The PALIMPSEST

FEBRUARY 1930

CONTENTS

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH
Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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The Writer's Iowa

I feel it an honor to speak on this occasion for the literary interests of our Commonwealth. The writer's Iowa must be considered from the standpoint of the present and the future rather than of the past. In the seventy-five years since the first Iowa book was published, only two or three great names have been inscribed on the record which will pass to the future as the literary history of Iowa. The development of our State has been in other directions, important, wholly necessary, but not final.

For I must seek your assent to the fundamental proposition that material achievements, however great and good, can not be final. We hear much at the present time of "the Greater Iowa Movement".

[This appraisal of the literary resources of Iowa was presented as an address in observance of Iowa Day on October 10, 1916. It is reprinted from *The Iowa Alumnus*, Vol. 14, p. 39, November, 1916. —THE EDITOR.]

We join in looking to a greater Iowa to come, in believing in it, in working for it. Is it necessary to point out that such increased greatness, if it be true greatness, will not consist only in paved roads and taller silos, in greater crops of corn and larger shipments of live stock? These things are right and good in themselves. But in themselves they do not and will not make a truly great or greater Iowa. We are not interested in a certain Greek city in the fifth century B. C. because of the vast tonnage of raw material and finished fabric that passed through her harbor. We are interested because at that time and in that city arose mighty springs of human thought to the eternal benefiting of the race. The per capita wealth of London in 1600 means infinitely less to us than many a single line written by William Shakespeare. The material fact of the annual output of the fisheries along the Sea of Galilee is unspeakably paltry and insignificant compared with the spiritual fact of the Sermon on the Mount. In other words, the doctrine that a human life is completed by the accumulation of material wealth is not rendered any the less absurd by its seemingly wide acceptance. And the same is true of the life of a State. Iowa's enduring greatness must be of the spirit. And spiritual greatness inevitably finds expression in literature.

There is stuff for the making of literature in Iowa now. The intensity and eagerness of our lives, the aspiration and achievement so plentifully apparent,

are the elements that can make great books. There are wonderful stories in the tenuous, vibrant fabric of the business world, in the patient enthusiasm of the professions. There are great dramatic plots in Iowa agriculture, the most daring and chaotic the world has ever known, with its steady, exalting victories, and its slowly crushing defeats. There are all the colors and forms of humanity in our daily life — the mingling of races and moulding of a race — the amalgamation of ancient inheritances into a new tradition. Wonderful and holy and beautiful is it all to the writer's eye.

Already this life is beginning to find its expression. In Iowa, and in the Middle West as a whole, a younger generation of writers is beginning to voice this varied and active life, with its yet-living past and its unlimited future. Their work may or may not prove of permanent greatness. It will have done a service to the world if it interprets to the generations to come this virile life of ours. But its greatest service must consist in interpreting this life to us, who are living it to-day. If our writers are to produce a great literature, they must make us recognize the actual and potential nobility in our neighbor's life, and our own. They must inspire in us a belief in the high destiny of our State, and a desire to see a truly beautiful Iowa — a land of trees and flowers and fields and homes. They must make clear to us that our material prosperity is deadening unless it leads to nobler lives. They will have suc-

ceeded in their task if they show us that this material greatness of ours is good, because it is the means to the bringing of a truly greater Iowa — an Iowa whose greatness is of the spirit, from which are the eternal issues of righteousness and truth and beauty.

JOHN T. FREDERICK

Exponents of the Pioneers

What do you suppose the hard-headed, practical "newcomers" in the Iowa of the forties would say if we could explain to them to-day, on some Lethe's wharf, that they have become heroes of romance? Perhaps some of them would be well pleased; for, whatever their attitude toward bookish heroes and heroics, doubtless many of them had been moved to undertake the great adventure of Iowa pioneering not only by economic and social reasons but by certain ill-understood stirrings of romance within them. At any rate, here the Iowa pioneer is, arrived with all his train in the realm of Romance. His prairie schooner drawn by oxen, his log-cabin, his claim, his prairie of a thousand variable charms, his founding of government and schools and churches, his "bees", his hunting — all these, because we are proud of the courage and hardihood of our grandfathers and grandmothers, and a little proud of ourselves for having descended from them — all these are to-day transmuted to the very stuff of fable.

Two men of letters stand out as having done distinctive literary service to the Iowa pioneer. They are, of course, Hamlin Garland and Herbert Quick. These two men, though never close friends, were acquaintances over a long period. First brought together by a common enthusiasm for the doctrines of

Henry George in the eighties, they resumed their friendship later, when Quick had begun to write his novels of early Iowa.

The earlier pioneer period is Quick's, by virtue of *Vandemark's Folly*. This excellent novel, published in 1921, is the best literary interpretation of pioneer life in Iowa before the Civil War. It gives such an impression of veracity that many readers, finding it written in the first person, took it for genuine autobiography. Quick penetrated to the center of the life of the period. He knew it through and through; and, largely by means of the beautiful simplicity of his pellucid narrative style, the story-interest is perfectly maintained. That Quick lived imaginatively the life of the period is shown by the fact that he likes to dwell upon the very features which the commentators of those days themselves most emphasized — the beauty of the prairie, described in at least one unforgettable passage; the Iowa blizzards, upon which a prominent incident centers; and such matters as staking a claim, transporting large sums of money, and contacts with picturesque frontier characters. These things are also present in most books of first-hand pioneer reminiscence, but there they are done with less art and with less understanding of how the parts make one whole.

