

THE PERVASIVENESS OF SAM SLICK

By V. L. O. CHITTICK

THAT Sam Slick, as presented in Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *Clockmaker* and its sequels, was, in his day, well and widely known both at home and abroad, there is surely no valid reason to dispute. The more than one hundred editions of those works alone should be proof enough of that. Nor was his appeal merely "popular." There is evidence to the contrary, for instance, in the personal testimony of such eminent men of letters as Justin McCarthy and Walter Savage Landor, in England, Emile Montégut and Philarrète Chasles, in France, and James Russell Lowell and G. W. Curtis, in the United States. But to point out that Sam Slick was read by great-name authors is one thing; to state that he had any marked effect on their writings is quite another.

In his *Herman Melville, a Critical Study* (1949), however, Professor Richard Chase of Columbia University, without implying that Melville ever read a line of Haliburton, holds (1) that the author of *Moby-Dick* was fully aware of the tradition of the comic Yankee, of which Sam Slick is the archetypal figure, and of a related tradition, that of the rambunctious Western "roarer," in the evolution of which Sam Slick shared too; and (2) that these traditions, separately or together, had a definite and integral effect on Melville's masterpiece and on other of his writings. Professor Chase's book is a brilliant, if controversial, treatment of its subject. Though it appeared in the forefront of the recent parade of Melville scholarship, none of the succeeding biographical or interpretative studies, and none of the concurrent meticulous re-reading and editing of the available manuscripts, has seriously challenged its findings. Its authority, consequently, is not to be lightly denied. If what it argues about Sam Slick can be substantiated, it very considerably elevates that notable worthy in the hierarchy of literary influences. It might be worth while, then, to look into this matter with some care.

According to common report, the traditional Yankee, of whose characteristics the down-east peddler's were but a rather special case, was born with an inherent love of barter, and made

his way through life by aid of constant figuring and calculation. Though pious enough in most outward respects, he was simply not to be trusted when it came to a question of trading. Full of fun and good nature, a trait belied by his sanctimonious countenance, fond of a mirthful song or a merry jest, and adept at banter and ingratiating talk, he had, in spite of his well known proclivities, a way of winning private confidence that usually left his customers poorer if seldom wiser. The man who could best him by fair means or foul in a game of chance or a speculation he had never encountered. His cunning methods in business or gambling were matched by his skill in ready inventiveness, and he was not backward about proclaiming his preeminence in both. He boasted inordinately about his race and his nation. He was as able a sailor as he was a salesman, and as competent at school-mastering as at "fixin'" a machine. Like those of most other Americans, his manners at table and elsewhere were execrable. He expectorated with utter unconcern as to the location or direction of his target, and paid no attention to the risks run by those who inadvertently came within range of his barrage. He was insufferably curious and inquisitive, but singularly uncommunicative when it was his turn to be interrogated. Although he was not of a combative disposition, his rights were not to be infringed upon with impunity, for when hard pressed he was invariably successful, by one artful dodge or another, in bringing about his persecutor's discomfiture.

In so far as Sam Slick's characteristics were those of the typical, and generalized, Yankee they corresponded almost item for item with those just enumerated. His chief delight was to drive a shrewd bargain, and his single aim in life was to "go ahead" of the next fellow by means of his mastery of "cypherin'" and "calculatin'." Though he claimed that in all matters of fact he was "true as a trivet," he was never at a loss to "scrouge" himself between the truth and a lie. He bragged and boasted about his country as "the top-loftiest place in all creation." He was ever foremost in promoting a frolic or in perpetrating a practical joke. He was equally adroit at putting a "leak" into a conceited customer or at "soft sawdering" his way to the hearts of the Bluenose women. Though he himself gave no display of the customary American prowess in expectoration, he must have been more than ordinarily familiar with the habit, since we have it on his own private confession that his father "chaws tobacco like a turkey . . . and spits like an engine." He was

absolutely at home in any kind of a craft that floats, from an Indian canoe to a transatlantic liner, and his technical information about Yankee fishing schooners and their routes and management should have entitled him to a pilot's license and a master mariner's certificate combined. Nothing in need of repair seems at any time to have "stumped" him to mend it. His sermonizing discourses among the Bluenoses are sufficient proof of his New England pedagogical tendencies. He was as clever as any other Connecticut "native" in evading one question by asking another, and with all his loquacity he could keep his counsel when to do so best served his purpose. And his wily trick of first "doin' simple" and then pretending to run away in order to lure an impertinent Bluenose on to a well-deserved "quilting" was strictly in agreement with the long-headed fighting tactics of a down-easter.

