

William Allen White's Early Fiction

by William R. Elkins

A number of questions necessarily preface any attempt to deal with William Allen White's fiction. For many people, the very fact that White was an active writer of fiction for more than thirty years of his career, that the amount of fiction is considerable—eight volumes, at least two of which are novels—may in itself be a revelation. But beyond the simple facts that fiction writing was for White a serious avocation and that he published a large amount, other questions arise. For instance, those who know White only as a small-town newspaper editor who became a nationally-noted editorialist, an influential political figure, a hob-nobber with governors, members of congress, and presidents, may want answers to such questions as: What is this body of fiction all about? How was it received during White's lifetime? Who reads it now? Should it be read now?

Certainly, the answers to these questions have little individual significance. They must be considered within some overall context of which the most obvious is the man himself. That approach, however, seems abundantly covered by the biographies already available. Especially, does John DeWitt McKee in his recent book, *William Allen White: Maverick on Main Street*,¹ rely on the fiction to achieve the position toward the man that is readily apparent in his title. One other approach, placing White's fiction within a theory of the functions of literature and the practices of criticism, is more elusive; and, for that reason, remains relatively untouched. Indeed, such an approach demands that clearly defined theories exist and that there is unanimity about their characteristics. Of course, the notion of general agreement among scholar/critics about literary functions and critical techniques is nonsense. The best one can do is to advance his own particular viewpoint and make it convincing. My purpose here, then, is to offer, if not a theory at least a rationale, and to examine White's early fiction within its context so that some light may fall upon those questions previously mentioned.

1. John DeWitt McKee, *William Allen White: Maverick on Main Street* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975).

I

There are seemingly universal critical techniques that are apparent when the writings of a literary figure come under examination. One of these is that the imaginative outpourings of a writer lend themselves to categories or eras that mark that particular writer's development. If the critic is primarily interested in artistic development, he concerns himself with the evolution of form, the heightening of technique. If the critic is primarily interested in the development of ideas, he looks for those indicators early on in the writings that mark changing philosophies; philosophies that become part of a vision, that view of life which the writer projects and constantly enlarges throughout his literary life. In the case of "classic" writers, the latter concern leads to an explanation of just why it is that the writer achieves a "classic" position in literature. For instance, "classic" American writers of the 19th century, the Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain types, continue to find an audience among modern readers because their writings, regardless of time or place, speak to, or better perhaps, stir within the reader a kinship with basic human needs; those often deeply buried but keenly felt alliances with what critics like to term the "human condition." As often as not, the "classic" writer was mostly ignored during his own time. Poe, Melville, and to a certain extent, Whitman are examples of neglect by their contemporaries.

Although neglect during a writer's lifetime and subsequent recognition are not prerequisites to "classic" designation, the paradox serves here to identify another division that exists. Put quite simply, the overwhelming majority of writers of any one era, who gain popularity during their time, sink from view. Probably most of them should sink from view. But somewhere in that mass of "popular" literature, an important, very often an intriguing writer, is caught in the undertow; and, if he surfaces, he does so as a curiosity or a literary foil for the better-known. The writer is, to put it mildly, labeled second-rate or third-rate; interesting only as he or she may allow us truly to see the "classic" ones.

All of this, of course, brings us back to William Allen White, editor AND writer of fiction. It brings us back because the fact of its existence and the viewpoint that it expresses are narrow and, in White's case, deny an important part of the literary heritage of Kansas. We should not be overly concerned with his artistic development, nor should we be concerned with his changing philosophical stance because, as McKee correctly notes, he was not, at the core, an in-

consistent man.² What we can do, however, is to identify White's early collection of short fiction, *The Real Issue*, *The Court of Boyville*, *Stratagems and Spoils*, and *In Our Town* as an era during which White exercised a range of fictional themes that established him as a "popular" writer who provided an eager audience with views of Kansas life and characters. Obviously, those views become a part of the literary heritage of Kansas. Since four books is a large order for a single article, the major emphasis here will fall upon the first collection, *The Real Issue*, for in it are the seeds from which the other three grew.