The post war pioneer era in Iowa has been copiously treated by both Quick and Garland. The Quick family came to Iowa in 1857, and the Garlands about ten years later, so both writers had their own

recollections of the sixties, seventies, and eighties to draw upon.

Quick's *The Hawkeye* is a sequel to *Vandemark's Folly*; and, unlike most sequels, it is generally thought to be quite as successful as its predecessor. "Freem" McConkey impedes his narrative with disquisitions more frequently than the less erudite "Jake" Vandemark; but the events of his experience perhaps lend themselves better to effective structure, the lynching at the end being a smashing climax. The characters are excellent: Mrs. McConkey is at once a type of the finest pioneer motherhood and an individual racy of the place and time; "Raws" Upright is an amazingly pleasant scamp; while as for "Freem" himself, one suspects in his likable characteristics and varied experiences more than a little of autobiography.

The Hawkeye covers the years from 1857 to 1885, and *The Invisible Woman,* the third of the Quick trilogy, belongs to the eighties and early nineties. It is a story of corruption in State politics. Christina Thorkelson, the heroine, is clerk in a great law firm which deals with politics and thus has an opportunity to see behind the scenes. There is a love story, and a great trial scene. As for politics, one finds them in nearly everything Quick wrote. I remember his saying not long before his death that *Vandemark* represented government as applied to the township, *The Hawkeye* stood for county affairs, and *The Invisible Woman* for State politics.

Quick's autobiography was unfinished, for it carries the story only to 1880; yet *One Man's Life* as we have it possesses a certain completeness. It is one of the best autobiographies of recent years and an invaluable addition to the literature dealing with the later pioneer era. As one who knew him reads it, it almost seems that his thoughtful, keen eyes look out at one from under that extraordinary dome-like brow of his. This book, taken with the trilogy, gives us the record of Herbert Quick's politics and sociology and philosophy of life — the form and pressure of his mind and soul. Honest, essentially and incurably a reformer, a born publicist, garrulous, a lover of good anecdote, and a keen observer, he has shown himself in all his qualities in these books relating to early Iowa.

It is the period of *The Hawkeye* with which Mr. Garland's earlier work coincides. His first stories were published in the late eighties; they were gathered into a book called *Main-Travelled Roads* in 1891. This was followed by two other collections. These stories were not historical in intent when they were published; but they may be so regarded now, since they portray life on Iowa farms as the boy Hamlin Garland had seen it in the seventies. They have been attacked as affording unfair, pessimistic pictures of that later pioneer life, but they are sincerely realistic; there were economic tyranny and oppression on the farm, and Mr. Garland, fired by reform ideas derived from Henry George, set out to

show them to the reader. The stories were effective, and made their author's early reputation.

They were autobiographic fiction. Three years later Mr. Garland published in the *Midland Monthly* a charming sketch called "Boy Life in the West — Winter", which was later printed, along with similar subsequent sketches, in a book with the title *Boy Life on the Prairie.* This volume, which still seems to me superior to all else of Mr. Garland's in freshness and vigor, has been too little praised, until now praise is unnecessary because, with his habit of redaction, its author has incorporated much of the material in *A Son of the Middle Border.* In this last, which is likely to stand as Mr. Garland's best piece of work, he has won to a true perspective of the pioneer period; and as a result he has produced a work kindlier, mellower, deeper than was possible to the single-minded writer of the *Main-Travelled Roads* stories.

Three other Middle Border books of autobiography complete an elaborate sequence, but only the first-published of them has much to do with Iowa. Still another book of reminiscences is soon to appear, this one dealing with literary friendships and acquaintance. A brochure called *A Pioneer Mother* must not be forgotten: it is one of the tenderest, sincerest little tributes ever penned. It was written by the son who put half the fee for his first story into the purchase of a silk dress for his hard-working, long-suffering mother.

Mr. Garland's talent is primarily autobiographical. It is true that most of his novels do not reflect directly his own experiences, but by the same token most of his novels can not be said to be very important. He has been writing direct autobiography ever since his early thirties, and now that he has reached three score and ten he writes as he lives — chiefly in the past. One can not talk to him without realizing that, justly enough perhaps, he is out of sympathy with most of the literary life of the present. He gained his first fame by a series of short stories which reflected his own childhood observations and experiences on a pioneer farm; he has attained his later eminence by a sequence of autobiographical works without parallel in American letters.

Iowa is fortunate in having had two such able interpreters of her pioneer life as Hamlin Garland and Herbert Quick.

Frank Luther Mott

A Novelist of the Unsung

Emerson Hough was preëminently a pioneer, even though he was born after the first great hordes of home-seekers had pushed the frontier into the ocean. He was a pioneer in the sense that he gave to the country a new literature of the West — a literature which despised the sensational presentation of the "wild west" with a few well-known characters, such as Kit Carson, Daniel Boone, and Lew Cody figuring as the heroes. He rather aimed to preserve the "history of the unsung" and elevate the "woman in the sunbonnet" to her true place in the sun. His work consists of a long line of glowing tales which were written "to preserve the old pioneer traditions and to reawaken the old pioneer virtues that gave fiber to the American character."

