REGIONALISM IN THE THREE SOUTHS

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Every corner of America in the late nineteenth century boasted its share of regional writers, but the local color movement in the South was especially significant. The South had produced so few novelists and poets before the Civil War that their appearance in large numbers afterwards was observed with particular interest. Southern writers recorded the passing of a way of life and the resulting social upheaval. The rest of the nation watched with the proverbial interest of the conqueror in the conquered. The most popular literary descriptions of Southern life appearing after the Civil War were nostalgic eulogies of a vanishing chivalric world. Such oversimplified appraisals of Southern institutions gained public acceptance but failed to reflect the complexity of the South and its literature.

The plantation literary tradition and its chief spokesman, Thomas Nelson Page, tended to overshadow the contributions of Southern writers who were concerned with the future of their region and who protested that the real South lay undiscovered. By investigating the myths of Southern life and the seldom recognized attempts of a few Southerners, such as George W. Cable and Mary Murfree, to refute these myths we learn a good deal about our nation as a whole and also about one of its more “curious” regions. It is interesting that a just survey of Southern literature reveals themes which appear in the Midwestern stories of Hamlin Garland. A closer look at the Southern literature of this period will illustrate the common bonds between dissimilar localities.

Southern literature is not the product of one, but of three regions: the Tidewater and Atlantic coastal South, the mountaineers’ South, and the deep South. Before the first World War the literary image of the South was dominated by accounts of life on the Tidewater plantations. More recently the Southern image has been shaped by writers describing Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. A meaningful survey of Southern letters involves the consideration of authors from all three regions.

Although the early settlers of the Southern Atlantic states prided themselves on their cultural sophistication, they were strangely unconcerned with reading or authorship. Page apologetically declared that the role of the planter class in shaping a democratic

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government and an equitable system of law interfered with a purely bellicose attitude toward letters. Less than five percent of the white population of the South were slave-holders and only a minute portion of these comprised the so-called planter class. Yet it was the men with the greatest commitments to the plantation system and to self-government who became the literary spokesmen for their region. Nearly all significant ante-bellum literature therefore has as its focus plantation life. Francis Pendleton Gaines, surveying this field of literature in 1925, notes the long tradition of plantation literature beginning with John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* in 1832. *Swallow Barn* is a series of sketches in the tradition of Washington Irving’s *Bracebridge Hall* (1822). As such it portrays the happier aspects of old-time society in the South. The author’s concern is in illustrating regional types rather than in developing believable personalities. Two decades after *Swallow Barn* and Kennedy’s later novels, *Horseshoe Robinson* and *Rob of the Bowl*, Philip Pendleton Cooke and his brother, John Esten Cooke, added some glamorous chapters to the plantation legend. Philip Cooke’s stories of Virginia life and John Cooke’s novels, *Leather Stocking and Silk* (1852) and *Virginia Comedians* (1854), exaggerated the virtues of the Southern landowner. Page accused John Cooke of “writing through the rose-colored lenses of Sir Walter Scott,” and George W. Bagby in 1859 declared his intention to bring about “the unkind but complete destruction” of Cooke’s reputation. Later Bagby turned romancer himself in “The Old Virginia Gentleman” (1877); he and Page did more to encourage ancestor worship and nostalgia for the Old South than any of their literary predecessors. As an example, note Bagby’s description of the plantation mistress which was the inspiration for Page’s heroines in *Red Rock* (1898) and *In Ole Virginia* (1887):

The ways of the great world had ceased long ago to be her ways. She lived in a little world of her own. She could not keep pace with the fast-changing fashions, which, in her pure mind, were not always for the better. Her manner was not, in the usual sense, high-bred; for hers was the highest breeding, and she had no manner. But her welcome as you entered her door, and her greeting, meet her where you might, on the endless round of her duties, in-doors or out, was as simple and genial as sunshine, and as sweet as spring water.\(^4\)

William Gilmore Simms was more involved in sponsoring a Southern literary renaissance than in praising the aristocracy. With James Wright Simmons he founded the Southern Literary Gazette

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\(^2\) Quoted by J. O. Beatty, *John Esten Cooke*, pp. 67–70.


