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Backwoods Tales: Paddy McGann, Sharp Snaffles, and Bill Bauldy (The Simms Series)

William Gilmore Simms

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The writings of William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870) provide a sweeping fictional portrait of the colonial and antebellum South in all of its regional diversity. Simms's account of the region is more comprehensive than that of any other author of his time; he treats the major intellectual and social issues of the South and depicts the bonds and tensions among all of its inhabitants. By the mid-1840s Simms's novels were so well known that Edgar Allan Poe could call him "the best novelist which this country has, on the whole, produced." The twelfth volume in the ongoing Arkansas Edition of the works of William Gilmore Simms, Backwoods Tales brings together three of the best examples of his comic writing. All were written during the last decade of Simms's life, when he had become a master of his craft. These three tales belong in the tradition of southern backwoods humor, a genre that flourished before the Civil War and produced classic tales by such authors as George Washington Harris, Johnson Jones Hooper, and Thomas Bangs Thorpe. Paddy McGann, "Sharp Snaffles," and "Bill Bauldy" are all frame tales, told by rustic narrators in authentic dialect, with frequent pauses for libation and comment. These three pieces of writing, never before published together, stand among the best examples of American humor of the nineteenth century.

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