In blazing this new trail, Emerson Hough encountered many hardships, the heritage of the pioneer. Though he never trekked across the prairie in a covered wagon, he was confronted with circumstances which were sorely trying to the soul, if not the sinews. For years he slaved away at writing with no inducement but his own courage, and when his work was finally accepted it was constantly being judged by improper standards and bitterly assailed by critics who did not understand what he was trying to do. He did not, indeed, get well on the trail of writing

until he was past his youth, and his first successful novel was published when he was forty-five.

Born on the frontier at Newton, Iowa, on June 28, 1857, Emerson Hough came of a strong line of Quaker ancestors who, moving with the frontier, had helped to organize several States and Territories. His intrepid father, one of the early officers of Jasper County, thought nothing of shooting "an Indian and a buffalo on the first day of his journey from home with his baby." With such a father who had a passion for the open prairies, the woods, and the streams, it was only natural that Emerson should have been nurtured on nature lore and taught to handle a rifle while he was learning the alphabet. The trail of his love for the open spaces was thus deeply grooved before it swerved off to meet the companion path of writing.

The boy Emerson flourished in his rough Iowa environment, and grew to be as tough as an oak and lithe as a sapling. He bore no particular marks of genius "unless his preference for roving the town and the country alone" could be called such. Somewhere between childhood and maturity, however, was laid the foundation for that "meditation, introspection, visual memory and personal sensitiveness" which resulted in his "sustained, energetic and often saddening adventures for the twenty-five years between college and success among the natural and social phenomena with which thereafter he dealt."

His father wanted him to become a lawyer and

for that profession he was educated, graduating from the State University of Iowa in 1880. After being admitted to the bar, he located in a tiny frontier town in New Mexico, in the mountain region between the Rio Grande and Pecos rivers. It was a wild, rough place, "half cow-town and half mining camp", and the young attorney's eyes were forever open to an engrossing, historic pageant which somehow seemed to get into his mind in the form of plots and stories. The outdoors was forever calling him, and his "yearning for the open spaces, his crusades to save the last remnants of the buffalo and wilderness playgrounds for the new generations of Americans, and his love for shooting and fishing, all kept him moving about the earth too freely and constantly to leave much time for legal practice."

A sudden jolt came into his happy and unprosperous life, however, when he received word that his father had failed in business. Immediately he cast about for some sort of congenial and remunerative work, and found that his "perfectly good and perfectly worthless" university education was of mighty little value to him or his family back east. But instead of concentrating upon the legal profession, he remembered that in the course of his law studies he "used to snatch time for writing". The lure of his former pastime beckoned, and he decided to try writing in earnest.

This was the beginning of long years of disappointment and discouragement. If he sold at all,

he received no more than ten dollars for an article which later would have brought a thousand. His first accepted work of this period was a series of "Southwestern Sketches" which were printed in the old *American Field.* Soon after this he "did odds and ends and collected bad debts" on the Sandusky (Ohio) *Register.* He wrote sports articles on the side and did humorous stuff "at a time", in his own words, "when I was sadder than I have ever been since in my life." For all this labor and heartache the syndicates paid him the sum of five dollars a column — "when they paid it — which was always 90 days or so overdue." When, in 1889, he was offered the Chicago office of *Forest and Stream* at a salary of "$15 a week — minus office rent" — he felt that he had graduated from the school of hard knocks into a rosy land of plenty.

But his long struggle was just beginning. His indefatigable energy and the crying need for money held him to the writing treadmill after office hours, and finally his first book, *The Singing Mouse Stories,* was published in 1895. In 1897 came *The Story of the Cowboy,* his first real success. Theodore Roosevelt was so impressed with it that he wrote the author a letter of praise, saying, "I always wanted to write this book myself. Now, thank God, it's done better than I could have done it." This was the first praise Mr. Hough had ever received, and he treasured the letter above all his possessions. The knowledge of a book well done must

have given him greater faith in himself, for in October of that same year he married Miss Charlotte A. Cheesebro of Chicago.

The Girl of the Half-way House appeared in 1900 and had only a fair sale. The author was not discouraged, however, in spite of its luke-warm success, for his "taste for historical subjects had begun to awaken, and he felt the urge to begin a story of this sort. So, dictating "direct to the machine in his office during the daytime, or penciling it after 10 o'clock at night, Mr. Hough wrote *The Mississippi Bubble* which in 1902 brought him national recognition. He had five copies of the manuscript made and sent them out to the leading publishers. To his consternation, two replied by telegraph and the others accepted by letter." The company that offered $5000 advance royalties got the contract. "Of course this was more money than there was in the whole world, and more than I had ever seen," Hough explained. "It seems quite natural that I took that offer in preference to any of the others."

When the book began to attract considerable attention, the New York editors of *Forest and Stream* decided that their Chicago representative could not be a very good journalist or he would not have written the "Bubble". Acting on this hypothesis they immediately dismissed him, and left in the wake of their ultimatum "the worst scared man in the world" who had a wife and no visible or invisible means of support save "that ancient ambition to

write." Years later, however, Hough could say, "I wish the *Forest and Stream* had fired me ten years earlier. I could have paid them three times the salary they ever paid me." And then he went on, "Well, now, I began to write in earnest and to my surprise to make a very good living at it. Magazines began to take my stories. I began to sell short stories, then serials."