It is precisely Sam Slick's pugnacious qualities, however, that show him to be something conspicuously different from a "real" Yankee. As long as he continued his clock-vending activities in Nova Scotia, it is true that he conducted himself in accordance with the precept that discretion is the better part of valor. But his appearance later as an attache of the United States legation in London discloses his marked development towards another American regional character-type quite as clearly defined as the Yankee, and quite as popular,—the "ring-tailed roarer" of the West, the stock presentation of the "bad man" who was always spoiling for trouble. It was a type with which Haliburton had evidently been fascinated from about the time he had first become interested in the traditional figure of the Yankee peddler, and increasingly as he felt the need of varying the entertainment provided by the one, he introduced into his comic sketches features borrowed from the other. Especially is this intermingling of the two sets of regional characteristics noticeable in the humorously lurid effects of Sam Slick's speech. Even in his earliest described meanderings about Nova Scotia his conversation betrayed his other than New England origin, as, for example, in this bit of pure Westernese applied to his speedy "critter," "Old Clay": "I can't help a thinkin' sometimes the breed must have come from old Kentuck, *half horse, half alligator, with a cross of the airthquake.*" And his account of his meeting with one "Lucifer Wolfe," recorded in the third *Clock-maker*, discovers his own, and Haliburton's, perfect familiarity with the model from which he was in great part drawn. Such episodes as the ex-clock vender's riotous celebration of his land-

ing in Liverpool, England, after his appointment as an attache, when he proceeded to "clean up" the Liner's Hotel, insulting the barmaid, knocking down the waiter, and worrying the chambermaid into hysterics, in the course of his hilarious enjoyment, and his violently explosive attempt to work off his spleen over his father's advent in the old country by wantonly threatening assault and battery on an innocent passer-by, are merely crude imitations of escapades from the once popular "wild West" yarn. And Sam Slick's desire to be painted "natural," "in the back woods, with my huntin' coat on, my leggins, my cap, my belt, and my powder horn, . . . with my talkin' iron in my hand, wipin' her, chargin' her, selectin' the bullet, placin' it in the greased wad, and rammin' it down," is but another indication of the same frontier influence emanating from the extensive Boone-Crockett cycle of rough-and-tumble adventure tales. But perhaps the most convincing evidence that Sam Slick was no true Yankee is his self-vaunted dexterity in bare-back horsemanship, for if there was one accomplishment in "all creation" which a genuine New Englander could never master it was the art of riding, though at driving he could beat the "univarse."

Assuredly unlimited as the resourcefulness and intrepidity of a combination Westerner and Yankee would have to be, it is doubtful if even the two together suffice to account for the range and variety of Sam Slick's attainments and experiences. He had journeyed to the South Sea islands. He had bought bargain "pictures" in Italy, and outwitted the law in France. He had been well acquainted with England long before he was sent there in diplomatic capacity. He had gone whaling in the Pacific. He had peddled clocks "up Huron way," and had travelled all over his own "thirteen united universal worlds," and was a "citizen at large" in the Great Republic. He had been employed by the governor of Maine as a state courier to the British forces in New Brunswick. He had engaged in the fur trade for the Astors in the Northwest, and had made a small "spec" in Bermuda. He was adept at all sorts of fishing, whether deep-sea, lake or stream. He knew horses like a stock-fancier, "tank, shank, and flank." He was a connoisseur of every American brand of strong drink. Through his knowledge of "simples" he claimed to be able to effect a cure for dropsy and a "hundred other" complaints. His skill as an artist extended from gilding clocks to painting portraits. "Once I drawed," he boasted, "a mutton chop so nateral, my dog broke his teeth in tearing the panel to get at it, and at another time I painted a