“to encourage the efforts and to do justice to the claims of native genius.” Simms’ novels, such as Martin Faber (1832), Beaufort (1842) and Charlemont (1856), were based on historical incident, as was his most widely read book, The Yemassee (1835), which deals with an Indian uprising and is often compared to James Fenimore Cooper’s stories of the frontier. Simms believed the future of Southern letters depended on a judicious use of local materials to present themes of universal interest. In his preface to The Wigwam and the Cabin (1856) he made some prophetic remarks about the proper goals of regional authors:

To be national in literature one must needs be regional. No one mind can fully or fairly illustrate the characteristics of any great country; and he who shall depict one section faithfully has made his proper and sufficient contribution to the great work of national literature.  

Simms nevertheless recognized the need to justify Southern institutions to a national reading public. He wrote to B. F. Perry that he was supporting the Southern Quarterly Review so that “we may have at least one organ among ourselves to which we may turn when it becomes necessary to express Southern feelings and opinions.” The Southern Quarterly Review supported the social and economic ideals of the plantation system. So, too, did the Uncle Remus stories of Joel Chandler Harris, the short stories of Armistead Gordon and the poetry of Irwin Russell.

Page was unquestionably the most eloquent spokesman for the plantation system. Although Page followed Kennedy, the Cookes, Bagby, and Simms in a well-established literary tradition, Gaines has noted that Page surpassed his predecessors in embellishing the image of an ideal society:

[Page is] far more passionate in the maintenance of a hypothesis of departed glory, paints in more glowing colors, is uniformly more idealistic, descends less frequently—if ever—from the legends of romantic vision.

From the works of Page it is possible to construct the image of an aristocratic society which Americans in other regions accepted as an accurate picture of the ante-bellum South. Beginning with “Uncle Gabe’s White Folks,” a dialect poem Page wrote in 1876, the Virginia author gained an eager audience throughout America. His popularity resulted partly from the interest of Northeastern and Midwestern readers in the recently defeated South. Page gave detailed accounts of an heroic people and their unusual customs and heritage. Edmund Wilson has observed that the nation was

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5Quoted by Parks, pp. 101-102.
anxious to suppress unhappy memories of the Civil War and that Page's idealized view of the South suited the public's demand that "the old issues be put to sleep." Page's stories and novels were written in the spirit of reconciliation. Although he extolled the bravery of Confederate soldiers, he noted the original reluctance of his heroes to become involved in war and praised their gracious acceptance of defeat and their renewed allegiance to the Union after the War. In an infrequently cynical moment Page accounted for his literary success to Grace King:

Now I will tell you what to do; for I did it. Just rip the story open and insert a love story. It is the easiest thing to do in the world. Get a pretty girl and name her Jeanne, that name always takes! Make her fall in love with a Federal officer and your story will be printed at once! The publishers are right; the public wants love stories. Nothing easier than to write them.\(^{10}\)

Page's allusion to "the publishers" is significant. Scribner's and other important national magazines welcomed the sentimental tales of local color writers. Northern magazine editors encouraged their Southern contributors to take part in creating a mythical kingdom below the Mason-Dixon line. The unwitting contribution of abolitionists in the early nineteenth century to ante-bellum glory is often forgotten. Mrs. Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and Whittier in their vehement denunciations of Southern institutions sketched the outlines of a mythical society which would later inspire partisans of the Southern cause. The abolitionists generally had a scanty first-hand knowledge of the South and over-emphasized the aristocratic basis of plantation life. The plantations they described were more lavish than great European estates while the landlords were as rich and autonomous as English noblemen. Howard R. Floan has called attention to Phillips' beliefs that the slaveholders possessed a terrible but magnificent domain:

He conjured up a land of whipping posts and auction blocks, a feudal society in which newspapermen, politicians, and clergymen were vassals. The nobility controlled family, church, and government. The slave power he described as a cable of three strands: the prejudice of race, the omnipotence of money, and the almost irresistible power of the aristocracy. Nobility and aristocracy were evocative terms in the New England of his day, and the most summary abstraction of them all was Phillips' epithet, "the South is the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries."\(^{11}\)

Page applied new value judgments to the abolitionists' collective portraits. He emphasized the medieval concepts of gentilese, the exalted position of women, and the chivalric behavior of the

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\(^{12}\)Floan, p. 18.
landlords. The wealth and power of the Virginia planter is magnified in Page's fictional representations, and his descriptions of the Tidewater country possess more the aura of Augustan Rome than of colonial America. In the creation of an ideal civilization Page blended the history and folklore of Virginia with his boyhood memories of plantation life. He believed in an ordered society, roughly based on the principles of the Chain of Being but modified by Christian charity and paternalism. The harmony of civilization depends, he believed, upon a stratified society whose leaders are guided by duty and honor. While Page's view of society was anachronistic and his attitudes toward art derivative of English culture, he recognized the value of tradition which so many chauvinistic regional writers denied. One recalls Garland's narrow-mindedness in *Crumbling Idols* (1894) where he tends to dismiss the accomplishments of the past, asserting that "to apply ancient dogmas of criticism to our life and literature would be benumbing to the artist and fatal to his art."

