

*The Swanee River and a Biographical Sketch of Stephen Collins Foster*, by FLETCHER HODGES, JR. The Stephen Foster Memorial Association, Inc., White Springs, Florida, 1958.

This latest edition of *The Swanee River* has the gently sentimental look of the books my grandmother used to keep under glass on the top shelf of the bookcase in her sitting room. Except this memorabilia has a special difference . . . a biography of the composer by the world's foremost authority on the subject.

Reprinting an 1887 edition of *Old Folks at Home* which was published by Ticknor and Company under the title of *Swanee Ribber*, the Stephen Foster Memorial Association seemed to find the need of a preamble, or biographical introduction to the illuminated verses and illustrations which make up the charmingly Victorian treatment of one of the world's most beloved laments.

In the twenty-seven pages allotted to him for this purpose, Fletcher Hodges, Jr. has managed to condense fact, fragment, anecdote and appraisal in "The Foster Family," "Stephen's Boyhood and Youth," "Cincinnati," his return to "Pittsburgh" and sections entitled "Money," "Marriage," "Success," "Trouble" and "Tragedy." It is possible that no one extant could have done as good a job at this as Mr. Hodges. To begin with, he is the curator of the Stephen Foster Memorial at the University of Pittsburgh where he is the acknowledged authority not only on facts and artifacts affecting the composer's life, but in books and criticism involving Foster.

The "Swanee River" which begins in the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia, picks up state recognition when it crosses the border into Florida. There it becomes the local reason for adopting a Pittsburgh composer's melody as the official state song. Tourists are reminded of the Suwannee's route through Florida by plaques on four bridges. And the Stephen Foster Memorial Association with its handsome carillon tower on the banks of the Suwannee at White Springs, Florida, is dedicated to the perpetual honor of America's first troubadour.

Mr. Hodges' stated intention in making his contribution to the new Swanee River edition has been "to fill a gap in the Foster bibliography" . . . and to write a brief account of Stephen Foster's life to serve "the general reading public, both adult and student."

He does all this remarkably well.