His first novels were written between midnight and four o'clock in the morning, after his regular work had taken toll of his energy. *Fifty-four Forty or Fight* was written in three weeks, "in the hottest July Chicago ever saw," and three nights in one week he never went to bed at all. He was then fifty-two years old!

Thus, after years of strenuous effort he suddenly arrived. But an earlier and more spectacular success, before he had mastered his craft and gained his stride, would never have satisfied a man like Hough. He would not have tolerated winning except by his own efforts. "I never wanted to get on in life through the work of anybody else; it would be no satisfaction to me to advance if I had to walk on hearts and faces to do that. Long ago I knew that if I did not beat the game out of my own hand it would have no satisfaction and no significance for me to beat it at all."

Almost forty years were required to become a consistent winner, but after the first trick his literary output grew and grew until it was probably "greater

than that of most American writers of his time." Even if what he thought worthless were discarded there would still be a bulk of "wordage" which would place him among the first ten writers of his period.

The Mississippi Bubble was published in 1902, with three books preceding it. After this appeared in succession, *The Way of the West,* 1903; *The Law of the Land,* 1904; *Heart's Desire,* 1905; *The King of Gee Whiz,* 1906; *The Story of the Outlaw,* 1906; *The Way of a Man,* 1907; *Fifty-four Forty or Fight,* 1909; *The Sowing,* 1909; *The Young Alaskans,* 1910; *The Purchase Price,* 1911; *John Rawn — Prominent Citizen,* 1912; *The Lady and the Pirate,* 1913; *The Young Alaskans in the Rockies,* 1913; *Young Alaskans on the Trail,* 1914; *The Magnificent Adventure,* 1915; *The Man Next Door,* 1916; *The Broken Gate,* 1917; *Young Alaskans in the Far North,* 1918; *The Way Out,* 1918; *The Sagebrusher,* 1919; *The Web,* 1919; *The Covered Wagon,* 1922; and *North of Thirty-six,* 1923. Besides this he conducted an "Out-of-Doors" section in the *Saturday Evening Post,* and wrote hundreds of short stories and articles. Few men could push themselves with such persistence at his time of life.

In everything Emerson Hough wrote there were two predominating, intertwining ideas — his love for the outdoors and his love for the pioneer. Concerning the first of these, he once analyzed the trend of his own career, and, as he put it, found that "the

boy was indeed the father of the man". Elucidating, he continued, "All my life I have adhered to my love for the out-of-doors, and I presume that the great bulk of all I have written has had to do with life in the open or with sports of the field. I have always found there the cleanest of experiences, the cleanest of ambitions and the cleanest of companionships." It was natural, too, that the pioneers should become his characters, for he believed that the "courage, patience, hardihood — the elemental virtues — of the men and women who won our West, were glorious things; and he believed, moreover, that our modern civilization will suffer mortally if these qualities die out."

In promoting this ideal, Hough spared time from his literary activities to conduct a lifelong crusade for the preservation of natural resources. To him "America was a great, all-embracing personage," a "benign goddess or a kind and glorious mother whom as a faithful son he served with instant loyalty." And as a son he felt that he had a right to enjoy the bounty of his country, and a duty to pass it on increased and unimpaired. For forty years he waged a tireless campaign for conservation. Due in a large measure to his influence, the few remaining herds of bison were given safe pasturage in Yellowstone, new national parks were established, and portions of the West and Southwest were preserved for their natural grandeur.

From the purely fictional standpoint, *The Missis-*

sippi Bubble was probably his most popular book. "In that romance he succeeded admirably in combining the historic and picturesque flavor of old American life with a personal story of adventure and love." *The Girl at the Half-way House* was perhaps his best as a charming bit of story telling. But the best known of all his novels is *The Covered Wagon,* "a stirring epic of the Oregon trail — the Westward Ho of 1848". A splendid moving picture based upon the book contributed to the reputation of the author. In the picture as in the book the fight with the Indians assumed no greater significance than the scene in which the "woman in the sunbonnet" steadfastly refused to part with the old bureau, because its drawers were filled with flower seeds; and the crossing of the Platte was no greater drama than the long lines of covered wagons snaking their way in endless procession across the treeless plains.

North of Thirty-six portrayed the beginning of the great cattle movement northward from Texas to the railroad. This and *The Covered Wagon* were to form parts of a trilogy about the American pioneer. The third book, to be called *The Tall Men,* was sketched out but never written. In it he planned to "celebrate those restless sons of Kentucky, of Virginia, and of Missouri who pushed our frontier forward to the Pacific and fought it south to the Rio Grande."

Almost every book which Hough turned out was

promptly assailed by meticulous critics. They complained that he described conditions inaccurately, they found discrepancies in names or dates, for they measured the historical novel by the same yardstick they applied to history. But the hue and cry of these matter-of-fact critics did not disturb the author. He kept steadily on, weaving his romances from truth and fiction with the ruggedness and virility of the marching pioneer. Within twenty-one years after his first success he produced twenty-five volumes, almost all of which were pervaded with the spirit of the frontiersmen who "stood shoulder to shoulder and waged battle with the elemental forces of life; those men who made the frontier a place of romance and action; those men who gritted their teeth, did their work and took their medicine."