Page's noble characters are often romantic stereotypes, but we must remember that the passing of a civilization is an epic subject. Individuals too realistically defined would detract from the author's eulogy of the Old South. As Corra Harris observed, Page's legendary figures are unlike "real men or women, but they are created in the spiritual, mettlesome likeness of ten thousand who did live in the South at that time." One explanation for the unqualified nobility of Page's heroes is that they are cast in the image of Robert E. Lee. Lee was to Page the ideal Virginian. The shadow of the Confederate leader, gigantic in the sunset of an era, became for Page the measure of a gentleman. Lee's attributes are reflected in the author's most important fictional spokesmen, such as Dr. Cary in *Red Rock*. Dr. Cary loses his only son in the war he hoped to avoid fighting; he is evicted from his plantation when he cannot pay the property taxes. But he proudly resigns himself to life in his former overseer's cabin and attends to the sicknesses of his poverty-stricken neighbors and ex-slaves. His last act of Christian charity is a visit to an ailing carpetbagger whose cruelty has subjected the Cary family to innumerable privations. The doctor's subsequent death demonstrates the aristocrat's unending sense of duty.

Page indicates the two-sided aspects of paternalism in his works. Negroes remain loyal to their masters after the Emancipation, and the masters offer their protection and trust in return. In Page's story, "Meh Lady," the mistress of the plantation on her deathbed

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22Note Page's lifelong interest in classics and his book-length study of Dante written just before his death.
entrusts her daughter's well-being and her material possessions to her butler, Unc' Billy. The author's most famous tale, "Marse Chan," is a vivid illustration of the principle of noblesse oblige. Colonel Channing is blinded when he runs into a burning barn to save one of his slaves. Similarly young Marse Chan's Negro manservant, Sam, risks his own life to accompany the young soldier to battle and to bring home the boy's body when he is killed. "Marse Chan" was Page's first published story, and it epitomizes the spirit of the author's eighteen-volume Plantation Edition of novels, stories, poems and essays. Sam tells a passer-by that life on the Channings' plantation before the War "wuz de good old times, marster, de bes' Sam ever see." Sam recalls the lavish hospitality of the plantation and the gallant behavior of the young aristocrats. He glories in the recollection of Marse Chan's bold courtship of Anne Chamberlain; he notes with pride the boy's knightly impetuosity, his quick defense of Colonel Chamberlain's honor. While Sam's narrative gives the story the ring of authenticity, the reader is aware of the tenuous line between myth and reality. Gerald W. Johnson referred to Page's South as "the recrudescence of the Arthurian legend of loyalty, love and derring-do all compact—in short, romance." The spirit of romance which suffuses the stories of Page and his many imitators after the War satisfied the demands of a nation exhausted by realities. The plantation tradition with its emphasis on an idealized feudal order became the most widely accepted expression of Southern life.

The early French and Spanish settlers of Florida and Louisiana and the Gulf Coast states fostered a way of life which differed considerably from the Atlantic coastal plantation society extolled by Page and his literary predecessors. Early inhabitants of the Louisiana territory, for example, had no control over their government which was run by France and which was autocratic rather than democratic. Louisiana’s law was based on Roman rather than English common law; the prevailing customs and institutions of the state were continental in spirit. Creole landowners did not possess the agricultural estates of the Virginia planters although they were frequently more worldly and more adept at mercantile pursuits. The first literary endeavors were written in French, and even spoken English was shunned by the leaders of the community. Charles Gayarré is notable as one of the earliest Creoles to write proficiently in English. American literary history in the Mississippi region begins therefore in 1830 when Gayarré published his "Essai historique sur la Louisiane." Gayarré's *Fernando de Lemos: Truth

and Fiction (1872) is the first novel of consequence to come from the deep South. This region did not excite much literary interest until after the Civil War when the Creoles were described in the novels of George W. Cable, Kate Chopin and Grace King. Mrs. Chopin and Miss King were primarily concerned with Creole customs and Louisiana’s exotic settings. Cable emphasized the decadence of New Orleans’ upper class and the social destructiveness of miscegenation. Clement Eaton believes that the literature of this region is distinctive because it has “the flavor of a semi-tropical civilization affected by Negro slavery and by the Latin temperament.” While Eaton does not define what he means by “Latin temperament”, he suggests that the mixed French and Spanish ancestry of the Creoles resulted in an aristocratic order quite different from the feudal society of predominantly Anglo-Saxon Virginia.

