

THE SPIRIT OF THE SOIL
AS REFLECTED IN SOME MODERN FICTION

A THESIS

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Acknowledgment

The Novel of the Soil has taken me far afield. It has enticed me to the cold barren marsh lands of the North, it has led me to the steaming rice fields of the South. It has taken me where mud made farming laborious, and again the heat and dust of the Great American Desert has made life a burden. The background for this study has not all been pleasant for it has kept me always within sight of men and women who toil. However, the serene personality and scholarly direction of Dr. June Jack has been to me as an oasis in a desert. She has brightened the horizon and led me onward. Thanks are also due Professor V. A. Davis. He suggested the "Novel of the Soil" as a field for study and made many helpful suggestions. Dr. Edwin J. Brown has shown himself a capable "farm general." He has never been too busy to leave his own field of endeavor to give sympathetic and helpful suggestions for the enrichment of my soil. To my friends who have loaned me books, and to the librarians who have helped to make materials available, I wish to extend my sincere thanks.

A. M. M.

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Introduction

America is sharing with the rest of the world an economic depression, and again the voices of the men who toil with their hands to feed humanity are heard murmuring in protest. It is an opportune time to study the farmer and get his perspective. History records the deeds of men, but it is to literature that students turn for a record of a man's spirit, his thoughts, emotions, and aspirations. It is in literature alone that one looks for the record of a man's soul. This study is an attempt to read the records as found in American fiction of the past twenty years with the hope of discovering the attitude of mind and, in consequence, a philosophy of life--the philosophy of the man who earns a living from the soil. The study of farm life is a comparatively new note in American fiction and is often spoken of as "The Novel of the Soil."

Man is primarily interested in the soil. Since Adam and Eve, disobedient, and fleeing from God's wrath in the Garden of Eden, heard the decree, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground," humanity has been divinely linked with the soil.

America with her far spread agricultural lands does not have a literature of the soil in the sense that Great Britain or the Scandinavian countries have developed it. Americans as individuals have not been tied to the land, nor are they able to accept the viewpoint of their brother of the soil descended from European feudal days. By the very nature of its development,

America has not paused long enough to establish a tradition of the soil. The people have been migratory, pioneers on the move from one section of the country to another. The truck farmer of New England of one decade becomes a wheat king of the prairies in the next; and the grain grower of the plains becomes, in the next generation, the president of a National Bank in some great metropolis.

Henry Seidel Canby, editor of The Saturday Review of Literature, says, "What our fiction has in the main portrayed is not life on the farm, but escape from the farm, or when sentimentally inclined, return to the farm. Or it has exalted the 'great, open spaces,' and stressed the spectacular and romantic elements of life where 'men are men'.

"Moreover, the great body of our literature of the soil has been produced not by writers who are a part of the life of the countryside but by those who from the distance of the town look back upon it with a distaste born of early laborious and unstimulating days or with a romantic yearning for the simplicity and quietude no longer to be achieved." 1

In the early seventies, closely following the Civil War, many of the veterans with their relatives and friends were moving westward to take land under the provisions of the homestead law. A golden glamor overhung the prairie, obscuring the drouth, grasshoppers, and Indian campfires. When the thrall of

1 Henry Seidel Canby, "The Farm and the Novel," THE SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE, July 27, 1929, Vol. VI, p. 1.

adventure had subsided, a new day of reality had dawned for the pioneers on the prairie; a wave of murmuring was spreading over the plains. The late Vernon L. Parrington says,

It was not till the end of the eighties that the bitterness of the frontier began to creep into literature. Its slackness and drab poverty had got into the pages of 'The Hoosier Schoolmaster', as its neighborliness had got into Riley; but in these earlier studies there was no brooding sense of social injustice, of the wrongs done the Middle Border by unjust laws, of the hardships that are increased by the favoritism of government. In the year of 1887, however, came a significant change of temper. Three very different writers--Harold Frederic, Joseph Kirkland, and Hamlin Garland--turned to the theme of farm life, and dealt with it in a mordantly realistic vein. It was the first conscious literary reaction to the subjection of agriculture to capitalistic exploitation and it was marked by the bitterness of a decaying order. 2

Seth's Brother's Wife, by Harold Frederic, is a story of failure, of blight upon a farming community. The story indicates that Frederic hates the country; that he feels starved, both in mind and soul. In the book Zury : The Meanest Man in Spring Country, by Joseph Kirkland, published in 1887, there is another picture of frontier meanness. Zury Prouder is a thrifty farmer and a shrewd trader, but his soul is dwarfed--his treasures are of this earth--land and mortgages.

The student looking about for the reason for this discordant note in literature, will find it stated in the introduction to Garland's work of 1889.

If anyone is still at a loss to account for that uprising of the farmers of the West which is the translation of the Peasants' War into modern and republican terms, let him read Main-Travelled Roads, and he will begin to understand.... The stories are full of those gaunt, grim, sordid, pathetic, ferocious figures whom our satirists find so easy to caricature as Hayseeds, and whose blind groping for fairer conditions is so grotesque to the newspapers and so menacing to the politicians.

2 Vernon L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism In America, Vol. III, p. 288.

See Bibliography for Complete Data.

They feel that something is wrong, and they know that the wrong is not theirs. The type caught in Mr. Garland's book is not pretty; it is ugly and often ridiculous; but it is heartbreaking in its rude despair. 3

Referring to the year 1889, Garland said,

Obscurely forming in my mind were two great literary concepts--that truth was a higher quality than beauty, and that to spread the reign of justice should everywhere be the design and intent of the artist. The merely beautiful in art seems petty, and success at the cost of the happiness of others a monstrous egotism. 4

Main-Travelled Roads, then, belongs to the early eighties, a time when the failure of western agriculture to adjust itself to the new capitalistic order was making for unrest and bitterness. Hamlin Garland is saying that the old romantic tales of the Border are lies to him. These short stories are Garland's reply to the myths of the early days of the plains. "You're the first actual farmer in American fiction," said his friend Kirkland, "now tell the truth about it." 5 This, Garland confesses, was hard to do, "Even my youthful zeal faltered in the midst of a revelation of the lives led by the women on the farms of the middle border." 6

'Few as were the stories of Main-Travelled Roads and Prairie Folks,' says Professor Parrington, 'They constitute a landmark in our literary history, for they were the first authentic expression and protest of an Agrarian America then being submerged by the industrial revolution. No other man in our literature had known so intimately the Middle Border as Hamlin Garland.' 7

3 Hamlin Garland, Introduction to Main-Travelled Roads, p.4.
 4 Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 374.
 5 Parrington op. cit., p. 295.
 6 Garland, op. cit., p. 416.
 7 Parrington, Op. cit., p. 294.

Definition of Terms

It now seems necessary to define and explain a number of terms that are to be used in this study.

The subject of this thesis is, "The Spirit of the Soil as Reflected in Some Modern Fiction." The word "Spirit" is used here in the sense, real meaning of, as one would speak of "the spirit of the law."

It is impossible to discuss the novel without using the terms "realist" and "romanticist". For example, Professor Parrington hesitates to call Garland a realist and suggests that he might more properly be called a thwarted romantic. Robert Herrick's interpretation of these terms is applicable to Garland and, to most of the group of writers used in this study;

The realist writes a novel with one purpose in view. And that purpose is to render into written words the normal aspect of things. The aim of the romanticist is entirely different. He is concerned only with things which are exciting, astonishing--in a word, abnormal. I do not like literary labels, and I think that the names "realist" and "romanticist" have been so much misused that they are now almost meaningless. The significance of the term changes from year to year; the realists of one generation are the romanticists of the next. 8

The definition of a novel is next in order.

"What is a novel," inquired Joseph Conrad, "if not a conviction of our fellowmen's existence strong enough to take on a form of imagined life clearer than reality?" 9

This definition of Conrad's is generous enough, it seems, to account for the books selected for this study.

Since there has been a conscious effort to select novels of some literary value, a definition of literature is not out of

8 Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature, pp. 31-32.

9 Grant Overton, The Women Who Make Our Novels, p. 84.

place here. Spingarn gives the following interpretation of literature:

Literature is an expression of something, of experience or emotion, of the external or internal, of the man himself or something outside the man; yet it is always conceived of as an art of expression. 10

But Spingarn's definition is vague and indefinite. Long's definition of literature is more specific and comes nearer to the truth as it is expressed in the realistic novel.