As might be expected, he had little sympathy for the Greenwich Village type of literati. Upon one occasion he was introduced to an "intellectual", and afterward explained his feelings. "I shed tears over my inability to admire him as I was asked to do", he said, "but in good sooth I did not admire his conceit, his necktie or his nails. Neither do I admire the stilted self-consciousness and the smirking affectation," which constitute the "hallmarks of much of the 'new literature', the 'new culture' of our country".

Hough's own philosophy of life was as rugged as the nature of his characters. He was emphatic in his belief that the really great men in America al-

ways have come from "the old frontier stock of America", and it was that strain which he felt could be invariably "found in the saddle running things." He believed implicitly that when "this Republic shall have grown old enough to have a distinctive literature, it will be a literature of our people, for our people — and by our people."

PAULINE GRAHAME

The Younger School

There are many references in the discussions of recent American literature by national critics, as well as by those of our own State, to the "younger school" of Iowa writers. It is, however, not quite accurate to speak of these younger writers as though they constitute a definite group. They are not people who know each other intimately and work in constant contact with each other and under circumstances of mutual criticism and encouragement, as has been the case in many literary movements. Nor is it true that the work of these younger Iowa writers shows any considerable degree of uniformity. There are certain resemblances but these are the signs of the relation of the Iowa writers to the whole movement of Middle Western realism, which in its turn is a part of that nation-wide literary movement called "regionalism" — certainly the most important development in American literature in the past generation. Iowa writers share the fundamental qualities of Middle Western realism and to this extent their work shows resemblance; but individually they differ widely from each other, more than one of them may differ, for example, from a writer of Missouri or Kansas.

If there is one thing more frequently said about the younger Iowa writers than any other, one criti-

cism most frequently leveled against them, it is that their work is drab, prosaic, and sordid, that it does not contain anything that is happy, bright, or romantic, and that because of this it fails to give a fair picture of Iowa life. In so far as it is generally true that the work of the younger Iowa writers lacks bright colors, this is only one of the general characteristics of Middle Western realism as a whole, and certainly no Iowa writer has gone so far in this direction as have some of those of other States. Iowa has produced nothing like Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology,* or Haldeman-Julius's *Dust,* or Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street.* And it is to be noted that no Iowa writer has written in hatred of his material, as so obviously some of the other Middle Western realists have.

Not even in the case of Roger Sergel's *Arlie Gelston,* which has perhaps been more violently condemned for its picturing of Iowa than any other novel, is the treatment that of one who writes in hatred or contempt. As a matter of fact Mr. Sergel is not primarily interested in his Iowa material as Iowan. His novel is not in the narrow sense regional at all. He is concerned rather with a person, a character conditioned by certain psychological limitations as well as by external circumstances, and his work belongs to the world-wide trend of psychological realism rather than to regionalism. In so far as he does present the Iowa landscape and the Iowa small town his work is brilliant and accurate.

Arlie Gelston is a novel of great insight. I feel, however, that it is too long, that its results could have been attained more economically.

The same indictment might stand against Walter Muilenburg's *Prairie.* Mr. Muilenburg first came into prominence as a short story writer. His stories published in *The Midland* and elsewhere, in 1915 and since, have been reprinted in Edward J. O'Brien's annual collections of *Best Short Stories* and have been singled out by O'Brien and others for special praise. These stories are characterized by a truly splendid style, remarkably accurate in its response to the emotional demands of the stories, and intrinsically beautiful. All of Mr. Muilenburg's stories show a strong feeling for the Iowa landscape and great firmness and sureness in the presentation of Iowa characters who are at once representative and individual. The same qualities are to be found in his novel, which remains one of the most important contributions yet made to the literary interpretation of Middle Western agricultural life. It is to be noted, however, that this novel is only partly Iowan in its setting and events. The greater part of the story is laid in Dakota.

A writer who has stuck to Iowa and who has brought into his work a great variety of Iowa material is Jay G. Sigmund. If I were asked to mention a writer in whose work I find fully represented all that is racy and authentic in Iowa life, all that is specifically Iowan, I should think of Sigmund at

once. Both in his verse and his prose he has achieved, as it seems to me, significant and living characters and situations. I wish that he had chosen to deal more generously with humorous materials and with the lighter aspects of the life of the State, for he does such work very well. As it stands, however, his most satisfying achievements, in the volume of short stories called *Merged Blood* and in his several volumes of poems, are those which present stark tragedies. Mr. Sigmund's work as a whole is marred by defects due to his astonishing fertility of imagination and to his wide and sensitive response to the dramatic values in his chosen material. He tends to write too rapidly and many of his stories and poems remain arresting and impressive sketches rather than fully realized works of art.

No discussion of the younger Iowa writers would be complete without some reference to some of the youngest of these writers whose work is just beginning to attract attention. One of these, Clarence Sundermeyer, is now a member of the Department of English at Iowa State College at Ames. His story, "World-Gate", dealing with the experience of an Iowa farm boy, was double-starred by O'Brien in 1928. Mr. Sundermeyer's work has psychological depth and a fine structural sense.

Another very promising short story writer is Vernon Lichtenstein, who is teaching English at Coe College in Cedar Rapids. Mr. Lichtenstein's "June Morning" was placed on the roll of honor by

Edward J. O'Brien in his 1929 volume. I like especially the style of Mr. Lichtenstein's stories and the unusually sympathetic presentation of characters whose psychological processes would be inaccessible to most writers.