Grace King presents a favorable study of Creole society in Monsieur Motte (1888), Tales of Time and Place (1892) and Balcony Stories (1893). She acknowledges the pride and vanity of the Creoles, but she credits them with warm-heartedness and wisdom. In matters of race she plays down the cruel treatment of Negroes by the Creoles and stresses the loyalty of docile, ignorant slaves to their masters. A testimony to the social interest of her region, however, is Miss King’s treatment of Louisiana’s quadroon caste, which is separated from both the black and white communities by its mixed blood. In “Madrilene: or, The Festival of the Dead,” she tells of a servant girl rescued from the degradation of slavery by the unexpected discovery that her parents are white.

Kate Chopin revealed the prideful nature of the Creoles as Miss King had done. A Creole in “A Gentleman of Bayou Tèche” (1894) refuses to accept two badly needed dollars from a photographer in search of “local color” characters for his magazine. The Creole fears he might be mistaken in a photograph for an Acadian or a poor white. Mrs. Chopin’s Creoles are childish, fun-loving people. She avoids the less savory aspects of their life, such as race prejudice and miscegenation.

Unlike Miss King and Mrs. Chopin, Cable does not minimize the faults of the Creoles. When he speaks of them in the aggregate, Cable condemns their basic attitudes toward society and questions their morality and wisdom. Especially he deplores their inhumanity to the Negroes. The kindly paternalistic masters of Page’s Hanover County are replaced in Cable’s Louisiana by capricious masters who flog their male slaves, seduce their female slaves and shoot any slave who becomes troublesome. Cable’s concern for the Negro inspired his best writing. Old Creole Days (1879), The Grandissimes

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(1880), and Madame Delphine (1881) mark Cable as an ardent supporter of civil rights. He shows that society falls victim to horrible perversions when these rights are ignored. In The Grandissimes an old Negro woman is shot down in cold blood because she has trespassed on a Creole plantation. When an African prince, Bras-Coupé, disobeys his white master, his ears are cut off and he dies. The vengeance of Bras-Coupé's mulatto wife and the attempt of a Creole, Honoré Grandissime, to make retribution for his family's cruelty provides a framework for the novel. Richard Chase says that the Bras-Coupé episode "anticipates Faulkner"\cite{RichardChase} in intensity of atmosphere and exploration of guilt. The tragic consequences of miscegenation which are examined in The Grandissimes also remind one of the guilty behavior of white supremacists. Cable applied the scientific method to the race question, repeatedly denying that racial superiority could be proved. He challenged the Creoles' belief that racial "instinct" alienated Negroes and whites.

While the defenders of the old regime recalled the glories of the Southern past, Cable urged the "New South" to keep abreast of modern scientific and social developments. He realized that the plantation system was doomed, not only by the emancipation of the slaves but by the revolutionizing influences of technology. Unlike Cable many Southern authors after the Civil War refused to consider the relationship of the races on a scientific basis.\cite{ClementEaton} Instead they appealed to a white reactionary audience which felt its political, social, and economic power threatened by the abolition of slavery. In most Reconstruction literature the re-establishment of the Union was accepted with grace, but the welfare of the Negro was still considered a regional problem. Cable, however, in all of his novels and essays railed against Southern autonomy in handling the race problem. In Lovers of Louisiana (1911) Rosalie Durel's Creole father expresses a common Southern attitude toward the freedman's position: "We call it a strictly Southern question, which we will take care of if the rest of the country will only let us alone." Durel is refuted by a Scottish friend who answers wryly, "But it isn't and ye don't."\cite{GWCable} The Scot comprehends that Negro rights are an American, not a Southern problem. He is also the