Literature is the expression of life in words of truth and beauty; it is a written record of a man's spirit, and of his thoughts, emotions, aspirations; it is the history, and the only history, of the human soul. 11

There are those who will object to the use of the word "beauty" in connection with the sordid pictures found in some modern fiction. The word may be justified in the identification of ideal truth and ideal beauty as Keats found it.

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Sources of Data

The sources of data used in this thesis are, first of all, the twenty-one novels listed for study. For background, the critical material of such authors as Parrington, Pattee, Rusk, Howells, Van Doren, Overton, Marble, Dickinson, and Boynton, was read. Living Authors, edited by Dilly Tante, furnished biographical sketches. The Saturday Review of Literature, The English Journal, Wings- a periodical published by the Literary Guild, and the Wilson Bulletin have given valuable suggestions.

The following is a list of the novels used in this study and the dates of their publication:

10 Elizabeth Nitchie, The Criticism of Literature, p. 346.

11 William J. Long, English Literature, p. 8.

1. O. Pioneers-- Cather -----1913
2. A Son of the Middle Border-- Garland -----1917
3. My Antonia-- Gather -----1918
4. Maria Chapdelaine-- Hemon -----1921
5. Dust-- Haldeman-Julius -----1921
6. A Daughter of the Middle Border-- Garland -----1921
7. Vandemark's Folly-- Quick -----1922
8. The Able McLaughlins-- Wilson -----1923
9. The Hawkeye-- Quick -----1923
10. So-Big-- Edna Ferber -----1924
11. Wild Geese-- Ostenso -----1925
12. Barren Ground-- Glasgow -----1925
13. The Time of Man-- Roberts -----1926
14. Giants in the Earth-- Rolvaag -----1927
15. Black April-- Peterkin -----1927
16. Red Rust-- Cannon -----1928
17. Peder Victorious-- Rolvaag -----1929
18. The Great Meadow-- Roberts -----1930
19. Pure Gold-- Rolvaag -----1930
20. American Beauty-- Ferber -----1931
21. State Fair-- Stong -----1932

Method

The novels for this study will be grouped as consistently as possible with respect to author, theme, and the section of the country affording background for the story. For example, O Pioneers and My Antonia by Willa Cather will compose one

chapter; Pure Gold by Rolvaag and Dust by Haldeman-Julius, because of similarity in theme will constitute a group. Maria Chapdelaine by Hemon and Wild Geese by Ostenso will be grouped together because of their Canadian background. Barren Ground by Glasgow and Black April by Peterkin will represent the South, and so on throughout the study.

An effort has been made to arrange the chapters chronologically. Beginning with the Puritan background of American Beauty, the study progresses as the history of America progresses. This plan has been followed as consistently as possible. There are occasional lapses due to grouping according to authors.

Chapter I

Edna Ferber's American Beauty with its Puritan background properly begins this study. The story goes back to the year 1770, when Captain Oorange Oakes, tired of Puritan Massachusetts, led a band of settlers into Connecticut. There he built a house such as his ancestors had in England.

Edna Ferber was born of Jewish parentage in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in 1887. Her father, a Hungarian, was the owner of a general merchandise store, first in Iowa, later in Appleton, Wisconsin. Her mother is an American, born in Milwaukee. At seventeen, Miss Ferber went from high school to work as a reporter on the Appleton Daily Crescent. She later worked on the Milwaukee Journal and then on the Chicago Tribune. She began her literary career by writing for magazines. Her first novel, Dawn O'Hara, was written while she was earning a living as a reporter. About the year 1912, she created the character of Emma McChesney, a travelling saleswoman; this character was the beginning of the McChesney stories.

Edna Ferber's stories center around Chicago and New York. Her characters also find homes in New England, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Her stories deal with people of the middle class. William Allen White has this to say of her characters: "But one thread will string every character she ever conceived; all her people do something for a living. She is the goddess of the worker. And her stories chiefly tell what a fine time these hard working Americans have with their day's work." 1

1 William Allen White, In Introduction to Cheerful-By Request.

Miss Ferber resents having people say that the mantle of O. Henry has fallen on her shoulders. She prefers to think that her style comes from the newspaper editor's command to "tell the story and make it snappy," rather than from any influence of O. Henry.

When asked why she writes about the middle class, Miss Ferber explained that since she had never been rich or poor, these people were strange to her. When asked if she liked to write about the middle class, she answered: "Like? like to-why listen! No other kind of person fascinates and excites my writing sense. And that's the truth. There's no explaining it." 2

When asked why she writes about the Middle West she summed it up in these words: "Though I now live in the City of Sophistication, I'll never be more than an onlooker in it. And when it comes to writing, I turn back to the town with a little human awkwardness left in it." 3

American Beauty

American Beauty is the story of the slow decadence of a family and a farm through more than two centuries of American life. In 1670, Captain Orange Oakes, whose ancestors had fled from England about 1634, led a band of settlers into the fertile lands of Connecticut. Here in the midst of a thousand acres of land, which he purchased from the Indians, Orange Oakes built a fine house from the clay of his surrounding acres.

2 Rogers Dickinson, Edna Ferber - A Sketch and a Bibliography. pp. 17-18.

3 Ibid., p. 26.

But a New Englander does not love the soil, and Captain Oakes preferred to live like a gentleman. Soon he and his descendants become land poor. In 1890, Tamar, a daughter of Amaryllis Oakes and an itinerant pedlar, returns to the old home to live with her aunt, Jude Oakes. Tamar marries the hired man, a Polack named Ondia Olszak. The Poles love land, and Ondia Olszak begins to farm faithfully though unscientifically. Tamar steadily refuses to part with any portion of Oakes farm. In 1930, old True Baldwin, a millionaire and former son of Connecticut, comes from Chicago and buys the old Oakes home with its three hundred sixty acres from Orrange Oakes Olszak, the last of the family line.

Citations from American Beauty

"I never knew this part of Connecticut was so lovely."

"Certainly wasn't as I remember it, nearly fifty years ago. Can't understand it. Look at it! Tropical, darned if they're not."

"Oh, call them lush.... The Connecticut is lush--would you believe it? -- And that's werry odd, because I'd always been told it was grim and barren as a New England spinster."

"New England spinster yourself," her father retorted gallantly, "once removed. But you're certainly right about its being surprising. Time I was sixteen I pulled rocks out those fields till my back--"... Look at that, will you!"

"Look at what?"

"Women, They've got women working in the fields."

"Well, why not? It can't be harder than washing clothes or scrubbing floors, and those have always been considered nice womanly occupations."

"Women working in the fields, like men! It's Russia, I tell you. Black Russia." 4

"The flower of America," trumpeted old True, "sprang from New England."

"Gone to seed now, darling, you must admit. They certainly let the farms go back to the primal ooze or thereabouts."

"Primal ooze, huh! Look at that garden spot."

"But that isn't Yankee. That's Polack. Whole families digging their toes into the dirt. Why, look at you! You're a runaway farm boy yourself, True." 5

"For that matter, no one lives in big cities any more unless they have to. If you start putting things into the ground and watching them come up, you'll find that there's as much thrill in that as in watching the tape come out of the ticker." 6

The Puritan decline that had set in almost two centuries before in early Massachusetts, was now complete. Restraint in England, and revolt. Restraint in Massachusetts, and revolt. A longing for possessions. A vain attempt to stifle this. Revolt again, and away for good and all. Away to the cities for these merchants and traders. No barren, rocky land for them. Let the pinched and poor-spirited have it and welcome. Let them stay on this hateful flinty soil and live on it if they could; and die on it. 7

And now the unrest that had brought these people or their forebears to Connecticut from Massachusetts, and to Massachusetts from England, had them again by the throat. By temperament and inclination they had never been farmers, really.... The truth was they were not farmers at all, these early settlers and their offspring. They had a practical--an almost Teutonic--ambition for trade and enterprise. 8

Judith Oakes' grandsons and their young friends were muttering now. Their restlessness grew, and their complaints mounted. The novelty was past. The fields were ungrateful, the winters long and hard. "There's no end to the stones in these fields," they protested. "The soil spews them up. No sooner do you get a field cleared of them than within another year a new layer has somehow worked its way to the surface. It's my opinion they boil up from hell, those stones, cooling on the way." 9

