

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.