certain recurrent concepts in his fiction likewise merits attention. His treatment of the American Indian, for example, displays something more than literary derivation. The Indian mounds near his Tennessee home attracted his notice and gave him a sense of the essential human dignity of these first Americans. Consequently, although frequently inclined to over-romanticise his fictional red men, he was never guilty of conceiving them as sub-human creatures, incapable of improvement. And in one instance, he succeeded in presenting a reasonably objective portrait of an Indian. The Casique Hatuey, in "The Fountain of Youth," is a convincing depiction of an individual and not a mere stock type.

Equally interesting are Tomlin's characterizations of women. Although some of his heroines are the conventionally colorless and negatively good "females" of average sentimental fiction, an almost exactly opposite type appears more often in his stories, the young woman who dares to think for herself and to be independent of conventions as such. This "new woman" is presented with every evidence of approval, unqualified by such doubts as hindered the Puritan Hawthorne from ever according a happy future to his dark ladies of dubious past. Even when Tomlin's unconventional heroine is, like the Comito of his two-part "Theodoric," completely immoral, her brazen conduct and bold speech are reported with obvious relish. But

where Tomlin is at his best in depicting an emancipated female is in his Texan stories. Here his heroines are not bad women, but pert, intelligent frontier beauties, whose conversation and actions are as innocent of subterfuge and of shackling inhibition as the elemental life surging around them.

There is a humorous element in the forthright speech and bland indifference to convention displayed by Tomlin's Western women. But even more humor is achieved by another type of character appearing in Tales of the Caddo, the rowdy frontiersman. The very names Tomlin gave these freebooters and roustabouts have an appropriate comic quality: Rube Deadrick, Ike Wayland, Simon Fugler, and Reuben Whitlow carry a flavor of definite vulgarity. And the coarse language, physical ugliness, and pugilistic propensities of these Rubes and Ikes contribute to the stories in which they appear a quality of "low" comedy reminiscent of an early Shakespearean farce.

One other element of Tales of the Caddo deserves mention in any discussion of Tomlin's achievements as an individual writer. He was able to perceive and to depict with some clarity the confusion of values always resulting when a society is in a state of flux. Although he was not above presenting an outlaw-hero in the Romantic tradition, he displayed no sentimental sympathies with wickedness, rapaciousness, or cruelty. Particularly effective is his depiction of the dangers attendant upon unauthorized punishment of offenders, when those who take the law into their own hands are often more guilty than their victims.

An especially notable characteristic of Tomlin's writing is the frequent manifestation in his prose, both as an integral part of the criticism and as the subject of digressions in the fiction, of his zeal for the fostering of a native literature. Writing at a time when American literature was still largely subservient to the traditions of the past, Tomlin was able to envision the emergence of poetry, drama, and fiction which would be fully worthy of both the natural grandeur and the democratic spirit of America. As he put it, this Western literature which should come after him would represent "our peculiar institutions, more magnificent and more forcible than has been produced in any country."

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