Now, more than ever, into this dessicated community--into this unvital region with its manless households--came these foreign people in whom the blood of many countries combined to make the Slav. Blood of the Hungarian was in them, of the Austrian too, perhaps, of the Saracen, of the Pole, the Russian, the Bohemian. They came to this new country eager, humble, worshipping the dirt they plowed, the furrows into which they sowed the seed. They loved the land with the ardor of born

5 Ibid., p. 6.

6 Ibid., p. 9.

7 Ibid., p. 65.

8 Ibid., p. 61.

9 Ibid., p. 62.

farmers who came from a country where land has always been scarce and precious. Their passion went into it. They felt about it as men feel about women. It was their pastime, their emotional life, their dream of possession. Money they did not covet. They were land lovers. 10

These Poles lived on cabbage, potatoes, salt pork.... They raised their own pork, their own cabbage, their own potatoes. Their money went into the land, or back to Poland. 11

The Polish farmer laboriously performed by hand the work that modern mechanism could have done in one tenth the time. Thus they had always worked in Poland. Long hours of labor meant nothing to them. They were serving the land. 12

Oakes farm, Oakes farm. All his life he had had it ground into his consciousness. Nothing came before Oakes farm. No matter what happens, Oakes farm must never be sold. Promise me you'll never sell an acre off. For over two centuries it had dominated a family, wrung from them oblation. Now it held the last of them clasped to its withered bosom. The old Pole, the sick and ageing woman, had nothing more to give it. It turned to the boy who was now a man. Love me, it said. I am still beautiful. I am still fertile. Love me, and I will reward you. 13

This business that old Oorange started, it's finished, I mean, as far as we go. End of the line like a street car. The Polacks, too, like Pa. Their kids don't want the farms, most of them. They want to go to Stonefield, and around, like Stas, and work in the factories and get into politics, and run things. 14

The Polish girls of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen and their strapping mothers still worked in the tobacco during July and August, topping. But they worked grudgingly. 15

Many of the older Polish farmers were selling now, to city people. The Pole moved to the city, and the city people moved to the country. It was like a game. Some of these people, Temmie learned, were descendants of old New England families. 16

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- 10 Ibid., p. 68.
 11 Ibid., p. 233.
 12 Ibid., p. 234.
 13 Ibid., pp. 278-279.
 14 Ibid., p. 281.
 15 Ibid., p. 297.
 16 Ibid., p. 299.

"I want to go to Storrs a winter or two," Orange announced, one October night at supper.... Storrs was the State Agricultural college.

"We're not getting anywhere with this farm. It's just where it was fifty years ago, only more worn out. Old fashioned methods you used in Poland. Another ten or fifteen years and it'll be finished." 17

"I'm not anxious to sell. I've got to. I'd give twenty years of my life to keep this place and run it the way I want to. It's this way: This place has been in the family ever since--well, you know. You lived around here years ago, you say. My mother felt the way I do about it. She was an Oakes, through and through. After she died my father and I ran the place, but he had one idea about it, and I had another. He was a good farmer, but he was all for using old-fashioned methods, like the ones he had always used in Poland. But I showed him that in ten years at the most, with any break at all, we could have the place on a paying basis--not only that, but one of the finest farms in the state. Farming. That's all I know." 18

Summary

In American Beauty, Edna Ferber clearly distinguishes between the New Englander's pride in family traditions and the Pole's pride in the land he serves. Aside from the fact that New England is stern and rockbound, there is another reason for the interest that manufacturing and commerce possesses for the people of this section. They are descended from that pioneer group described as restless, neurotic, great movers, irked by monotony, and impatient of conventions. Their ambition was for trade and enterprise. They had never really been farmers. The story tells us that they never loved the barren rocky soil. And so it was left to the Poles, with their Old-World love of land, to come into this part of America and coax the soil into productiveness. The first generation of Poles mixed little science with their toil. The second

17 Ibid., p. 274

18 Ibid., p. 309.

generation realized that farming is becoming technical, that hard work alone can not win. The women and girls of this second generation work in the fields, but they do it grudgingly. Here is the beginning of the movement of country people to the city and of city people to the country. Edna Ferber's philosophy seems to be that if it takes the Pole's love of land, reenforced by his strength and endurance, to save the New England farms, it will also require the Yankee's enterprise, his business procedure, and the machinery which his fertile brain can fashion. These things are united in Orrange Oakes Olszak, the last of the line--the man True Baldwin chose to farm his land and make it pay.

So Big

Selina De Jong would look up from her work and say, "How big is my man?" Then little Dirk De Jong would answer with outstretched arms, "So-o-o big!" And so he was nicknamed. Although So-Big gives the book its title, his mother is the central figure. Selina had travelled with her gambler-father until she was nineteen years of age. After his death she became a teacher in the Dutch settlement of High-Prairie, a community of hard working farmers. These thrifty Dutchmen and their slaving wives were narrow-minded people, indifferent to natural beauty. Selina married Pervus De Jong, a good-natured, plodding farmer. Then the never-ending drudgery of the farmer's wife began for Selina. But through all the years of hardships she never lost her youthful spirit. After her husband's death,

she remained on the farm and made it a success. Her one dream was to make Dirk something more than a truck farmer. But Dirk De Jong did not inherit his mother's stability. He forsook his dream of being an architect for a more lucrative employment—that of bond salesman. His success should be measured in terms of dollars and social engagements. The woman Dirk loves demands scars--the scars of the battle of life; and Dirk admits that he has none.

Citations from So-Big

"Oh, Mr. Pool!" she cried. "Mr. Pool! How beautiful it is here!"

"Beautiful?" he echoed, in puzzled interrogation. "What is beautiful?"

"This! The-the cabbages."

"Cabbages is beautiful!" his round pop eyes staring at her in a fixity of glee. "Cabbages is beautiful!" His silent laughter now rose and became audible in a rich throaty chortle. "Cabbages --" he choked a little, and sputtered, overcome...19

11. But always, to her, red and green cabbages were to be jade and Burgundy, chrysoprase and porphyry. Life has no weapons against a woman like that. 20

Klass Pool knew nothing of chrysoprase and porphyry. Nor of Byron. Nor, for that matter of jade and Burgundy. But he did know cabbages from seed to sauerkraut; he knew and grew varieties from the sturdy Flat Dutch to the early Wakefield. But that they were beautiful; that they looked like jewels; that they lay like Persian patches, had never entered his head, and rightly. 21

Klass toiled like a slave in the fields and barns; Maartje's day was a treadmill of cooking, scrubbing, washing, mending from the moment she arose (four in the summer, five in the winter) until she dropped with a groan in her bed often long after the others were asleep. 22

19 Edna Ferber, So-Big, pp. 23-25.

20 Ibid., p. 27.

21 Ibid., p. 26.

22 Ibid., p. 61.

The phlegmatic Dutch-American truck farmers of the region were high priests consecrated to the service of the divinity, Earth. She thought of Chicago's children. If they had red cheeks, clear eyes, nimble brains it was because Pervus brought them the food that made them so. It was before the day when glib talk of irons, vitamins, arsenic entered into all discussions pertaining to food. Yet Selina sensed something of the meaning behind these toiling patient figures, all unconscious of meaning, bent double in the fields for miles throughout High Prairie. Something of this she tried to convey to Pervus. He only stared, his blue eyes wide and unresponsive. 23

"Farm work grand! Farm work is slave work. Yesterday, from the load of carrots in town I didn't make enough to bring you the goods for the child so when it comes you should have clothes for it. It's better I feed them to the livestock." 24

During June, July, August, and September the good black prairie soil for miles around was teeming, a hot bed of plenty. There was born in Selina at this time a feeling for the land that she was never to lose. Perhaps the child within her had something to do with this. She was aware of a feeling of kinship with the earth; an illusion of splendor, of fulfillment. 25

As cabbages had been cabbages, and no more, to Klaas Pool, so to Pervus, these carrots, beets, onions, turnips, and radishes were just so much produce, to be planted, tended, gathered, marketed. But to Selina, during that summer, they became a vital part in the vast mechanism of a living world. Pervus, earth, sun, rain, all elemental forces that labored to produce the food for millions of humans. The sordid, grubby little acreage became a kingdom. 26

It was in the third year of Selina's marriage that she first went to the fields to work. Pervus had protested miserably, though the vegetables were spoiling in the ground. "Let them rot," he said. "Better the stuff rots in the ground. De Jong women folks they never worked in the fields. Not even in Holland. Not my mother or my grandmother. It isn't for women."