A young Iowa writer whose work seems to be outstanding is Grace Hunter, an instructor at Grinnell. She has done work both in verse and in prose which is sincere and effective.

Rather the best interpretation of Iowa in lyric poetry which recent years has offered is to be found in the too-infrequent poems of James Hearst of Cedar Falls. Mr. Hearst's work, published in such magazines as *The Independent* and *Poetry,* as well as in *The Midland,* has a fresh recognition and expression of poetic truth in common things, which makes it akin to the best lyrics of Robert Frost and establishes it as poetry of a very high order indeed.

I should note at this point that the self-imposed limitations of this article exclude writers whose work is not peculiarly Iowan in the material as well as in origin. This prevents me from paying more than a passing tribute to the superlatively fine lyrics of J. G. Neumann or the rapidly maturing work of Thomas Duncan, and from mentioning at all a number of very interesting and promising young Iowa writers whose work is not especially associated with the State by their choice of material.

Undoubtedly "Iowa Literature" is identified most generally in the minds of American critics and

readers with Ruth Suckow. Miss Suckow first began to publish verse, and some memorable unpretentious lyrics are to her credit. Her first short stories appeared in *The Midland* in 1921 and in the *Smart Set,* then edited by H. L. Mencken, in the same year. She has continued to write short stories and is now a regular contributor to *Harper's* and other magazines. Her collected short stories were published in 1926 under the title *Iowa Interiors.*

Miss Suckow's first novel, *Country People,* appeared in 1924. It is a compact epic of the Iowa soil, conveying a very strong sense of the movement of agricultural life in Iowa in the last three generations. In her succeeding novels, *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl,* 1925, and *The Bonney Family,* 1928, she came closer to her characters and presented them with greater completeness. There is a marvelous wealth of accurate and revealing details in her story of the young girl in the "Odyssey". Many readers have told me how remarkably this story parallels their own experience. "I am that girl", is not an uncommon comment. In *The Bonney Family* we have a stronger central character and one with whom readers are likely to be less sympathetic. The minor characters in this novel are much better than those in the earlier books. It presents a magnificently realized family group.

In Miss Suckow's latest novel, *Cora,* 1929, the central character is still stronger and attains a triumph denied to most of Miss Suckow's protagonists

—though it proves to be a triumph that is robbed and defeated by forces within Cora herself. This is a rich and glowing dramatic novel, poignant in its emotion, and full of meaning. It includes an especially impressive study of an old man, Cora's father. Miss Suckow shares with Dreiser, it is interesting to note, an extraordinary ability to present old men.

Against all of Miss Suckow's work the charge of drabness has been directed again and again. One thing which is overlooked by those who find this fault is Miss Suckow's intensly poetic feeling for the Iowa landscape. This is never absent from her work though it is never allowed to intrude or to overbalance the effects she desires. But certainly the writer was not unattuned to loveliness who could describe an Iowa landscape in these terms:

> The "lay of the land" — something in that to stir the deepest feeling in a man. Low rolling hills, fold after fold, smooth brown and autumnal, some ploughed to soft earth-colour, some set with corn stalks of pale tarnished gold. Along the farther ones, the woods lay like a coloured cloud, brown, russet, red and purple-tinged. As he walked on, the houses grew fewer, everything dwindled into pasture land. The feeling of autumn grew more poignant. There was a scent of dust in the stubble. The trees grew in scattered russet groups. One slender young cottonwood, yellow as a goldfinch and as lyric in its quality, stood in a meadow, alone. Not even spring beauty was so aching and so transient — like music fading away. Yet, under everything, something abiding and eternal.

"But Miss Suckow's people", the objector will say, "are all dull and unhappy". I can only reply that I do not find them so. As I study the gallery of Miss Suckow's characters in my own memory of her books, I do not find that tragedy and unhappiness are more general among them than in the lives of the Iowans I know in the flesh. Among them I find many who are happy and many human relationships which are beautiful and adequate. Take, for instance, the matter of the Iowa small-town or rural church. Miss Suckow can show the tragedy of the narrowness and pettiness of the small town in such a story as "Wanderers", in which the aged minister is forced out of his charge because he has refused to flatter wealthy members. But she also gives us the deep and genuine love of Mr. Bonney for his church and of his parishoners for him. This is a fine tribute indeed to an institution which has been the object of much unfair criticism. It shows how far Miss Suckow is above the range of the ordinary exploiters of the imperfections of Middle Western life.

I feel that many of the objections to Miss Suckow's work are due to her method, not to her material at all, although readers may not realize this. As a writer she is so objective, so reserved, so careful not to put herself into the picture, that she often seems unsympathetic toward her characters. But this is the method of true realism. When we indict Miss Suckow on this ground, we

are indicting Tchehov and Turgenev, Tolstoy and Flaubert, Conrad and Hardy.

Miss Suckow has her limitations, I think. I feel that she has not yet realized quite all of the possibilities of her materials. I grant that there are contrasts, colors, intensities in Iowa life which she has yet to fit into the patterns of her work. It is possible that she is not aware of these qualities; if so, this will constitute a permanent limitation in her work. I think, rather, that she has chosen not to use them, because she shrinks so strongly from such over-dramatizing of the Middle Western material, as one can see illustrated in the work of Martha Ostenso. With this attitude of Miss Suckow's I am in the heartiest sympathy. Her work seems to me to show a steady growth and I feel confident that she is bringing into it, with an artistic judgment of the surest acuteness, more and more richly all the significant values of her material. She seems to me very definitely the greatest figure, not only among young Iowa writers, but in the whole Middle Western and regional movement in America to-day. Her position is at the very front in American letters.