shingle so like a stone, when I threw it into the water, it sunk right kerlash to the bottom." He had been brought up to farming, and had been used to gunning and trapping since boyhood. If poetry was beyond him (all poets he professed to hate "lock, stock, and barrel"), his progress in music and psalmody was the source of much gratification—to himself. But it was especially at dancing that he "reckoned" he could "take the shine of most folks." "Many's the time," he declared, "I have danced 'Possum up a gum tree' at a quiltin' frolic or a huskin' party, with a tumbler full of cider on my head, and never spilt a drop;—I have upon my soul." And the steadiness of his footing was matched by the imperturbability of his nerve. "Lord!" he confided to his friend, Lawyer Poker, "a man that goes to Missarsippi like me, and can run an Alligator boat right head on to a Sawyer, high pressure engine, valve soldered down, three hundred passengers on board, and every soul in danger, ain't a coward. It takes a *man*, Squire, I tell you." In youth he could jump over three horses standing side by side, and when older was still "spry" enough to outrun any likely looking "gal" that would "darnt" him to a chase. From first to last he was an incorrigible liar and an irresistible flirt, and at the same time a persistent preacher of steadfast morality, and a vehement expostulator against cant and hypocrisy; and he was as effective in the one mood as he was entertaining in the other. Which is to say he was a tolerable success in spite of his irreconcilable inconsistencies and contradictions. He was, in short, as Haliburton put it, "quite a character," with "some humour, much anecdote, and great originality," though his endowment in the last of these gifts is something that has always been much overrated.

II

Extended as this description of the composite Sam Slick has been, for anyone not familiar with the tall tale tradition of the old-time South and West, the legendary figure of the "ring-tailed roarer," some of whose outstanding characteristics entered into the synthetic clock-peddler's make-up, probably needs further delineation. When he was the real thing, like Autolyceus of *The Winter's Tale*, he was "a tall fellow of his hands." He was also a tall fellow of his tongue. When he was spurious he was tall of his tongue only. While both were given to inordinate boasting and ranting, it was the former alone who had what it took to make his brag good. Of the latter type the

classic example is the pair of loud-mouthed cravens found aboard a river-raft in Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*. Jumping in the air and cracking his heels together, the first one shouted, "Whoo-oo!"

"I'm the original iron-jawed, brass-mounted, copperbellied, corpse-maker from the wilds of Arkansas! . . . I'm the man they call Sudden Death and General Destruction! Sired by a hurricane, dam'd by an earthquake. . . Look at me! I take nineteen alligators and a bar'l of whisky for breakfast when I'm in robust health, and a bushel of rattlesnakes and a dead body when I'm ailing! I split the everlasting rocks with my glance, and I quench the thunder when I speak! Whoo-oo! Stand back and give me room according to my strength! Blood's my natural drink, and the wails of the dying is music to my ears! . . ."

To which the other, jumping into the air and cracking *his* heels together replied,

"Whoo-oo! bow your neck and spread, for the kingdom of sorrow's a-coming. . . Whoo-oo! Smoked glasses here for all! Don't attempt to look at me with the naked eye, gentlemen! When I'm playful I use the meridans of longitude and the parallels of latitude for a seine, and drag the Atlantic Ocean for whales! I scratch my head with lightning and purr myself to sleep with thunder! . . . I'm the man with the petrified heart and biler-iron bowels! The massacre of isolated communities is the pastime of my idle moments, the destruction of nationalities the serious business of my life! The boundless vastness of the great American desert is my enclosed property, and I bury my dead on my own premises."

After more of this empty vaunt, and nothing else, to the limits of the raft-crew's endurance of such stuff, the smallest man of the lot "stood up to" both windbags at once and soundly whipped the two of them.