... So she answered briskly, "Nonsense, Pervus. Working in the field's no harder than washing or ironing or scrubbing or standing over a hot stove in August. Woman's work! Housework's the hardest work in the world. That's why men won't do it." 27

23 Ibid., p. 121.

24 Ibid., p. 122.

25 Ibid., p. 121.

26 Ibid., p. 121.

27 Ibid., p. 139.

"Tell me, little Lina, from where did you learn all this about truck farming?"

"Out of a book," Lina said, almost snappishly. "I sent to Chicago for it."

"A book! A book!" He slapped his knee. "A vegetable farmer out of a book."

"Why not! The man who wrote it knows more about vegetable farming than anybody in all High Prairie. He knows about new ways. You're running the farm just the way your father ran it."

"What was good for my father is good enough for me."

"It isn't! cried Selina, "It isn't! The book says clay loam is all right for cabbages, peas and beans." 28

Dirk went to school from October until June. Pervus protested that this was foolish.

"Reading and writing and figgering is what a farmer is got to know," Pervus argued....

"So-Big isn't a truck farmer."

"Well, he will be pretty soon. Time I was fifteen I was running our place." 29

"You're all alike. Look at Roelf Pool! They tried to make a farmer of him, too. And ruined him."

"What's the matter with farming? What's the matter with a farmer? You said farm work was grand work, once."

"Oh, I did. It is. It could be. It-- Oh, what's the use of talking like that now! 30

"And I want Dirk to go to school. Good schools. I never want my son to go to the Haymarket. Never. Never." 31

High Prairie heard that Dirk De Jong was going away to college. A neighbor's son said, "Going to Wisconsin? Agricultural course there?"

"My gosh, no!" Dirk had answered. He told this to Selina laughing. But she had not laughed. 32

"Dirk De Jong- Bond Salesman."

"The way you say it, Mother, it sounds like a low criminal pursuit."

"Dirk, do you know sometimes I actually think that if you'd stayed on the farm--"

"Good God, Mother! What for!"

"Oh, I don't know. Time to dream. Time to--no, I suppose that isn't true any more. I suppose the day is past when the genius came from the farm. Machinery has cut into his dreams. He used to sit for hours on the wagon seat, the reins slack in his hands, while the horses plodded into town. Now he whizzes

28 Ibid., p. 125.

29 Ibid., p. 144.

30 Ibid., p. 154.

31 Ibid., p. 208.

32 Ibid., p. 225.

by in a jitney. Patent binders, plows, reapers—he's a mechanic. He hasn't time to dream." 33

"Is it because I'm a successful business man that you don't like me?"

..."Is that it? He's got to be an artist, I suppose, to interest you."

"Good Lord, no! Some day I'll probably marry a horny-handed son of toil, and if I do it'll be the horny hands that will win me. If you want to know, I like 'em with their scars on them. There's something about a man who has fought for it. I don't know what it is—a look in his eye--the feel of his hand. He needn't have been successful—though he probably would be. I don't know. I'm not very good at this analysis stuff. I only know he—well, you haven't a mark on you. Not a mark." 34

"I mean character portraits of men and women who are really distinguished looking—distinguished Americans for example—like your mother."

...My mother!"

"Yes, if she'd let me. With that fine splendid face all lit up with the light that comes from inside; and the jawline like that of the women who came over in the Mayflower; or crossed the continent in a covered wagon; and her eyes! And that battered funny gorgeous bum old hat and the white shirt-waist—and her hands! She's beautiful. She'd make me famous at one leap. You'd see!" 35

Roelf leaned toward her. He put his hand over her rough one. "Cabbages are beautiful," he said. Then they both laughed as at some exquisite joke. Then seriously: "What a fine life you've had, too, Selina. A full life, and a rich one and successful." 36

Summary

In So-Big, Miss Ferber has again contrasted two types of people—the beauty-loving Selina to whom cabbages are beautiful, and the practical Dutch farmer to whom cabbages are a product for market or sauerkraut for the table. Selina does not see any beauty in the drudgery of farm labor, but it is 'her job'; and she does find pleasure in achievement. Selina has never

33 Ibid., pp. 296-297.

34 Ibid., p. 347.

35 Ibid., p. 355.

36 Ibid., p. 356.

found time even to begin the castle of her dreams; so she slaves that Dirk may become an architect and have time to dream and build. Selina does not want Dirk to become a truck farmer and go to the Haymarket. She wouldn't mind having him go to the Agricultural college and become a scientific farmer, but to follow in the path marked out by his father and Dutch ancestors for generations back—No, Never. Like Oorange Oakes, Selina knows that the old order must change for the new. She muses that maybe Dirk might have done better had he stayed on the farm; and then she remembers that machinery and modern methods have changed farm life; the farmer has become a mechanic. There is no time for dreams; machinery keeps a man alert. Again, as in American Beauty, Miss Ferber has maintained that farm work is no harder for women than the drudgery of housework. But Pervus De Jong says that his mother and grandmother didn't work in the fields in Holland. Last of all, the author has given the reader her measure of a successful man or woman. She has definitely outlined a formula for character building: It isn't the thing a man chooses to do in life but his fidelity to his life purpose that counts. The man who forsakes his job because it is hard or discouraging has failed. He need not succeed, says Miss Ferber, but he must have the marks of the battle and fight through to the end. Miss Ferber has been called the goddess of the worker, and that she has shown herself to be in the two novels just reviewed.

Chapter II

Although The Great Meadow was not published until 1930, from the viewpoint of history, it should be the second novel presented here. The story goes back to the days just preceding the Revolutionary War, the year 1774 to be exact. Living Authors gives some interesting facts concerning the author of The Great Meadow and The Time of Man.

Elizabeth Madox Roberts was born in 1885, at Perryville, near Springfield, Kentucky, in what is known as the 'Pigeon River country.' This is now her permanent home. She is deeply rooted in southern soil for her fore-bears have been Kentuckians since 1803. "Some of them came from Virginia over Boone's Trace in the 1770's, with just such a pioneer band as she describes in The Great Meadow." ¹ Her first novel, The Time of Man, was considered a success in both England and America. It has since been published in German, Swedish, and Dano-Norwegian editions. Reviewers say that Miss Roberts fuses the art of poetry with her prose and the skill of the weaver of tapestries with her character portraiture. The Great Meadow received the recognition of The Literary Guild.

The Great Meadow

Elizabeth Roberts, in discussing The Great Meadow, says that it is the story of her fore-bears who followed the trail she describes in the novel; and the characters are made up of

¹ Living Authors, Edited by Dilly Tante, p. 343.

figures from her grandmother's memory. She concludes: "I thought it would be an excellent labor if one might gather all these threads, these elements, into one strand, if one might draw these strains into one person and bring this person over the Trace and thru the Gateway in one symbolic journey." 2

The Great Meadow relates the heroic struggles of the early pioneers of Kentucky. Its chief characters are Berk Jarvis and his wife Diony, who are members of an immigrant train from Virginia into the wild, new country surrounding the stockade at Harrod's Fort in Kentucky. These Pioneers suffer starvation, Indian attacks, torture, and death in the wilds of the new country. Diony, as a type of the pioneer woman, suffers untold hardships. She is attacked by Indians, and Berk's mother is struck down and scalped while fighting to defend her. Not long after this, she bears her child. Before the baby is a year old, Berk goes out from the stockade to revenge his mother's death. The news comes that he has been captured and killed. Three years later, Berk returns from captivity to find another man in his home, another man's baby in the cradle. Diony, according to primitive law, is forced to make a choice between Berk and her new husband and baby.

Citations from The Great Meadow

Her brothers called her Diny, and they were indeed earthmen, delving in the soil to make it yield bread and ridding the fields of stumps, plowing and burning the brush. 3

2 Ibid., p. 344.

3 Elizabeth Madox Roberts, The Great Meadow, p. 15.

Yea, it is a good land, the most extraordinary that ever I know. Meadow and woodland as far as eye can behold. Beauteous tracts in a great scope, miles. A fine river makes a bound to it on the north, and another fine river flows far to the west, another boundary. To the east is a boundary of rugged mountains. And set above the mountains is a great cliff wall that stands across the way. Yea, you would know you had come to the country of Caintuck when you saw that place. 4

Diony felt the coming of the spring as she flung the shuttle through the web to weave the tow linen for the summer wear.

