



# **The Mysteries of the Backwoods, Or, Sketches of the Southwest: Including Character, Scenery, and Rural Sports (1846)**

*Thomas Bangs Thorpe*

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Thomas Bangs Thorpe (1815–1878) was an American antebellum humorist, painter, illustrator, and author best known for the short story "The Big Bear of Arkansas". He was an Easterner who in 1836 moved west to Louisiana Territory where he discovered the source of his greatest literary achievements. Here he acquired fame as both as a painter and as a writer of humor and character sketches. Later he became the editor of several newspapers, and also wrote two books on the Mexican War, a novel, and a study of Zachary Taylor. He served as officer in both the Mexican and the American Civil Wars.

Later Thorpe returned to the East, but his most noteworthy achievement remained his humorous sketches of frontier American life which included hunting, of traveling aboard Mississippi riverboats, of listening to the tall stories of pioneer farmers, backwoods hunters, and fur trappers who worked the Louisiana Territory. From this backdrop, Thorpe wrote a set of unique sketches, usually narrated in a gentlemanly way using the vernacular diction and the comic exaggeration of such celebrated backwoodsman.

The present work of Mr. Thorpe is in a lively vein, and happily takes off many of the scenes in Western life, and the rare peculiarities and originalities of Western manners. It is always gratifying to mark an increase of good writers among us, and we hail Mr. Thorpe in that class.

The Mysteries of the Backwoods contains the following sketches: Traits of the Prairies; A Piano in Arkansas; Piscatory Archery; Place de la Croix; Wit of the Woods; The Water Craft of the Backwoods; Pictures of Buffalo Hunting; Scenes on the Mississippi; The Disgraced Scalp Lock; Alligator Killing; Grizzly Bear Hunt; Concordia Lake; Frontier Incident; The Mississippi; American Wild Cat; Tom Osven, the Bee Hunter.

It is an admirable publication which affords a more accurate idea of the manners, habits and sports of the west than any thing else recollected. The chapter on Alligator killing in the southwest is a specimen of the sort.

Thorpe as an author revels in the life of the unmannered backwoodsman, in sketches set in camp meetings, dances, races, and village doggeries where pretentious notions of manners are of miniscule importance compared to wilderness skills.

This book originally published in 1846 has been reformatted for the Kindle and may contain an occasional defect from the original publication or from the reformatting.

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