Of the *bona-fide* roarer the readiest available specimen is perhaps the earliest in the entire range of tall tale fiction, the titular hero of the *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett of West Tennessee*:

"I had taken Old Betsy [his rifle]," Davy is recorded as saying, "and straggled off to the banks of the Mississippi River; and meeting with no game I did n't like it. I felt mighty wolfish about the head and ears, and thought I would spile if I was n't kivured up in salt, for I had n't had a fight in ten days, and I came acrost a fellur floatin' down stream settin' in the stern of his boat fast asleep. . . . I looked down upon him slantendicular. . . . Said I, 'Cum ashore, I can whip you—I've been trying to get a fight all the morning;' and the varmint flapped his wings and

crowed like a chicken. I riz up, shook my mane, and neighed like a horse. He run his boat plump head foremost ashore. . . . —and at it we went. . . . In ten minutes he yelled enough, and swore I was a rip-stavur. Said I, 'Ain't I the yaller flower of the forest? And I am all brimstone but the head and ears, and that's aqua-fortis.' Said he, 'stranger, you are a beauty. . . .' Said I, . . . 'You know what I'm made of. I've got the closest shootin' rifle, the best coon dog, the biggest tieldur [bowie-knife], and the ruffest racking horse in the district. I can kill more lickur, fool more varmint, and cool out more men than any man you can find in all Kentucky! Said he, 'Good mornin' stranger—I'm satisfied.' Said I, 'Good mornin' sir; I feel much better since our meetin'; . . ."

Neighing like a stallion and flapping one's "wings" and crowing like a rooster were part of the fixed ritual of the ring-tailed roarer's preliminary to a fight. The formula into which the inevitable accompaniment of boasting fell was almost as fixed, showing no more variation from the examples cited than that of "the king of the keelboatmen," Mike Fink's, "I can out-run, out-hop, out-jump, throw down, dragout and lick any man in the county. I'm a Salt River roarer; I love the wimming and I'm chock full of fight;" or that of one of T. B. Thorp's Southwestern "characters," "I am a roaring earthquake in a fight, a real snorter of the universe. I can strike as hard as fourth proof lightning, and keep it up, rough and tumble, as long as a wild cat;" or that about the engineer of the *Arkansas Thunder*, "a rearing tearing, bar state scrouger, who could chaw up any single specimen of the human race—any quantity of tobacco, and drink steam without flinching." Indeed so petrified did the formula of the backwoodsman's boast become that it remains unchanged as the trade-mark of some present-day novelists' conception of frontier virility, or the pretense of it. It occurs, for instance, in so unlikely a place as Elinor Wylie's delicately wrought *Orphan Angel*; and A. B. Guthrie's coarser-grained, recently best-selling *The Big Sky* records a chronic trouble-maker's signal for action as: "This nigger can outrun, outdrink, outstud, and out fight any son of a bitch that sides with a Blackfoot. Stand out of my way! This hoss aims to raise ha'r [take a scalp]!"

III

Strange as it may seem, it was by way of verse that the ring-tailed roarer made his entrance into, or actually began, the tradition of vociferating Western prowess. Early in the eighteenth century a favorite comedy actor, Noah Ludlow, appropriately

costumed, with a "squirrel" rifle and a coon-skin cap, included Samuel Woodworth's "The Hunters of Kentucky" in his performance at a Southern river-port vaudeville theatre. The end-lines of two of the stanzas, to the effect that General Jackson's riflemen, defending their position against the "Britishers" in the battle of New Orleans, had proved themselves "half-horse, half-alligator," were enough to make the song an instant, and literal, howling success. (Sam Slick's identification of his trotter, "Old Clay," as one of the same breed "with a cross of the airthquake," reveals him as well informed about his country's folklore as about other items in his "larnin'"). Kentucky hunters and Mississippi and Ohio flatboat crews combined forces in the legend, as they had in shouting the song, to become the ring-tailed roarers of the frontier tall tales. Thereafter the appearance and re-appearance of these "gamecocks of the wilderness" can be followed in both novels and plays straight down to near the close of the century. The comic Yankee's lineage can likewise be traced on the stage and in book-length fiction, extending from even farther back down to the time of Joseph Jefferson, and beyond—with at least one notable detour into verse, as witnessed by Lowell's *Biglow Papers*. The lines of this double descent, running thus parallel, tended to remain separate, though there was always the possibility of "contamination," either way, from one figure to the other in the (sub-) literary forms in which they were featured, and it sometimes took place. The certain and consistent mingling (it was never a complete fusion) of the two types of popular hero, mock or real, occurred and developed principally, however, in the succession of jest-books and "sporting" weeklies, broadsides, and, most importantly, comic almanacs that appeared in great number throughout the United States generally during the period from, roughly, 1830 to 1860. That there should have been a gradual merging of the pair is not surprising. They were not so different as they looked.