II

In a sense, White's first venture into fiction foretells the direction that much of his writing was to take. His first short story grew from his position as reporter and editorial writer for the *Eldorado Republican* and his entry into the political arena after the defeat of the Republicans by the Populists in 1890. White, the young Republican, quickly grasped the rudiments of political power. He adopted the political position that was to serve him for the rest of his career. He says, "I took no office. I knew enough even then to realize that he who seeks honors loses power. To help an up-and-coming young fellow become chairman of a committee, gave me more power than he had, if he was grateful."³

After his return from the Young Republican convention, where "he swung the Butler County delegation . . . to the support of the state chairman,"⁴ he wrote "The Regeneration of Colonel Hucks."⁵ The story, later included in his first volume, *The Real Issue*, is about an old-line Republican who had strayed into the Populist movement because of the pressure exerted by his neighbors, all members of the Farmer's Alliance. For Colonel Hucks, the call of his former party was too strong; consequently, he attends the Republican convention, excitedly enters into the fervor of the proceedings, and is thereby, "regenerated." About this story, White later writes with insight and good-humored candor, "It was all emotion, all sentiment, and probably all nonsense."⁶ Although White's assessment is probably correct, the story is important because it opened a new writing career for the

2. McKee, p. 203.

3. William Allen White. *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. 197.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Autobiography*, p. 198.

6. *Ibid.*

journalist and because it brought him considerable state-wide recognition. In his *Autobiography*, White notes:

The Kansas City Star copied it. So did the Kansas City Journal. All the Kansas daily papers published it within a week after it appeared in Eldorado. The Republican state central committee saw it, and Senator Plumb, who had been my father's friend, read it. I am sure he was telling me the truth when he said it brought tears into his eyes; for he was a good politician, and his tear ducts were loosely valved.⁷

Everett Rich in his biography, *William Allen White: The Man from Emporia* is quite emphatic about the prophetic value of White's first fictional venture. He writes, "The story was a portent of what was to happen five years later, for within the state it brought White the same type of recognition that 'What's the Matter With Kansas?' brought to him nationally."⁸ Since recognition is important to any writer, we may conclude that such widespread acceptance encouraged White and impressed on him the depth of grass-roots interest in politics and the political figure; subjects that he continued to explore and to which he gave his most complete expression in *Stratagems and Spoils*, the third collection comprising the early fiction and one to which we will return later.

The years between the publication of "The Regeneration of Colonel Hucks" and the publication of *The Real Issue* in 1896 by Way & Williams of Chicago are amply documented by White and his biographers. Our interest extends only to the fact that the stories in this collection were either previously unpublished or had appeared in the *Gazette*, the *Kansas City Star* and the *Eldorado Republican*. White notes that his title was bad and misleading.⁹ Was it bad because it played on the notoriety he gained from "What's the Matter With Kansas?" and misleading because it failed to recognize that the stories in the book are, with two exceptions, not political? White doesn't say. However, an examination of the book's content seems to reveal that the "real issue" of *The Real Issue* might be better stated as the writer in search of direction.

The Real Issue consists of a mixture of fifteen short stories and sketches. It would be fortunate if the selections followed a logical sequence and the sequence indicated distinct categories. But the fact of the matter is that the stories do not have an apparent order, nor does White himself give any information about their sequence. His order appears random except that six of the stories are pairs; that is, White precedes "The Regeneration of Colonel Hucks" with "The

7. *Ibid.*

8. Everett Rich, *William Allen White: The Man from Emporia* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), p. 57.

9. *Autobiography*, p. 273.

Home-coming of Colonel Hucks," he follows the life and death of a chief clerk named Hawkins in two successive stories, and in two others, he delineates the misfortunes of a man named Beasley. In keeping, however, with the major purpose of this article, it is possible to establish three major categories although, of course, the individual selections constantly overlap; thus, their importance and merit is not so simply dealt with. But, if we initially establish categories, we may then pursue the nuances and ramifications of individual stories within some manageable overviews. To this end, then, we can state that the three categories are "western" stories, political stories, and character delineations.

Since White's biographers are naturally more interested in the total picture of the man than in his literary position, they generally give little attention to his first collection. Everett Rich, for instance, recognizes the diversity of the selections but emphasizes ". . . White's two favorite themes, politics and boys."¹⁰ Politics has already been mentioned as a major and continuing facet of White's fiction. "Boys" was an expedient diversion, an immediate source of income, and the basis for his collection, *The Court of Boyville*. Actually, only one "boy" story appears in *The Real Issue*. It, like a number of the other stories, gave White an opportunity to delineate character; in this case, boyhood initiation rites that were in White's time and place requisite to "strength of character."