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\item \cite{RichardChase} Richard Chase, "Cable and his Grandissimes," Kenyon Review, XVIII (Summer, 1956), 374.
\item \cite{ClementEaton} Clement Eaton in Freedom of Thought in the Old South (Durham, N.C., 1940), p. 209, comments that very few Southerners were concerned over Darwin's hypothesis of evolution, largely because they were too involved in sectional controversies. Eaton does mention, however, that before Darwin published On the Origin of the Species (1859) Langdon Cheves of South Carolina advanced the theory of the origin of the species by transmutation and the survival of the fittest. Cheves was refuted by Agassiz's pupil, Lo Conte.
\item \cite{GWCable} G. W. Cable, Lovers of Louisiana, (New York, 1911), p. 27.
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author's spokesman in a haunting prophecy when he maintains that the race question is not solved:

Tisn't dead, I say. It's but lost its place in the line and has been sent back to the wurrld's tail end... and there's a day ahead, whether far or near God only knows, when that question—and they that are out o' fashion wi' it—will come round again, as big and ugly as hoop-skirts.21

Along with improving the status of the Negro, Cable envisioned other social reforms for America. He advocated education for the masses, a revision of the penal system, and worked to elevate the nation's cultural interests by establishing Home Culture Clubs.22 The heroes in Cable's fiction enthusiastically embrace the doctrine of progress and re-evaluate their traditions. Philip Castleton in *Lovers of Louisiana* notes that "we who dearly love them [our traditions] ought to have a well-shapen, rational policy for speeding them on, instead of a shapeless, emotional one for holding them back."23 Cable's ideas on human progress evolved slowly, thoughtfully and reservedly. He was too aware of the frailties of human nature to anticipate the millenium. His social goals were reasonable ones and his hopes for the future were always modified by his regard for the more honorable traditions of the past.

Cable's respect for the past, however, did not hinder his opposition to a Creole minority's domination of Louisiana. He battled the forces which chose to leave the Acadians in poverty and ignorance when he wrote *Bonaventure* (1888). Earlier in *The Grandissimes* he had ridiculed the Creoles' distrust of the Anglo-Saxons. Because the maintenance of a privileged society depended on autonomous statehood, the Creole characters in Cable's fiction are fiercely opposed to the Union and refer contemptuously to their neighbors of the North, East, and West as "les Américains." In *The Grandissimes* Agricola Fusilier's dying words, "Louisiana Forever," epitomize the old guard Creole's rejection of federal government. Cable was opposed to sectionalism in government or in literature. One of his most eloquent pleas for national unity is contained in an address to the University of Mississippi on the state of letters in the South (1883):

... We shall no more be Southerners than we shall be Northerners. The accidents of latitude shall be nothing to us. We shall be the proud disciples of every American alike who adds to the treasures of truth in American literature and prouder still if his words reach the whole human heart and his lines of light run through the varied languages of the world. Let us hasten no longer to be a unique people. Let us search provincialism

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21Ibid., p. 234.
out of the land as the Hebrew housewife purged her dwelling of leaven on the eve of the Passover.\textsuperscript{24}

Cable’s belief that an author could work with regional materials and yet avoid provincialism is similar to theories which Garland expressed in \textit{Crumbling Idols}. Garland urged that “local art must be raised to its highest expression.”\textsuperscript{25} Though Garland was sixteen years younger than Cable, the two men were good friends and frequently exchanged ideas.\textsuperscript{26} Both writers were raised in penurious circumstances and recorded the hardships of their youth in their novels. They were initiated into authorship as local color writers but soon established themselves as social realists. Their novels were the work of reformers. Garland, impressed by Henry George’s \textit{Progress and Poverty} (1879), proposed specific economic platforms to alleviate the hardships of the farmer’s life. Cable discussed economic problems in \textit{Dr. Sevier} (1885); in nearly all of his books his primary concern was equality for all races.

The Southerner and Midwesterner agreed on the role of the novelist as an artist who recorded life as factually as possible but was motivated by strong moral convictions. On March 13, 1894, Cable met with Garland and Hamilton Mabie to discuss the problem of realism vs. romanticism. The debate was summarized the next day on the New York \textit{Times} editorial page. Garland made some astute observations on French realism:

So-called French realists are rarely veritists. They deal too largely and too often with the abnormal and the unwholesome. On the other hand American veritism has the breath of the pine forest. It is psychological rather than pathological.\textsuperscript{27}

Garland separated realism from veritism as Cable did. Cable analyzed society objectively and dispelled the romantic myths of ante-bellum Southern life. He refused to paint in the merely sordid or obscurely decadent details of that period, but there are few social or personal evils which are omitted from his canvas. Garland defended the reticence of Cable and other realists in not depicting the salacious side of life:

It is as fully within the jurisdiction of realistic fictionists to write of the wholesome as well as the impure or the erotic, to deal with the happy, though commonplace, domestic lives, that are without great incidents, as to deal with murder or forgery. Imagination may explore the light as well as the dark.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{24}Quoted by Arlin Turner, “George W. Cable’s Revolt Against Literary Sectionalism.” \textit{Tulane Studies in English}, V (1955), 20–21.
\textsuperscript{25}Garland, \textit{Crumbling Idols}, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{26}It is possible that Cable’s familiarity with Darwin, which was an apparent influence on his scientific thought though never acknowledged, began in his talks with Garland and Halijmar Boyeson.
\textsuperscript{27}See the New York \textit{Times}, March 14, 1894.
\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}
Here, possibly for Cable's benefit, Garland appeared to be distinguishing between realism and grossness. Cable indicated that he preferred realism in lieu of naturalism. What he objected to in writing was a slavish devotion to detail at the expense of imagination. He distrusted fiction which represented the minutiae of life but lacked a moral purpose:

Facts are realistic but truth is higher, is beautiful, is romantic. It is the business of fictionists not to testify to fact alone, but more to truth . . . The eternal verities of the human heart are without restriction to the petty facts of the everyday round.  

Cable was a true Southerner in his love of his region but he was an objective social critic. His ability to group new trends of thought and re-evaluate traditional prejudices enabled him to predict the future of the South. He absorbed the current ideas of evolution, heredity and environment and accepted the doctrine of progress. Cable was twelve years older than Page, but his viewpoint was nevertheless more contemporary than the conservative Virginian's. Cable was the first Southern writer to challenge the aristocratic bias of the plantation tradition and to describe its institutions realistically.  

2Ibid. Here it is interesting to note the similarity between Cable's literary theory, as expressed here, and the ideals which Faulkner, as a contemporary Southern realist, expressed in his Stockholm address: "He (the writer) must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid; and, teaching himself that, forget it forever, leaving no room in his workshop for anything but the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed—love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice."  

3Cable was the most prominent Southern liberal to earn a literary reputation after the War, but several other Southern writers approached the problems of their region realistically. Virginius Dabney in Liberalism in the South (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1932) cites the following writers, along with Cable and Mary Murfree, as forward-looking Southerners:  

Sydney Lanier (1842-1881) liberalized Southern literature by promoting sound scholarship and honest criticism and by experimenting with metrical patterns and unusual imagery in his own poetry. He published his first novel, Tiger Lilies, in 1867 and his first collection of poetry, Poems, in 1877.  

Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1891) recognized the appeal of the plantation tradition, but in his Uncle Remus stories he introduced the Negro as the central character of his fiction. He did not hesitate in his stories to discuss "the darker aspects of slavery, such as the sufferings of fugitives, the tragedy of mixed blood, the separation of families or the occasional cruelties of overseers."  

William Peterfield Trent (1862-1899) wrote a controversial biography of Simms in 1892 in which he asserted that "secession was wrong in itself." His book caused a furor, but he was retained at Sewanee where he founded the enlightened Sewanee Review (1892).  

Henry Watterson (1840-1921) became editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal in 1868 and made it one of the most politically influential newspapers in the South. He advocated free trade and conciliation between the North and South and opposed the Ku Klux Klan. In The Compromises of Life (1906) he defended his bold political opinions and also satirized America's superficial "Four Hundred" society. In his declining years he reversed many of his liberal opinions, however, and opposed woman suffrage and the League of Nations.  

Walter Hines Page (1855-1918) was decidedly more liberal in his political opinions than his cousin, Thomas Nelson Page. He ridiculed his fellow North Carolinians for their worship of the Confederate dead, their strict adherence to religious orthodoxy, and their fear of the Negro. In his novel The Southerner he made harsh but constructive criticisms of his native region.
While Page defended and Cable challenged Southern traditions, both men focused on the white landowners and Negro slaves and freedmen of their respective regions. The poor white families of the South intrigued them less, although Page in “Little Darby” and “Run to Seed” and Cable in Bonaventure described with some accuracy the existence of average citizens who lived apart from the plantation system. Tales of the small farmer seemed tepid, perhaps, to a reading public accustomed to chivalrous Virginians and haughty Creoles. Yet there was a small, persistent number of writers who attempted to depict the spirit of the plain people. Most of them chose the frontier areas as settings for their stories.