"Not one of the heavenly bodies nor any part of the furniture of the earth can have being without mind to think it. Mind," the shuttle said, beating time against the pound of the reeds as she whipped the threads into cloth, and now the Thinking Part turned slowly to prepare a spring for the world. 5

The soil fell into crumbs of damp red mold and out of the clods came odors of sweet decay. As her hoe severed the earth to let the fruit out, her thought spread widely to grasp some other way of the earth where would be soil of some other kind, and she wondered of the mold where Berk had gone and what soil he plowed. 6

"Hit's Indian property. The white man has got no rights there. Hit's owned already, Kentuck is. Go, and you'll be killed and skulped by savages, your sculp to hang up in a dirty Indian house or hang on his belt. Hit's already owned. White men are outside their rights when they go there." 7

"If the Indian is not man enough to hold it let him give it over then," he said, "It's a land that calls for brave men, a brave race. It's only a strong race can hold a good country. Let the brave have and hold there." 8

"What do you want here? What did we come for?" She was shaken with delight and wonder.

"We want a fine high house, out in the rich cane. We want a farm to tend... fields..." 9

She knew herself to be the beginning of a new world. All about her were beginnings. The beginnings of fields took form as the trees were cleared away and the cane lands plowed, and the beginnings of roads appeared where a man made a trace by walking to a stream, another following and another, and added to these the footmarks of dogs and horses. 10

4 Ibid., p. 48.

5 Ibid., p. 58.

6 Ibid., p. 93.

7 Ibid., p. 105.

8 Ibid., p. 105.

9 Ibid., p. 173.

10 Ibid., pp. 190-191.

This was a new world, the beginning before the beginning. Sitting thus alone in the cabin, while Berk looked for the cow on the snowy creekside and brought her safely to the fort, while he, with the other men of the stockade, dragged fodder inside the wall, getting the wood, closing the gates—sitting thus she would see a vision of fields turned up by the plow. A moist loam rolls up to take the seeds and the rain into itself. Over the field some birds would go swiftly, darting here and there, calling now one and now all together, plovers tossing over a made field to go the creekside beyond a low rising shoulder of turned loam. A field! This would be a great happiness.

Or again; a vision of sheep sprinkled over a pasture or turned in on a hillside to crop the stubble and glean a fine rich eatage for themselves.

A vision of stone walls and rail fences setting bounds to the land, making contentment and limitations for the mind to ease itself upon. The wearying infinitives of the wilderness come to an end.

A vision of neighbors, a man living to the right, a man to the left, each in his own land, their children meeting together to walk down the road to a school house or a church.

A vision of places to sell the growth of the farms, there being farms now, a vision of some market place off in some town beyond the fields,... 11

"As I came past the gate," Betsy said, "I took it in my head to wonder was the moon of a similar kind to the stars, and Joe Tandy, he happened by then, and he said I better keep my eyes on the ground a little spell longer, or anyhow until Kentuck was safe for astronomicals." 12

"You're a lucky man, more fortunate than a dozen I could name that stand inside a mile here. Your mammy died a whole death at one time, a quick death, and if her scalp is still gone it's as like as not thrown down before today and withered to the dust where it would be in the end, no matter." 13

"And the Indian that carries it is dust, as good as dead and withered, and you mought as well forget what he carried or carries a spell longer until he goes the way he's bound to go." 14

11 Ibid., pp. 207-208.

12 Ibid., p. 221.

13 Ibid., pp. 239-240.

14 Ibid., p. 240.

She continually remembered on her side that the whole mighty frame of the world had no being without a mind to know it, but over this lay another way of knowing, and she saw clearly how little she could comprehend of those powers on the other side, beyond the growth of the herbs and the trees, and to sense the hostility of the forest life to her life, and to feel herself as a minute point, conscious, in a world that derived its being from some other sort. 15

Summary

In this story the author has set forth, through the medium of Diony, the philosophy of George Berkeley as found in Principles of Human Knowledge, 1710. Diony keeps reflecting "nothing can have being without a mind to think it." Berkeley maintained that matter cannot be conceived to exist, the only possible substance being mind. "This doctrine is epitomized in the sentence, 'esse est percipi,' i.e., to be is 'to be perceived or known,' or existing is 'being perceived'." 16

Diony's philosophy keeps her in close touch with the divine—the Thinking Part. She feels the close kinship of man to the dust of the earth. The scalp of the white man, and the Indian who takes it are bound to go the same way. The story abounds in visions typical of mankind in his march toward civilization, but they all center in a field from which man derives his daily bread. Diony ponders over the fact that the world has no being without mind to know it, but other things trouble her, too. She acknowledges how little she can

15 Ibid., pp. 274-275.

16 The New International Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 171. 1904.

comprehend of those powers on the other side, beyond the growth of the herbs and trees, and the hostility of the forest life about her. Through the soil—the very element of which man is made, the Thinking Part communes with His creation.

The Time of Man

The Time of Man is the story of the Chessers, a family of poor whites from the Kentucky hills. They have the restless urge of the pioneer and keep moving on in search of more fertile lands. The story centers about Ellen Chesser, an only daughter. She has a primitive mind, but the soul of a poet; and she yearns for beauty and communion with nature. Her first lover forsakes her, but she finally marries a luckless farm hand. There is more wandering and privation. They are about to settle down on a farm, when the hostility of the neighbors towards Ellen's husband sends them forth again, "a far piece" this time.

Citations from The Time of Man

She would be telling Tessie about the hayfield, perhaps tomorrow, at any rate by the day after. "Warm smells a-steamers up and a lark a-singen when he hopped up on a snag tree, and Pappy a-whistlen when the team goes down the field. A hay field is a good singen place now. But a baccer patch, who wants to be a-singen in baccer! I just wish you could 'a' seen Pappy a-sitten up big on that-there rake and a-whistlen to fair split his sides. I didn't say e'er a word or let on like I hear. If I'd taken notice he would 'a' shut right up. I never in life hear Pap sing so hard before. 17

"Pappy, where do rocks come from?"

"Why, don't you know? Rocks grow."

"I never see any grow. I never see one a-growen."

"I never see one a-grown neither, but they grow all the same. You pick up all the rocks offen this-here hill and in a year there's as many out again. I lay there'll be a stack to pick up right here again next year."

"I can't seem to think it! Rocks a-grown now! They don't seem alive. They seem dead-like. Maybe they've got another kind of way to be alive." 18

She was leaning over the clods to gather a stone, her shadow making an arched shape on the ground. All at once she lifted her body and flung up her head to the great sky that reached over the hills and shouted:

"Here I am!"

She waited listening.

"I'm Ellen Chesser! I'm here!"

Her voice went up in the wind out of the plowed land. For a moment she searched the air with her senses and then she turned back to the stones again.

"You didn't hear e'er a thing," she said under her breath "Did you think you heard something a-callen?" 19

Or Ellen sat in the house by the open fire drying her wet shoes. Around the house outside was mud, wet, and dripping eaves. Inside clothes were drying by the fire and the cabin was filled with soapy steam in which floated the odor of human bodies. Up the stairs, and the walls were wet from the leaking roof and the figures on the wall sank away into darker brown as in a fog, the procession endlessly going—trees, women, letters, women, crosses, unfeathered birds, swords, demons. Out of doors there was slop and mud to the ankles, cow dung and slush, deeper in the low places by the pond and deeper again in the cowpens. In the morning she would go up the hill in the dripping wet and her feet would sop in and out of the slow mire. She would help milk the cows under the shed and another day would be upon her, more mud, more wet, days endlessly going alike to every other, each one. 20

Her body and mind were of the earth, clodded with the clods; the strength of her arms and her back and her thighs arose out of the soil, the clods turned upon themselves to work back into their own substance endlessly. 21

But the near way of the clods, as she knew them, as she leaned over them, were a strength to destroy her strength. There, present, the heaviness of the clods pulled at her arms and the field seemed to reach very far before it stopped at the pool by the quarry. 22

18 Ibid., p. 79.

19 Ibid., p. 81.

20 Ibid., pp. 103-104.

21 Ibid., p. 250.

22 Ibid., p. 248.

Dreamily it came to her that she would take what there was out of the hard soil and out of the stones and she would have, in the end, something from the clattering rocks. 23

It came upon her one day when Nannie was two years old that the land was more real, more hard and actual, stone for stone and soil for soil, more than it had been when she first came there. 24

Breaking the soil her mind would penetrate the crumbling clod with a question that searched each new-turned lump of earth and pushed always more and more inwardly upon the ground, a lasting question that gathered around some unspoken word such as "why" or "how". Thus until her act of breaking open the clay was itself a search, as if she were digging carefully to find some buried morsel, some reply. 25

Summary

There is in this story as in The Great Meadow a questioning of the whole plan of the universe. Ellen, like Diony, gropes her way to find an answer to the riddle of life. Ellen questions even the stones and wonders whether they are alive. She says, "They seem dead-like. Maybe they've got another kind of way to be alive."