The "western" stories are of greatest interest to our major purpose. In two of these, White is at his most realistic in portraying man against the harsh forces of nature. By stretching this particular category, we can include four selections: "The Story of Aqua Pura," "A Story of the Highlands," "The Home-coming of Colonel Hucks," and "A Nocturne."

"The Story of Aqua Pura" tells of the rise and demise of a western Kansas town. Before the long drouth that began in 1887, a group of "honest, ambitious men and women"¹¹ founded the town.

Of the six men who staked out the town site, two—Johnson and Barringer—were Harvard men; one, Nickols, was from Princeton; and the other three, Bemis, Bradley and Hicks, had come from inland state universities. When their wives came west there was a Vassar reunion, and the first mail that arrived after the postoffice had been established brought the New York magazines.¹²

Barringer, the banker, is the protagonist. After the onset of the drouth, it is he who borrows money from the eastern capitalists and, thereby, manages to keep the town alive through the spring of 1888.

10. Rich, p. 98.

11. William Allen White, *The Real Issue* (Chicago: Way and Williams, 1896), p. 23.

12. *Ibid.*

From this point, however, the town begins to die. White parallels the creeping desolation of the town with the physical weakening of Barringer. Three passages stand out:

There was no rain that winter and the snow was hard and dry. Cattle on the range suffered for water and died by the thousands. A procession from the little town started eastward early in the spring. White-canopied wagons, and wagons covered with oil table-cloths of various hues, or clad in patch-work quilts, sought the rising sun.

Barringer grew thin, unkempt and gray. Every evening, when the wind rattled in the deserted rooms of the old hotel, and made the faded signs up and down the dreary street creak, the old man and his daughter went over their books, balancing, accounting interest, figuring on mythical problems that the world had long since forgotten.¹³

Not only does White parallel the desolation brought by the drouth with Barringer's physical well-being; he also, in the above passage, removes colors, life-symbols, from the scene. The pattern continues:

When the spring of 1893 opened, Barringer looked ten years older than he looked the spring before. The grass on the range was sere, and great cracks were in the earth. The winter had been dry. The spring opened dry, with high winds blowing through May. There were but five people on the townsite that summer, Barringer, his daughter, and the postmaster's family.¹⁴

As the years pass, Barringer's contact with life-forces is further reduced. His daughter dies, the post-office closes, and what little touch with reality remains is transitory. Barringer no longer sees the world clearly:

Thus the winter passed. The grass came with the light mists of March. By May it had lost its color. By June it was brown, and the hot winds came again in August, curving the warped boards a little deeper on the floor of the hotel porch. Herders and travellers, straggling back to the green country, saw him sitting there at twilight, looking toward the southwest,—a grizzled, unkempt old man, with a shifting light in his eye. To such as spoke to him he always made the same speech: "Yes, it looks like rain, but it can't rain. The rain has gone dry out here. They say it rained at Hutchinson,—maybe so, I doubt it. There is no God west of Newton. He dried up in '90. They talk irrigation. That's an old story in hell. Where's Johnson? Not here! Where's Nickols? Not here! Bemis? Not here! Bradley? Not here! Hicks? Not here! Where's handsome Dick Barringer, Hon. Richard Barringer? Here! Here he is, holding down a hot brick in a cooling room of hell! Yes, it does look like rain, doesn't it?"¹⁵

The end of the story is quite predictable: a five-day rain finally floods the whole area. Barringer, now the sole inhabitant of Aqua

13. *The Real Issue*, p. 29.

14. *The Real Issue*, p. 31.

15. *The Real Issue*, p. 35.

Pura, is dead when the rescue party arrives; but true to the tenacity of his character, White tells us, "Beside his bed were his balanced books and his legal papers. In his dead eyes were a thousand dreams."¹⁶

The naturalistic irony of Barringer's fate is somewhat the same as that depicted in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat." In both, man's desires and his fate are of no particular consequence to nature. Unlike Crane, however, White minimizes the impact in his opening paragraph; one that is notable because it shows how well he knew Kansas.