JOHN T. FREDERICK

Iowa Literary Magazines

When youthful Iowa was still primarily a land of pioneering adults, some curious mental twist prompted the settlers to establish colleges in every city of promise (and what city was not promising?), so that by 1850 there were fifty "paper" colleges in the State. Seemingly it never occurred to any one that before there could be colleges there must be students. In like manner, before there were readers to support them, or writers to contribute to them, there were outcroppings of "literary journals" in the pioneer cities. They were little more than newspapers, however, and their infant birth-cries were soon hushed when they suffered death by malnutrition.

The dream to establish a magazine to express the literary sentiments of the West has a long tradition. In its earlier phases it was expressed in the *Journal of Belles Lettres,* established in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1819; the *Western Quarterly Review,* begun in Cincinnati in 1832; the *Western Literary Journal,* established in Cincinnati in 1836, and many others. In Iowa the dream did not materialize until much later when a returning tide of sectional consciousness brought the *Midland Monthly* into the world.

Published at Des Moines by Johnson Brigham,

the first number (January, 1894) announced the periodical to be "a home magazine, affording scope for the best talent in literature and art, and proving for the home circle a class of reading essentially interesting, not solely to one member of the family, but, in some respects at least, its oldest and its youngest members alike". Its field was to be "the world in general, and the midland region in particular". Amateur as well as professional writers were solicited to contribute.

Each number consisted of about one hundred pages. There were stories of novel length, short stories, and poems; there were, moreover, descriptive, travel, and historical sketches. Women's clubs and matters of education received considerable attention. The "Midland Book Table" reviewed current literature, with emphasis perhaps on literature pertaining to the Middle West. Illustrations, both photographs and drawings, were numerous. All in all the magazine made a good appearance.

Unfortunately, from a financial point of view, the venture was not profitable. The subscription price was only $1.50 for the year. Although the supporters of the magazine were enthusiastic over its future, an inability to procure advertising at paying rates brought the undertaking to a close at the end of 1898. Years later, in writing of the demise of his journal, Mr. Brigham said: "When an opportunity came to turn over the magazine to St. Louis parties, I felt a sense of relief, feeling that if the

Midland Monthly were doomed to die, I, at least, would not have to attend the funeral. It 'died and made no sign' ".

The *Midland Monthly's* claim upon immortality rests, perhaps, chiefly upon the fact that it helped to keep a dream alive. Unquestionably it stimulated an interest in the literary possibilities of the Middle West. More specifically it will be remembered in its connection with Hamlin Garland, some of whose "Prairie Songs" appeared in the first number, and whose "Boy Life in the West—Winter" —suggestive of *Boy Life on the Prairie*—made a part of the second number Some other well known names are included in the list of contributors, among them Emerson Hough, whose short story of Arizona and Apache Indians, "Belle's Roses", was published in June, 1895. Ellis Parker Butler contributed a number of short poems and Alice French a short story or two. Still other writers well known to Iowans who wrote for the *Midland Monthly* are Harvey Ingham, Irving B. Richman, and Cyrenus Cole, not to omit Mr. Brigham himself.

In 1915 *The Midland,* unrelated save in name to the *Midland Monthly,* made its initial appearance in Iowa City. It was founded by a group of students who were assisted and encouraged by several members of the University faculty. Possibly because its founders were for the most part young people, the first number radiated enthusiasm, its atmosphere suggestive of the crusader's spirit. The

experience of Middle Western writers, said the editor, "proves that the spirit of the Middle West does not at present find adequate expression. . . . We have found, too, that the Middle West possesses a regional consciousness. We have met with a response not bounded by rivers nor limited by state lines. The Middle West exists as a unit in the life of the world. It is waiting for self-expression. . . . The possibilities for the development of a western magazine, devoted to the service of all our classes of reading and thinking people, have been little more than suggested. But we trust that we have made clear the magazine's belief in, and dedication to, the highest interests of the Middle West."

With the passing of time, *The Midland* has laid less and less stress on sectionalism. In 1920, five years after the founding of the magazine, its editor said, "the publisher and the editors of *The Midland* hope that their familiarity with the life of their neighbors may be helpful to good writers whose interpretations are true. To this degree *The Midland* was and is sectional. Probably it is not more sectional than other magazines; probably its isolation makes it more conscious of sectionalism."

In the issue of January, 1930, just fifteen years after the initial number, the outward features of regionalism have been definitely left behind. No longer content with its original subtitle, "A magazine of the Middle West," the editors, John T. Frederick and Frank Luther Mott, now feel that their

journal may rightly be called "A National Literary Magazine". The new phrase on the cover and title page, says Mr. Frederick, "is in somewhat belated recognition of the fact that almost from the beginning the material printed in the magazine has come from all parts of the country". Similarly, the readers of *The Midland* have long since ceased to be limited to the Middle West. It was perhaps inevitable that the purely regional appeal should cease when the magazine became established.