The Spirit of Beauty is calling Ellen, and from the fragrant hay field, she can hear and answer the call; "But a baccer patch, who wants to be a-singen in baccer!" says Ellen.

While Ellen is a child, her soul is in tune with Nature, but fate plays against her in the game of life. Her spirit soars away to the hay fields where larks sing, but her feet are compelled to tread in the slush and mire of the low places of life. As she grows older, the rocks that once were "a-callen", become heavy stones for her tired muscles to lift.

23 Ibid., pp. 262-263.

24 Ibid., p. 314.

25 Ibid., p. 350.

The clods seem a strength to destroy her strength as she toils among them to feed her hungry children. As the family enlarges, the struggle for existence becomes harder; and Ellen describes it by saying that the land becomes more real, more hard, and actual. There comes to her now a realization of man's dependence upon the soil. She feels that her body and mind are of the earth. She knows that her strength comes out of the soil, and that the clods turn upon themselves to work back into their own substance endlessly. Thus Ellen labors, breaking and crumbling the soil, realizing her kinship with it. And her toil becomes a search after the hidden mystery of life—the "how" and "why" of the universe.

Chapter III

In continuity of time the novels of Herbert Quick are next in order. The history recorded in Vandemark's Folly dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century, probably about the year 1840.

Herbert Quick was born in Iowa in 1861. Before he was forty years old, he had won distinction in two professions—education and law. Then, at a time when most men believe it futile to begin a new career, he closed his law office and began to cultivate a boyhood ambition. He set out to be an author. When asked about his work Mr. Quick said:

"It is only the middle portion of the history of the Middle West which has been neglected in fiction. When there were Indians and buffaloes and adventures of the more violent sort, it went into the works of the fiction-writers and fitted. What I have done is to use the material which lay all about me in my infancy. I took hold of the life which followed the expulsion of the Indian and the buffalo, in the state which had the most peaceful of histories—Iowa. I think it has been neglected because novelists did not see the wonders of it. To me it is the most marvelous episode of all history—the life of the people who made these rich prairies into the Heart of America.... I feel that I understand the Mid-west. Anyhow, before I was grown I planned this history of these people in fiction form. For forty years I thought about it. I have not told all of it. These people were my people, their home was my home, their problems, my problems. My father drove across from Madison to Central Iowa just as Jacobus Vandemark

did. In this story are the things I heard when I sat on my mother's lap. I resigned five years of my term on the Federal Farm Loan Board just because I had to finish the book which lay half done on my desk. I wrote it because I couldn't help it." 1

Vandemark's Folly

This story is autobiographical in its method. Herbert Quick's father is in reality the Jacobus Vandemark, who, in the story, drives from Madison to Central Iowa. Jacobus begins his narrative by telling about his playless childhood and the cruel stepfather who 'bound him out' to work. Jacobus finally takes refuge with the captain of a boat on the Erie Canal. After a number of years, he returns to find his mother gone and the house deserted. Then begins a long search for her which ends at a newly made grave. As his share of the mother's property, Jacobus is given a deed to some Iowa land. He is soon on his way to make a home in the new country. During this long journey, Jacobus is privileged to protect a helpless young woman who later becomes his wife. He becomes a successful man in spite of the hardships and adversities of his boyhood.

Citations from Vandemark's Folly

Here we went, oxen, cows, mules, horses; coaches, carriages, blue jeans, corduroy, rags, tatters, silks, satins, caps, tall hats, poverty, riches; speculators, missionaries, land-hunters,

1 Fred L. Holmes, "Herbert Quick-Bard of the Great Midwest," THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT, p. 13, July, 1, 1922.

merchants; criminals escaping from justice; couples fleeing from the law; families seeking homes; the wrecks of homes seeking secrecy; gold-seekers bearing southwest to the Overland Trail; politicians looking for places in which to win fame and fortune; editors hunting opportunities for founding newspapers; adventurers on their way to everywhere; lawyers with a few books; Abolitionists going to Border War; innocent-looking outfits carrying fugitive slaves; officers hunting escaped Negroes; and most numerous of all, homeseekers 'hunting country'—a nation on wheels, an empire in the commotion and pangs of birth." 2

It was sublime! Birds, flowers, grass, cloud, wind, and the immense expanse of sunny prairie, swelling up into undulations like a woman's breast turgid with milk for a hungry race. I forgot myself and my position in the world, my loneliness, my strange passenger, the problem of my life; my heart swelled, and my throat filled. I sat looking at it, with the tears trickling from my eyes, the uplift of my soul more than I could bear. It was not the thought of my mother that brought the tears to my eyes, but my happiness in finding the newest, strangest, most delightful, sternest, most wonderful thing in the world—the Iowa prairie—that made me think of my mother. 3

Prior to this time I had been courting the country; now I was united with it in that holy wedlock which binds the farmer to the soil he tills. Out of this black loam was to come my own flesh and blood, and the bodies, and I believe, in some measure, the souls of my children. Some deep conception of this made me draw in a deep, deep breath of the fresh prairie air. 4

The next day was a wedding day—the marriage morning of the plow and the sod. It marked the beginning of the subdual of that wonderful wild prairie of Vandemark Township and the Vandemark farm. No more fruitful espousal ever took place than that when the polished steel of my new breaking plow was embraced by the black soil with its lovely fell of greenery. Up to that fateful moment, the prairie of the farm and of the township had been virgin sod; but now it bowed its neck to the yoke of wedlock. Nothing like it takes place any more; for the sod of the meadows and pastures is quite a different thing from the untouched skin of the original earth. Breaking prairie was the most beautiful, the most epochal, the most hopeful, and as I look back at it, in one way the most pathetic thing

2 Herbert Quick, Vandemark's Folly, p. 105.

3 Ibid., pp. 112-113.

4 Ibid., p. 210.

man ever did, for in it, one of the loveliest things ever created began to come to its predestined end. 5

As I looked back at the results of my day's work, my spirits rose; for in the East, a man might have worked all summer long to clear as much land as I had prepared for a crop that first day. This morning it had been wilderness; and now it was a field—a field in which Magnus Thorkelson had planted corn, by the simple process of cutting through the sods with an ax, and dropping in each opening thus made three kernels of corn. Surely this was a new world! Surely this was a world in which a man with the will to do might make something of himself. No waiting for the long processes by which the forests were reclaimed; but a new world with new processes, new neighbors, new ideas, new opportunities, new victories easily gained. 6

"Forty acres," said he, "bane pretty big farm in Norway. My fadder on twenty acres, raise ten shildren. Not so gude land like dis. Vun of dem shildren bane college professor, and vun a big man in legislature. Forty acre bane gude farm, for gude farmer." 7

The destinies of the county and state were in the hands of youth, dreaming of the future; and when the untamed prairie turned and bit us, as it did in frosts and blizzards and floods and locusts and tornadoes, we said to each other, like the boy in the story when the dog bit his father, "Grin and bear it, Dad! It'll be the makin' o' the pup!" 8

We went through some hardships, we suffered some ills to be pioneers in Iowa; but I would rather have my grandsons see what I saw and feel what I felt in the conquest of these prairies, than to get up by their radiators, step into their baths, whirl themselves away in their cars, and go to universities. I am glad I had my share in those old, sweet, grand, beautiful things—the things which never can be again.... I have lived on my Iowa farm from times of bleak wastes, robber bands, and savage primitiveness, to this day, when my state is almost as completely developed as Holland. If I have a pride in it, if I look back to those days as worthy of record, remember that I have some excuse. There will be no other generation of human beings with a life so rich in change and growth. And there never was such a thing in all the history of the world before. 9