Kansas, like Gaul of old, is divided into three parts, differing as widely, each from the other, as any three countries in the same latitude upon the globe. It would be as untrue to classify together the Egyptian, the Indian and the Central American, as to speak of the Kansas man without distinguishing between the Eastern Kansan, the Central Kansan, and the Western Kansan. Eastern Kansas is a finished community like New York or Pennsylvania. Central Kansas is finished, but not quite paid for; and Western Kansas, the only place where there is any suffering from drouth or crop failures, is a new country—old only in a pluck which is slowly conquering the desert.¹⁷

"A Story of the Highlands" is again set in western Kansas, and White's picture of grim prairie life deepens. He writes:

The even line of the horizon is seldom marred. The silence of such a scene gnaws the glamour from the heart. Men become harsh and hard; women grow withered and sodden under its blighting power. The song of wood birds is not heard; even the mournful plaint of the meadow lark loses its sentiment, where the dreary clanking drone of the wind-mill is the one song which really brings good tidings with it. Long and fiercely sounds this unrhythmical monody in the night, when the traveler lies down to rest in the little sun-burned, pine-board town. The gaunt arms of the wheel hurl its imprecations at him as he rises to resume his journey into the silence, under the great gray dome, with its canopy pegged tightly down about him everywhere.¹⁸

Thomas Burkholder and his wife, Lizzie, settle in western Kansas. Thomas, like the original settlers of Aqua Pura, is an educated man. He and his wife bring books, rugs, even a piano. The year is 1885, two years before the 1887 drouth. When the drouth strikes, the young couple try to continue; but, finally, Tom goes east looking for work. As he had done in the Aqua Pura story, White parallels the increasing barrenness of the water-starved land with the deterioration of its human settlers. In this case, it is Lizzie who withers in the dust: "The treeless landscape worried her more and more; the steel dome seemed set tighter over her, and she sat thirsting in the landscape."¹⁹

16. *The Real Issue*, p. 38.

17. *The Real Issue*, p. 22.

18. *The Real Issue*, pp. 76-77.

19. *The Real Issue*, p. 86.

Unfortunately, White never again quite reaches the same descriptive power nor the sensitivity of technique found in these two "western" stories. Both "The Home-coming of Colonel Hucks" and "A Nocturne" belong in this category only by default. They are celebratory; that is, in both, Kansas is a sort of "promised land," a place to which one returns after a long journey.

After thirty years of back-breaking farm labor, Colonel Hucks and his wife journey back to the old town in Ohio. But, nothing is so disappointing as memory. The Ohio landscape is not so green as remembered, the mill not so large, "And so Colonel William Hucks brought his wife back to Kansas. Here their youth is woven into the very soil they love; here every tree around their home has its sacred history; here every sky above them recalls some day of trial and of hope."²⁰

In "A Nocturne," two friends have returned to Kansas. One from the east, one from the west. It is night as they sit on a hilltop watching the lights in the village below and listen to singing. They realize that they are "old folks," that they will never again participate in what they once knew in that village in Kansas. If White, in later years, had commented on "A Nocturne," he may well have called it all sentiment and, perhaps, all nonsense.

Except for "The Regeneration of Colonel Hucks," White exercised his political theme in only one other story, the title story, "The Real Issue." In it, White's reference to political power, noted earlier, provides the central statement for his protagonist, Congressman Wharton, who, disillusioned after five terms in office, says:

Here I am, Ike, a flesh-and-blood statesman. I've been in it and through it. I've held as high a place in the organization of the House as any of the great men we used to read about. I've passed a pension bill—and the old soldiers for whom I worked night and day during six months, have passed resolutions against me. I have had my name on a silver bill for which the fiat money fellows have abused me. I've led my party through two successful fights. And what is there in it? You know as well as I do, that it is hollow,—all a hollow show.²¹

The "real issue" for Wharton is whether or not to continue in political life—to continue to become partner to the strategies and spoils. Through Wharton's dialogue with his friend, Ike, we see him struggle with the realization that his power is limited by the commitments and money necessary to maintain his image. The story concludes:

Probably most men—at least most moralizing men—would have called the "old man" weak had they seen him the following Monday making out a

20. *The Real Issue*, p. 167.

21. *The Real Issue*, p. 21.

check payable to Isaac Russell for \$2,300. But most men do not know what it is to worship an idol for a lifetime, and they cannot understand how a man can love his idol even when he knows to his bitter sorrow that it is only clay.²²

Of course, the idol that Wharton loves is politics itself.