Both were phantom-like creations in their origins, seeming to spring out of the realms of the unknown, and for partly unknown reasons. Both were masqueraders. The loud-mouthed "front" of the backwoodsman concealed, as often as not, the fear of defeat or the harrowing memory of a pioneer's hardships. The tight-lipped mask of the down-easter, at times, disguised depths of emotion or artful wiles, the open display of which was not in accord with either New England manners or conscience. Both took pride in their alleged faults; both, when occasion demanded,

indulged in non-stop monologues, frequently in the language of the spread-eagle brand of oratory fashionable in their day; both were self-conscious show-offs, disclosing it, among other means, by their mastery of homespun metaphor; both, with unconcerned lack of consistency, were evasive in conversation, ordinarily replying to a question by asking one. And, if they pursued diverse ways of earning a living, surely the confirmed border-land indulgence in "swappin'" was close kin to the early seaboard addiction to "tradin'." Even so, the same proficient in comic character portraits who point out these resemblances plume themselves on being able to tell where the features of one leave off and those of the other begin, when the two are encountered in mixture.

Such niceness in discrimination is no great feat, however, when one follows, as most experts do, the common practice of defining the humor of the backwoods as based on explosiveness and exaggeration, and its down-east counterpart as arising from a reticent habit of speech and laconic comment. But such differentiae, while sufficiently sound as generalizations, are more than likely to fail as tests for determining what part of last century America, east or west, a jest of one sort or the other, or the jester speaking it, came from. A convenient case in point is afforded by the remark of a federal government official on an inspection trip to potential trouble-spots in the Assiniboine area on the eve of the first Métis outbreak there. He refused to visit Portage La Prairie because, he said, "it was so windy there that it took two men to hold one man's hat on!" Here, certainly, is Western exaggeration, if not explosiveness. And yet the person who made that "crack" came from about as far east as is possible without getting one's feet wet. It was none other than the Honorable Joseph Howe, then Secretary of State in the first post-Confederation Canadian cabinet. Or try settling by the conventional tests just offered which variety of humor should be credited with the saying, on the one hand, that a steamer drew so little water it could steam anywhere across country *if only there had been a heavy dew*; or, on the other, that the current of a constricted stream was so swift *it would float a crowbar*. Not that it matters much. The significant fact about both kinds of comic appeal is that each stems from a surprise turn into absurdity or the grotesque. Either is good for a laugh. And that is why Haliburton, for example, at first specializing in one brand of humor later gladly sought help from the other to keep his audience amused.

If that last statement, taken with what I have said earlier about the admixture of western elements in Sam Slick's pseudo-down-east line of comedy, leaves the impression that Haliburton was the first or only professional humorist to combine the two, that impression is erroneous. Just as he had borrowed the initial conception of Sam Slick, and many of the details that afterwards went to stock his joker's pack, from Seba Smith's Jack Downing, Haliburton borrowed from his contemporary almanac makers. And they, in turn, doubtless borrowed from him *ad lib.* Consequently another of my statements made elsewhere (see my *Haliburton*, page 381), that "Among the scores of comic Yankees who peddled their 'notions' through the pages of the annuals [the almanacs]. . . there was not one besides Sam Slick who showed as completely as he did the mingled characteristics of the down-easter and the ring-tailed roarer," is almost certainly a mistake. It would not have been made had I found it possible to examine the extant files of the comic almanacs published during Haliburton's active period of writing. That task was painstakingly carried out by the late Constance Rourke. Her *American Humor*—the one intelligent book on its subject—states what is probably the pertinent truth about Sam Slick's pre-eminence: "[Sam] Slick achieved a mammoth popularity that lasted for three decades or more, and in the end all but obliterated the reputation of the quaint original [Jack Downing]" The astonishing degree to which Sam Slick's influence as a comic Yankee-ring-tailed roarer hybrid pervaded the incongruous blending of the two types throughout its entire sequence is no more strikingly shown than in a broadsheet entitled "Sam Slick the Yankee Pedlar," hawked about the streets of London in the eighteen-sixties. Yet Haliburton's contribution to it, outside the title, was obviously negligible:

"Oh, here I come before you all
And reckon yourselves lucky
That I've brought the news along
From wonderful Kentucky! . . .

It isn't every day that you see a gen-u-ine Yankee doodle, I calculate! Oh, no. Now look at me. I'm cast iron all over, and pieced with rock. One of my blows is either sudden death, or long sickness. If I was to hit a fellow it would knock him into mortal smash, and it 'ud take about eternity to pick up all the pieces—it would, I reckon! We Yankees are a tarnation cute race; we make a fortune with the right hand, and lose it with

the left. I'm half fire, half love, and a little touch of the thunderbolt! . . .

Now here's my wares, spick span and new!
 My darlings, come and buy them,
 From bonnet ribbons to a horse's shoe,
 You'll find that I supply them; . . .

I—Sam Slick the Yankee Pedlar—I can ride on a flash of lightning and catch a thunderbolt in my fist. I've the prettiest sister and the best shooting rifle in all Virginia. I'm the most glorious, original, and never-to-be-forgotten, smash-biler-busting, free and enlightened nigger-whipping Pedlar as ever was raised, and no soft-sawder. So go ahead.

So here I am, just from the South,
 In everything a meddler:
 Spruce and slick in everything
 Is Yankee Sam the Pedlar."

IV

It should be uncontestably clear by now that Sam Slick reached accepted status as a figure in folklore. Professor Chase (to return at long last to him and his book) in his study of Melville goes straight to the heart of the matter. Melville, he says, "created a literary-mythical version of the American folk hero, who in all his rudeness and native vigor, was appearing in the popular literature of the day. Sam Slick, the creation of the humorist Thomas Chandler Haliburton, was the type." In other words, Sam Slick became not merely "traditional" as others, including myself, have unemphatically stated, but, in the fullest sense, the common property of uncounted numbers of anonymous persons (writers and talkers) whose diverting outpourings were put to use during his years of favor in all sorts of humorous publications, in stage comedy, and in oral narrative. The figure in many of its various manifestations was well known to Melville. He delighted from his youth on in every form of the legend, straight or blended, and made effective use of it in most of his works.

Moby-Dick is a tall tale, enclosing other tall tales within it. Ahab, its epic hero, "was given Melville by the folk tales and legends of New England and the frontier." Listen to the transmuted recall of a Western boaster's (and the broadsheet Sam Slick's) claim that he could turn a flash of lightning, in Ahab's defiance of the fire-god he worshipped: ". . . I own thy speechless,

placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me. . . . Leap, leap up, and lick the sky! I leap with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defying I worship thee!" Melville himself, speaking in the role of his narrator, Ishmael, mounts even higher in out-soaring the roarer's usual idiom. Exulting in his command of a style to match the size of the Leviathan sperm whale, he proclaims: "Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals. Give me a condor's quill! Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand! Friends, hold my arms!" And Ishmael as other than Melville (though like him too) "is the New England spirit partly Westernized." His special resemblance to Sam Slick is stressed in this passage, a partial listing of his multiple activities: "Ishmael was not only schoolmaster and whalerman; he was also a stonemason. . . a merchant seaman, a moralist, a philosopher, . . . a scientist, . . . and a traveller." Other characters out of New England folklore in *Moby-Dick* are Captain Peleg, who meets question with question, Captain Bildad, whose Lord's Day observance is never allowed to interfere with his thrift, Gabriel, the Shaker zealot, and Elijah, the Yankee prophet. The *Pequod's* junior officers, Stubb and Flask were in some degree Western "screamers" (an alternative term for "roarers"). The humor of *Moby-Dick*, and there is not a little of it, is like that of the comic almanacs. The prevailing rhetoric of the novel is also Western: ". . . besides Melville, only Whitman has been able to write with the genuine epic breadth which encompasses the American scene. (This Western quality in the style of *Moby-Dick* was noted by the late Professor Archibald MacMechan of Dalhousie University, in his pioneering appreciation, the rediscovery, of "the greatest sea-story ever written." Melville, he commented was "a Walt Whitman of prose." Of more general concern, Professor Chase, speaking still of Melville's masterwork, observes: "The images of world-historical tragedy. . . monsters of abstraction. . . required a context of fact and fantasy. Melville discovered this context, inevitably, in American folklore. And this discovery contributed markedly to his extraordinary success in *Moby-Dick*." And again, about its author: "[he] was gifted with the high perception, without which *Moby-Dick* would lack the over-all structure of universal-historical allegory. Yet underneath the high perception, supporting and nourishing it, Melville knew there must be a low enjoying power. This he sought and found in the folk spirit of his country."