5 Ibid., p. 228.

6 Ibid., p. 229.

7 Ibid., p. 225.

8 Ibid., p. 297.

9 Ibid., p. 362.

Here ends the story, so far as I can tell it. It is not my story. There are some fifteen hundred townships in Iowa; and each of them had its history like this; and so had every township in all the great, wonderful West of the prairie. The thing in my mind has been to tell the truth; not the truth of statistics; not just information; but the living truth as we lived it. Every one of these townships has a history beginning in the East, or in Scandinavia, or Germany, or the South. We are the results of lines of effect which draw together into our story; and we are a cause of a future of which no man can form a conjecture. 10

The prairies took me, an ignorant, orphaned canal hand, and made me something much better. How much better it is not for me to say. The best prayer I can utter now is that it may do as well with my children and grandchildren, with the tenants on these rich farms, and the farm-hands that help till them, and with the owners who find that expensive land is just like expensive clothes;—merely something you must have, and must pay heavily for. 11

Summary

In this story Herbert Quick has given his version of early pioneer days in Iowa. It is a story that recalls bleak wastes, robber bands, and savage primitiveness; but the author thinks that the rewards have been worth the cost. Herbert Quick loved the virgin prairie, and he writes about it in an exalted mood. Jacobus Vandemark compares his section of Iowa land with the forty acre tract described by Magnus Thorkelson as a good farm in Norway, and his farm becomes a small kingdom. Jacobus says that the prairie took him an ignorant, orphaned canal hand and made him something better. He admits that the prairie has been a stern teacher, but his one prayer is that it will do as well by his children and grand-children. Herbert Quick's philosophy is that of a successful man, the man who cannot help being an

10 Ibid., p. 419.

11 Ibid., p. 420.

optimist. It is a philosophy of maturer years. He has thought about these things for forty years, and time has mellowed his reflections. No bitterness finds a place in the heart of a man like Herbert Quick.

The Hawkeye

While this story is not a sequel to Vandemark's Folly, there is a continuation of the account of a young country in the process of making, which the author began in the earlier novel. In The Hawkeye, Mr. Quick has told the life story of Fremont McConkey, beginning on the night of his birth in June 1857. The story continues on into the 1890's, recounting, as it goes, stories of the drouths, plagues, political turmoils, and other incidents which unite to make the early history of Iowa. The author presents a vivid picture of the corruption in politics which crept into the management of town, county, and state governments during the 1880's. Like Hamlin Garland, he gives a realistic account of the hardships of the farmers. He furnishes adequate reasons for the farmer's pessimism. The hardships and sacrifices of Fremont McConkey's mother, as a type of the pioneer farmer's wife, are sympathetically recorded.

Citations from The Hawkeye

It was assumed on Henry's part that Fremont was doing less than his share of the hard work, and Fremont himself felt a little guilty on the point, for life in the McConkey family was reckoned on a system which used muscular exertion of a useful nature as the standard of value. Fremont himself looked upon his teaching as a sybaritic indulgence, to which he was seduced by his love for reading and study. 12

Fremont modestly suggested to the enthusiastic captain that this tall rank wheat was already rusting and blighting. This was the nightmare of the Iowa farmers, the diseases of the wheat. To sow vast fields to the grain, to harrow it promptly so as to save it from the great flocks of pretty little horned larks which under the name of "wheat birds" filled their crops with it if it was left exposed to them, to watch it spring up so green and lush, to see it shoot up its heavy heads as if to bring forth twenty-fold, and then, on some fine Sabbath morning, to stroll forth to exult over the prospect of money for the mortgage and the doctor's bill and the account at the store—and find on the green straw the red rust, or the black blotches, which destroyed all prospect of anything but a small return of shriveled kernels. This was what robbed the McConkey family of every hope save that which springs eternal, and may account to the puzzled critic for what he terms the inveterate pessimism of the farmer. These farmers were being plunged every year deeper and deeper into poverty, while tilling the richest soil in the world. 13

The nerves of the farmers who had revolted at Crabapple Grove that day were on edge. Revolutions come of overstrained nerves rather than by reason. Every day these farmers were watching for the oncoming scourge of grasshoppers. They saw the wheat menaced by mysterious blasting diseases threatening their very livelihoods; and found themselves existing on a plain lower than that occupied by the pioneers twenty years before. They believed that the eternal bung was loose at the moment, to adopt a Lawlessian locution. 14

Fremont looked at his mother with tears in his eyes. He knew how fond she was of her tobacco. He had often wished that she had not learned to smoke, but he had long since put aside the disposition to be critical—for was it not her only indulgence? And she had renounced it for him. For there was an understanding between them that he was to be the exceptional one of the family, and not "just a farmer." 15

Here was something definite accomplished. So many furrows turned to be frozen and thawed by winter, buried in snow, sown in the spring, and reaped next year; and so many mouths fed somewhere, so many hands released from the plow and enabled to clothe and shelter and educate and enthrall by some art the great developing world. Fremont never plowed but he felt the claim of the soil upon him. He never hauled a load of wheat to market without feeling a part of that claim cancelled. 16

13 Ibid., pp. 94-95.

14 Ibid., p. 118.

15 Ibid., p. 128.

16 Ibid., p. 146.

The mothers of the frontiers! They felt the oncoming of another day for their children. No life was so laborious, no situation so unpropitious, no poverty so deep that they did not through a divine gift of prophecy see beyond the gloom a better day for their children. In the smoky overheated kitchens, struggling to feed the "gangs" of harvesters and thrashers, as they washed and mopped and baked and brewed and spun and wove and knit and boiled soap and mended and cut and basted and sewed and strained milk and skimmed cream and churned and worked over butter, catching now and then an opportunity to read while rocking a child to sleep, drinking in once in a while a bit of poetry from the sky or the cloud or the flower; they were haloed like suns of progress for their families and for their nation, as they worked and planned and assumed for themselves a higher and higher culture of its sort—all for their children. 17

They little knew what took place in his soul....; while the callouses softened on his hands, and peeled off, leaving them soft and pink—the callouses on his soul, which had been made by his long life on the farm, still remained. 18

The fragrance of new-turned furrows disturbed him somewhat. The waves of shadow on the ripening wheat called him as to some task shirked. The whispering maize of July, as it stood in its straight rows, its burgeoning stalks slanting in the prairie breeze, seemed to say to him, "We are the green hosts of that God who dropped manna for His children's sustenance. Why are you not marching with us, softening the bed for our roots, freeing us from the spies, deserters and traitors of the weeds, giving drink to our lips through the water you hold for us in the cups of your furrows? Are you also turned against us?" He would smile at the ridiculousness of it. I wonder whether in that ominous desertion of the soil which our world has seen in its steady, and, I sometimes suspect, fundamentally wicked industrialization, the human race has not suffered a shock to its collective conscience of which Fremont McConkey's queer little trouble is typical? 19

Summary

This novel is somewhat in harmony with Garland's mood when he wrote Main-Travelled Roads in 1889. It presents the psychology of the farmer—what he thought and felt in those trying days of drouth, and grasshoppers, and political corruption. The farmer evaluates things, and "muscular exertion of a

17 Ibid., p. 196.

18 Ibid., p. 293.

19 Ibid., p. 294.

useful nature" is of prime importance to the tiller of the soil. Education seems effeminate, a useless luxury, which the pioneer father could hardly afford to tolerate. But the pioneer mother had a vision of a better day for her children. When she drags weary limbs through long days of toil, it is with the hope that her daughter may have more comforts; that her son may be something besides "just a farmer". However, Mr. Quick does not permit his farmers to become so calloused in soul that the call of the soil passes unheeded. Fremont McConkey never plows, without realizing that his toil is helping to feed a hungry world; and after leaving the farm for the city he has, at times, the feeling that he is a deserter; that he has turned his back on the soil that gives him sustenance. And Herbert Quick wonders, whether the human race in its steady march towards industrialization, has not suffered a like shock to its collective conscience.

Chapter IV

Hamlin Garland was born in the village of West Salem, Wisconsin, in 1860. He accompanied his restless father from Wisconsin to Minnesota, from Minnesota to Iowa, and from Iowa to Dakota. It was this pioneering which gave him background for the stories of the Middle Border. In 1918, he was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and he is now a director of the organization. The Pulitzer Prize for the best biography during the year was awarded, in 1921, to Mr. Garland's A Daughter of the Middle Border.