That the human struggle within the political figure was important to White is attested to by those stories he collected and published as *Stratagems and Spoils*. These five long stories elaborate on the political truism of the dilemma Wharton faced. Though we cannot closely examine the stories here, White's preface to *Stratagems and Spoils* indicates the place politics had in his writings, and, more generally, his attitude toward imaginative literature. He writes that the "novel, which was once a branch of literature, recently has grown independent of it, and has become a civilizing agency . . ."²³ While he recognizes that the "accepted motive of fiction seems to be the love motive,"²⁴ he makes a case for the "field of American politics, where every human emotion finds as free play as it could have found in the courts of mediaeval kings."²⁵ Specifically, about politicians, he states:

There is much scandalous talk by scantily informed people about the corruption of politics. The truth of the matter is: That politicians are about as honest in their business as storekeepers are in their business, or lawyers are in their business, or bankers or preachers, or day-laborers, or farmers, or college professors, are in their own callings. Of course, politicians are not so honest as lawyers imagine they would be if they were preachers; nor as preachers fancy they would be if they were storekeepers; nor as storekeepers believe they would be as lawyers.²⁶

The one remaining category evident in *The Real Issue* is character delineation. Naturally, White's ability to delineate character is part of all that has already been discussed; but, a number of stories qualify as "finger-exercises" in character treatment. And, in the sense that this first collection consists of the seeds of the later three, stories like "The Prodigal Daughter," "The Record on the Blotter," "The Reading of the Riddle," and five of lesser quality prepare us for the sort of character sketches later collected and published as *In Our Town*.

"The Prodigal Daughter" and "The Record on the Blotter" are one of the pairs mentioned before. White takes us to a factory worker's neighborhood and introduces us to Beasley's daughter, Allie, who has

22. *The Real Issue*, p. 22.

23. William Allen White, *Stratagems and Spoils* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. v.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Stratagems and Spoils*, p. vi.

26. *Stratagems and Spoils*, pp. vii-viii

a "reputation." In the story, "The women of Jersey Creek neighborhood hinted that the foreman [she worked in an overall factory] had been too polite to her."²⁷ Allie leaves the factory, and finally leaves town to seek her fame in the theater. Naturally, she returns to find the same attitude toward her among her women neighbors. Eventually, in "The Record on the Blotter," she kills herself. The fact that these two stories deal with the "wayward woman" is in itself notable, but the true quality of the story is White's ability to depict the lonely father, Beasly, who is so willing to accept Allie on any terms. Only the conclusion of the second story is disappointing: The record on the captain's blotter at the station read: "John Beasly, aged 60, held for the murder of Alice Beasly, his daughter. Confessed to the captain in charge."²⁸

"The Reading of the Riddle," an enigmatic story about a lonely young woman whose self-image denies her love and marriage, is closer to modern fiction than any other story because its resolution lies within the reader's understanding of man's irrational nature. Although White sentimentalizes the ending, the "riddle" remains unanswered.

What White began as newspaper fiction and later collected and published as *The Real Issue* (1896) marked for him the direction that his early fiction was to take. From "The King of Boyville" came *The Court of Boyville* (1898), from "The Regeneration of Colonel Hucks" and "The Real Issue" came *Stratagems and Spoils* (1901), and from his "western" stories and character delineations came *In Our Town* (1906).

III

Reception of *The Real Issue* was, as Everett Rich comments, out of proportion to the book's merit.²⁹ Since the book was White's first and since its contents are newspaper fiction,—a genre that has disappeared from the American scene—the greater number of its reviews appeared in newspapers throughout the country. Some short notices appeared in *The Literary Review*, *The Illustrated American*, *The Midland Monthly*, *The Critic*, and a few other periodicals of similar stature.³⁰ McKee notes that it is impossible to accurately assess how much influence White's "What's the Matter With Kansas?" editorial had upon the success of his book.³¹ Obviously, no one can assess the exact amount; however, White requested from his pub-

27. *The Real Issue*, p. 39.

28. *The Real Issue*, p. 58.

29. Rich, p. 94.

30. Sallie (Lindsay) White's Scrapbook, William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia Kansas State College, Emporia, Kansas.

31. McKee, p. 43.

lishers a number of copies for distribution to editors whom he knew or to whom he was known.³² It seems fairly safe to speculate that reviews, following closely upon the publication of the famed editorial, were written with more than passing attention to the notoriety of the author. At least, the available reviews seem so to indicate; for example, an advance notice in the *Chicago Evening Post*, November 21, 1896, indicates that the anonymous reviewer had some knowledge with which to prejudge the book.