Moby-Dick is not the only one of Melville's works in which the presence of folk material can be detected. There are touches of it in *Typee* and *Omoo*, and even in *Mardi*, and "repeated references to Yankee peddlers. . . and to Western hunters and mountaineers" elsewhere. "A strong ground swell of folklore" ebbs and flows through *Israel Potter* and *The Confidence Man*. Israel Potter, in the novel of that name, "was born among the hills of western Massachusetts, but soon. . . took to the road. Like the typical Yankee folk hero, he became a jack-of-all-trades; a farm hand, a surveyor of wild forest lands, a hunter and trapper, a peddler among the frontier villages and Indian settlements. Fearlessly self-reliant, independent, and shrewd, he bargained and swapped his way. . . . Later, this wandering Ishmael went to sea as a harpooner out of Nantucket. Through all his ups and downs Potter kept his ceaseless energy and easy-going humor. . . . He has strong affinities with Major Jack Downing and Sam Slick, . . . who combined the character of the peddler with those of the hero and the politician and the foreign diplomatist." Of Ethan Allen, "the true born American," who appears briefly in *Israel Potter* as a prisoner of war in England, Professor Chase says, "though born in Connecticut, he was essentially Western." To be convinced of that one has only to hear him "roar";

" . . . you may well stare at Ethan Ticonderoga Allen, the unconquered soldier, by ——! . . . Stare on! I am he, who, when your Lord Howe wanted to bribe a patriot to fall down and worship him by an offer of a major-generalship and five thousand acres of choice land in old Vermont . . .—I am he, I say, who answered your Lord Howe, 'You offer our land? You are like the devil in Scripture, offering all the kingdoms in the world, when the d——d soul had not a corner-lot on earth!' Stare on! . . . General Lord Howe? Heed how I talk of that toad-hearted king's lick-spittle of a scarlet poltroon, the vilest wriggler in God's worm-hole below? I tell you that herds of redheaded devils are impatiently snorting to ladle Lord Howe with all his gangs into the seething syrup of Tophet's flames!"

Benjamin Franklin is another "true born American (but pure bred Yankee) encountered in *Israel Potter*, whom Melville characterizes with an amusing, mostly ironical, extended parallel to Sam Slick's all-roundness, culminating in "Jack-of-all-trades, master of each and mastered by none. . . a sort of handy index and pocket congress of all humanity." In *The Confidence Man* the title character is a weird composite of various American,

and other, stock figures, including the Yankee peddler as the embodiment of acuteness and dishonesty.

Surely after all this it is no longer possible to doubt whether Professor Chase has made his case that Melville knew the Sam Slick tradition and was influenced by it. By so doing he has brought to the Nova Scotian folk figure a hitherto unacknowledged and very distinguished honor. One can well imagine how Haliburton would have expanded with justifiable pride had he ever read *Moby-Dick*, and noticed, running intermittently through the radiant texture of its prose, the twisted strand of comic Yankee and backwoods humor. But doubtless Haliburton never did. He was not the sort of man to remain silent about anything that moved him deeply.