To one of its original tenets, however, *The Midland* still adheres: it is not a commercial enterprise. It is not endowed, and editors and contributors alike receive no compensation. Admission to its pages is not determined by the apparent popularity of the material, but by the taste of the editors. Honesty of treatment and artistry with which effect is created are two standards by which contributions are judged. The publication is amateur in spirit and is especially devoted to the work of young writers. It does not seek noted names. Indeed, its greatest material service may be the discovery and encouragement of talent that has later become generally recognized. Among the better known writers whose early efforts first appeared in *The Midland* are Ruth Suckow, Roger L. Sergel, Edna Bryner, and Philip Stevenson. Edward J. O'Brien has said that "during the past few years *The Midland* has made more discoveries and focussed them more clearly than any other periodical".

It is too early to judge *The Midland* finally, especially since its ends are so difficult to define. Commercial success it does not seek, and so will not attain. One might suggest that its fifteen years denote success, if *The Midland* itself found "virtue in mere longevity". Pleasure in writing and pleasure in reading, perhaps its ultimate goal, are elements not easily measured, yet one feels that behind and beyond all tangible standards of attainment are assurances of truth and honesty that are ends in themselves.

The Husk, published thrice a year at Mt. Vernon since 1922, does not aspire to be a national magazine; neither does it attempt to be regional in character. It seeks to be a college literary magazine that reflects life rather than collegiate conventionalities. Primarily its contributors are students or alumni of Cornell College, though Carl Sandburg and Jay G. Sigmund, two of its notable supporters, are neither. The fine amateur atmosphere of this slender little periodical was excellently voiced by its first editor, Alfred E. Longueil, in the sentiment that "hard trying is ultimately worth more than achieving; that the spirit in which things are done counts for more than things done; that the attitude of the craftsman toward his craft, of the thinker toward his thought, is a more vital contribution to life than any concrete achievement of craftsman or thinker". Where the endeavor is so much more significant than the deed, possibly there is an irrelevancy in recall-

ing names, yet somehow one remembers, among the contributors of verse, Thelma Lull, Jewell Bothwell Tull, and Kathryn Fenstermacher. Janet McBroom's short story, "A Dissertation on Roast Pork", has received O'Brien's high commendation.

At present the magazine is edited by Clyde Tull of the English department. The art department of the College, under the direction of Nama A. Lathe, assists in making the publication attractive through cover designs and illustrations of stories and verse. Unlike the almost severe simplicity of the cover design of *The Midland,* the cover of *The Husk* appears in new guise with each issue. The linoleum cuts illustrating the magazine are good. This is a handsome little periodical.

The Tanager is published bi-monthly at Grinnell by the English and journalism departments of Grinnell College. Although many of its contributors are students, there are frequent articles by such famous writers as James Norman Hall, Ruth Suckow, Carl Sandburg, Gamaliel Bradford, Hamilton Holt, and others. In the main, the objectives of the journal are apparently literary; the forum, however, is represented by articles and editorials in which non-literary matters are discussed. A regular feature of the magazine consists of book reviews, which have been accompanied in the later numbers by interesting illustrations. *The Tanager* has been published since 1926.

If Iowa is ever to produce a commercially suc-

cessful literary magazine, the day of its realization still seems far distant. Mr. Brigham's attempt was a brave one and served a useful purpose in a period of transition, yet it is doubtful whether there would now be an intrinsic virtue in a similar enterprise. If there is an aspect of contemporary American literature that is conspicuous and generally recognized, it is regionalism. But it is a regionalism that no longer needs to struggle for expression in periodicals of a local character. There is, however, and perhaps forever will be, an apology for the amateur journal whose hope is to "lighten and brighten life" through writing, and for the editor who believes that "trying is ultimately worth more than achieving."

HUBERT H. HOELTJE

Comment by the Editor

THE GEOGRAPHY OF LITERATURE

What is the nature of regional literature? pondered the Mentor, as he laid down a volume of negro poetry and took up a novel of mid-western realism.

That depends on your meaning, responded the Critic. If fine writing be judged by quality only, literature is universal; for excellence in any art defies confinement to the area of its origin.

But suppose the material of literary portraiture is the life of prairie pioneers, continued the Mentor. While they possessed the common traits of human nature, the peculiar features of their environment and livelihood combined to forge a type of character and shape a destiny such as no people ever had before or ever can acquire again. To reconstruct those times in words is to produce a literature that is regional in substance no matter how fundamental it may be as art.

How can subject-matter be a proper test for classifying literature? questioned the Critic. By such a standard all writing possesses local character. The residence or nativity of the author would be as pertinent to literary analysis as the vital stuff he writes about.

The geography of authorship is indeed signifi-

cant, asserted the Mentor. By that means the authenticity of a book can often be determined. They write best who write of what they know.

Who, then, shall be counted as regional authors? inquired the Critic. Judged by your criterion of competence, only those who live continuously in one locality can be included. Alice French and Cornelia Meigs, S. H. M. Byers and John T. Frederick would qualify as Iowa authors, but their themes are seldom Iowan.

The formula must be broad enough to include all who are born within the State as well as those who claim this Commonwealth as home, explained the Mentor. Margaret Wilson, Ellis P. Butler, and James Norman Hall may be considered as Iowa authors, though they live in London, New York, and Tahiti.

J. E. B.

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