About a year ago Mr. White, believing that Kansas has never been properly recognized in literature, wrote a group of stories which he calls "The Real Issue," and which are to appear next week under the imprint of Way & Williams of this city. They may have their faults—presumably they have—but it is safe to assert in advance that these stories will be worth reading and will be a clever exposition of the "most picturesque lot of cranks on 'God's green earth.'"³³

Later, the *Chicago Evening Post* printed a lengthy and surprisingly critical review; that is, critical only in the sense that the reviewer took time to speak to White's literary style and the genre of newspaper fiction in general.³⁴

Notices about his book in the *San Francisco Evening Call*, November, 1896 call attention to White's reputation.³⁵ Many anonymous reviewers comment on the varied nature of the stories, calling attention to the grim, somber tales of western Kansas, interspersed with lighter humorous works. As one reviewer puts it, ". . . the western stories, the stories of pathos, the humor. . ."³⁶ Reading these reviews raises a question about just how closely some of the reviewers read the book. Only one story, "The King of Boyville," is to any degree humorous. An anonymous review in the *Chicago Journal* offers another view of apparent superficial reading. The reviewer emphasizes the political nature of the stories and declares that there are only two kinds, political and agricultural. On this basis, the reviewers likens White's stories to those of Hamlin Garland.³⁷

Linking White's fiction to that of Hamlin Garland, George Hamlin Fitch's review in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 28, 1897, states: "His stories are full of the western flavor, but what makes them effective is not dialect, nor description, nor character sketches, but truth to life."³⁸ Fitch singles out "The Home-coming of Colonel Hucks" and "The King of Boyville" for special mention.

32. Letter file, William Allen White Collection, William Allen White Memorial Library, Emporia Kansas State College, Emporia, Kansas.

33. Scrapbook.

34. Scrapbook.

35. Scrapbook.

36. Scrapbook.

38. Scrapbook.

As it happens, Hamlin Garland wrote White in December, 1896. His letter reads:

I have had your little book of stories for a few days and have read part of them with great interest. The last story I read was "The King of Boyville." It is capital. If the book goes on deepening and broadening it will make a real contribution to our western literature. Your method is excellent in its reserve and graphic power. I am delighted to see you doing such homely honest stories.³⁹

We can expect that Kansas reviewers would be effusive in their praise, and they were. The *Iola Register*, November, 1896, carries a notice of publication:

The volume is called "The Real Issue" and besides some of the old favorites, such as "The Regeneration of Colonel Hucks," which alone is worth the price, the book will contain a number of new tales, all dealing with Kansas life, and all blending the sense and pathos and humor that characterize all of White's writing.⁴⁰

The *Wichita Eagle*, December 1, 1896, printed a lengthy review covering the better part of three columns. Celebrating a Kansas writer who celebrated the glories of Kansas was worthy of such state-wide recognition. The review reads in part: "But that [reference to *Aqua Pura* story] is only one story. There is another, 'The Home-coming of Colonel Hucks,' which will make the Kansas reader drop the book and go to the window to look upon and love Kansas."⁴¹

The *Kansas City Star*, October 9, 1898, adds a final note to the breadth of White's book's appeal. Under the headline, "Kansas Stories in French," and the dateline, "New York, Oct. 8," the article relates that:

Mme. Bentzon-Blanc has presented our new writer Mr. William Allen White to the continental public in the mid-September number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, by means of a most interesting article in which she has collected the essence of his fresh and vigorous little volume, "The Real Issue."⁴²

Mme. Bentzon-Blanc did not translate but summarized with connecting links. It is, the article continues, "delightful to read these western episodes in French, to feel their individuality, enjoy their unique savor and rejoice in their crisp freshness, racy with the elements of a virgin soil. . . ."⁴³

39. Letter file.

40. Scrapbook.

41. Scrapbook.

42. Scrapbook.

43. Scrapbook.

What may we now conclude about the early fiction of William Allen White? His major purpose was to bring the breadth of Kansas before the public. His themes were fairly constant. Having their beginnings in those stories collected in his first book, they varied little in the next three. He was widely read and should be considered a "popular" writer who, however, drew the attention of influential writers such as Hamlin Garland, William Dean Howells, and Mark Twain. Perhaps, it is sufficient to say that in newspapers, magazines such as *McClure's*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Scribner's*, and in books of short fiction, William Allen White of Emporia was the fictional spokesman for turn-of-the-century Kansas landscapes, politics, and people. More than likely, he is seldom read today, but that fact should have little to do with his place in the literary heritage of Kansas.