Augustus B. Longstreet’s Georgia Scenes, which appeared in 1835 and 1840, describes the Georgia Crackers. Longstreet visited the rural areas as a circuit judge and his earthy, humorous tales were widely read in the South. There are occasional notes of condescension in Longstreet’s treatment of crude back country characters. He usually prefaced a racy dialogue with the comment, “I should certainly omit such expressions as this could I do so with historic fidelity…” Also in 1840 William Tappan Thompson wrote Major Jones’s Courtship, a comic story composed of letters describing episodes in rural Georgia. More than two decades passed before another Southerner wrote a significant book about the poor whites. George W. Harris’s Sut Lovingood Yarns appeared in 1867 and was a major contribution to American humor. Harris was the first Tennessean to write of the Appalachian mountains. His chief character, Sut Lovingood, is a rough mountaineer of the Great Smoky region who speaks irreverently of the dances, funerals, and camp-meetings he has attended. Lovingood’s dialect is more comic than accurate, and his Rabelaisian humor and love of the practical joke indicate that he is intended to burlesque mountain life rather than create an authentic atmosphere.

Mary Noailles Murfree, who wrote under the pseudonyms of R. Emmet Dambry and Charles Egbert Craddock, became a more important chronicler of the mountaineers than Harris. Miss Murfree’s stories and novels are conscientious studies of a people who, according to Lucy Lockwood Hazard, “approximate the rank and file of the pioneers more closely than do any other contemporary Americans.” Feuds, gambling and revivals provide the chief recreation for Miss Murfree’s pioneers and she records their superstitions and customs with amused sympathy. The bleak lives of her characters are contrasted ironically with the grandeur of the Tennessee mountains. She acknowledges her fondness for setting

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in an unpublished letter she wrote to L. M. Hosea in 1886. Hosea had sent Miss Murfree some water-colors to remind her of the mountains after she had returned to St. Louis to write. Miss Murfree writes in this letter:

I have just received the charming water-color sketches of Tuckaleechee Cove and Little River with the Great Smoky in the background, which you kindly sent to me. They are so imbued with the spirit of the locality that I have only to glance at them to feel I am again among the mountains.\[^{25}\]

Miss Murfree’s first volume, *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884), is a collection of eight stories which had previously appeared in the *Atlantic*. The book was an instant success and went through fourteen editions. The individual stories in the volume are impressionistic sketches, as F. L. Pattee has observed:

Strictly speaking, her short stories are not short stories at all save in the one element of their shortness. She records simple, everyday incidents in their natural sequence and stops when the space allotted to her has been filled. She moves leisurely from incident to incident in the monotonous vacuity of mountain life, as a minutely written journal might move.\[^{26}\]

The first novel which Miss Murfree wrote was her most popular. *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains* (1885) tells the story of Hiram Kelsey, a religious leader who loses his own faith. Kelsey and the rakish Mink Lowrey of Miss Murfree’s *In the Clouds* (1886) are mountain men without literary parallels in other areas of the South. The women in Miss Murfree’s books resign themselves stoically to hard work and boredom, and they remind us of Garland’s long-suffering farm wives in Wisconsin and the Dakotas. Consider Garland’s description in *A Son of the Middle Border* of his own mother’s duties:

...With the widening of the fields came the doubling of the harvest hands and my mother continued to do most of the work herself—cooking, sewing, washing, churning and nursing the sick from time to time... Even on Sunday... she was required to furnish forth three meals, and to help Frank and Jessie dress for lunch. She sang less and less, and the songs we loved were seldom referred to.\[^{27}\]

Miss Murfree did not share Garland’s interest in economic reform; she limited herself to sympathetic observations of a people she respected. The quality of her work is uneven and the best of it is dated now by excessive geographical description and sentimentality. But her accomplishment is significant if we consider her as a spokesman for a forgotten segment of society.

The fiction of the deep South and the Appalachian Mountain territory is as much a part of the whole South as the literary tradition of the Tidewater. But the myths of plantation life better suited the public demand for romance after the Civil War. The preference of readers from the South, North, Midwest and far West for idealized rather than realistic studies of Southern life indicates a national reluctance to face the issues raised by the War and bears testimony to the complicity of the whole nation in keeping alive a tottering legend.