

By Way of Summary

The portrayal of the Iowa farm in fiction, from Garland to Feikema, has shown a faithful response to the major currents in our national literature. It has attained levels of high achievement in each successive phase. Sincerity has been the prevailing common denominator of the writers who have created this portrayal. Many have been moved by love of the life they portrayed, some by rebellious anger against its circumstances. But in general they have been clear sighted, blinded neither by anger nor by love; and they have tried to tell the truth. Almost without exception they have escaped the trap always baited for the unwary regionalist: the mistaking of the means for the end, the exploitation of regional peculiarity or idiosyncrasy as such, for its own sake.

In 1922 I began to teach at the State University of Iowa what was, I believe, the first course in contemporary American literature ever offered at an American university. I have been teaching such courses ever since. For the last fifteen years I have been regularly occupied as a reviewer of current books, in addition to my teaching. I venture to introduce these personal details at this point, not in deference to the dictum of Huneker

which I mentioned at the outset, but because the fact that the study of contemporary literature has been my business for nearly thirty years — as well as my special interest — may lend a degree of authority to the conclusion at which I have arrived as a result of the survey which I have outlined in the preceding pages: that for the period surveyed, no other state can show a portrayal of its rural life in fiction so rich, so varied, and so generally sound as can Iowa. As a native Iowan, I think this is as it should be.

Yet the job is not done. The unused materials and unrecognized opportunities in the field far exceed those that have been utilized. Whole regions of the state have been neglected. Where are the novels which capture the immensely rich life of the great rivers which border the state, in their intimate relationship to the life of the people of the farms and towns beside them? Where is the novel which pictures the landscape of the northeastern corner of the state and its effect? We lack authoritative revelation of the dynamic relationship between farm and town in Iowa — especially in terms of the lives of business and professional men, merchants, bankers, doctors, and lawyers. We lack adequate portrayal of success in farming as opposed to failure — of the lives of the relatively prosperous and happy. In recent years the nation as a whole has been aroused to a new concern for the land itself, a questioning as to what we

have done with our land and what we are to do with it. The American people are beginning to see, with rapidly increasing sharpness and clearness, the basic importance for the very preservation of our national life and of the race itself of that essentially religious feeling for the land — that sense of stewardship — which has always been the mark of the true farmer. The writer can always find fresh terms for that ancient and ageless theme, man in relation to the earth.