On June 21, 1926, the University of Wisconsin conferred upon Hamlin Garland the degree of Doctor of Letters. In presenting the honor, Professor Frederick Paxson, noted American historian⁷, paid tribute to the historical value of Mr. Garland's work. He said, in part:

"Mr. Garland is the novelist of our northwest farmer country. For thirty-five years his easy pen has worked at the life of our people. A Son of the Middle Border, himself, his art has portrayed the character of humans, and has recorded the history of a generation that saw the American people transmuted into a nation. Fiction is often truest history. He has done something with history and formal biography as such, but what we value today, and what our children will value in years to come is his verisimilitude to life. His writings are works of art, but they are also documents that may become the source of history; for the contemporary portraiture of a people by itself has a value in interpretation that goes beyond the literary values of

the stories." 1

A Son of the Middle Border

A Son of the Middle Border is autobiographical in nature. It is the story of Hamlin Garland's boyhood and young manhood in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Dakota, with glimpses of his contacts with the cultured East. It is also a history of the Garland and McClintock families in their relation to the great westward expansion of the American nation in the early '60's and '70's.

The story really begins in the third year of the Civil War when the author's father comes to the mother in their rude home on an Iowa farm and tells her that he has enlisted. And so the father becomes a soldier as well as a pioneer. His word is law in his household, and they who are members of it have no choice but to share the hardships of pioneer life as David Garland follows the 'star of empire' westward as far as Dakota. At last, the sons, who have been loyal through childhood, rebel, as they see their mother bending under age and hardships on the barren Dakota plains. Hamlin Garland is finally successful in establishing a homestead for his aged parents in Salem, Wisconsin, the village of his birth. David Garland, influenced by his wife's declining health, is compelled, at last, to take the back trail.

1 "Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border", A Pamphlet of Criticisms and Reviews. p. 3.

Citations from A Son of the Middle Border

All the charm and mystery of that prairie would come back to me, and I ache with an illogical desire to recover it, and hold it, and preserve it in some form for my children. —It seems an injustice that they should miss it, and yet it is probably that they are getting an equal joy of life, an equal exaltation from the opening flowers of the single lilac bush in our city back-yard or from an occasional visit to the lake in Central Park. 2

There are certain ameliorations to child labor on a farm. Air and sunshine and food are plentiful. I never lacked for meat or clothing, and mingled with my records of toil are exquisite memories of the joy I took in following the changes in the landscape, in the notes of the birds, and in the play of small animals on the sunny soil. 3

Most authors in writing of "the merry, merry farmer" leave out experiences like this—they omit the mud, and the dust, and the grime, they forget the army worm, the flies, the heat, as well as the smells and drudgery of the barns. Milking the cows is spoken of in the traditional fashion as a lovely pastoral recreation, when as a matter of fact, it is a tedious job. We all hated it. We saw no poetry in it. We hated it in the summer when the mosquitoes bit and the cows slashed us with their tails, and we hated it still more in the winter time when they stood in crowded malodorous stalls. 4

My father was puzzled and a good deal irritated by his son's dark moods.... To him a son who wanted to go east was temporarily demented. It was an absurd plan. "Why, it's against the drift of things. You can't make a living back east. Hang onto your land and you'll come out all right. The place for a young man is in the west." 5

Then an old farmer, bent and worn of frame, halted before me to talk with a merchant. This was David Babcock, Burton's father, one of our old neighbors, a little more bent, a little thinner, a little grayer—that was all, and as I listened to his words I asked "What purpose does a man serve by toiling like that for sixty years with no increase of leisure, with no growth in mental grace?" 6

All that day I had studied the land, musing upon its distinctive qualities, and while I acknowledged the natural beauty of it, I revolted from the gracelessness of its human habitations. The lonely box-like farm houses on the ridges

2 Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 100.

3 Ibid., p. 100.

4 Ibid., p. 129.

5 Ibid., p. 316.

6 Ibid., p. 361.

suddenly appeared to me like the dens of wild animals. The lack of color, of charm in the lives of the people anguished me. I wondered why I had never before perceived the futility of woman's life on the farm. 7

I thought of the hand of Edwin Booth, of the flower-like palm of Helena Modjeska, of the subtle touch of Inness, and I said, "Is it not time that the human hand cease to be primarily a bludgeon for hammering a bare living out of the earth? Nature all bountiful, indiscriminating, would, under justice, make such toil unnecessary." "Nature is not to blame. Man's laws are to blame." 8

And yet all this did not prevent me from acknowledging the beauty of the earth. On the contrary, social injustice intensified nature's prodigality. I said, "Yes, the landscape is beautiful, but how much of its beauty penetrates to the heart of the men who are in the midst of it and battling with it? How much of consolation does the worn and weary reenter find in the beauty of cloud and tree or in the splendor of sunset?—Grace of flower does not feed or clothe the body, and when the toiler is both badly clothed and badly fed, bird-song and leaf-shine cannot bring content." Like Millet, I asked, "Why should all of a man's waking hours be spent in an effort to feed and clothe his family? Is there not something wrong in our social scheme when the unremitting toiler remains poor?" 9

"The working farmer," I went on to argue, "has to live in February as well as June. He must pitch manure as well as clover. Milking as depicted on a blue china plate where a maid in a flounced petticoat is caressing a gentle Jersey cow in a field of daisies, is quite unlike sitting down to the steaming flank of a stinking brindle heifer in fly time. Pitching odorous timothy in a poem and actually putting it into the mow with a temperature at ninety-eight in the shade are widely separated in fact as they should be in fiction." 10

My talk with Kirkland and my perception of the sordid monotony of farm life had given me a new and very definite emotional relationship to my native state. I perceived now the tragic value of scenes which had hitherto appeared merely dull or petty. My eyes were opened to the enforced misery of the pioneer. 11

"Butter is not always golden nor biscuits invariably light and flaky in my farm scenes, because they're not so in real life," I explained. "I grew up on a farm and I am determined once for all to put the essential ugliness of its life into print. I will not lie, even to be a patriot. A proper proportion of the sweat, flies, heat, dirt, and the drudgery

7 Ibid., p. 356.

8 Ibid., p. 363.

9 Ibid., p. 368.

10 Ibid., p. 377.

11 Ibid., p. 375.

of it all shall go in. I am a competent witness; and I intend to tell the whole truth." 12

Summary

A Son of the Middle Border combines the fascination of a story of fact with a novelist's sense of values. It seems futile to attempt to state Garland's philosophy of farm life more clearly than he has done in this story. Country life, before Garland's day, had been described by the poet sitting on the front porch looking on. But Garland writes with muscles, sore from pitching hay. He knows how it feels to toil early and late in heat and cold. He has been repelled by farm life—the filth of it among the cattle and horses. He has been nauseated while seated at the table with unwashed bodies—men reeking with the sweat of harvest fields. He has felt the pangs of remorse when his mother falls, stricken under her heavy load of drudgery. The author has summed up for the reader, farm life, as he sees it.—"For me, the grime, and the mud, and the sweat, and the dust exist. They still form a large part of the life on the farm, and I intend that they shall go into my stories in their proper proportions." 13

A Daughter of the Middle Border

This story is a sequel to the author's A Son of the Middle Border, and like the first, it is autobiographical in nature. The two books form the story of the McClintock and Garland families whose wanderings and privations are typical of thousands

12 Ibid., p. 416.

13 Ibid., p. 377.

of pioneer families who took part in the settlement of the Middle Western States. The stories cover that period of history which lies between the Civil War and the World War of 1914.

A Daughter of the Middle Border continues Garland's reminiscences of boyhood days and recounts many of his later experiences as he travels from the Yukon country on the north to Oklahoma and New Mexico on the south. However, the story is chiefly concerned with the bringing home of the "new daughter," Garland's wife, to his aged parents in the family homestead in New Salem, Wisconsin. Around this important event in the author's life are woven his struggles as a writer, his joys in his family and homestead, and the deep emotion he experiences when it becomes apparent that his aged parents are making ready to set forth on that last, long journey. The story closes when the father, aged soldier and pioneer, is at last 'mustered out'.

Citations from A Daughter of the Middle Border

The old soldier, who came in from the barn a few moments later, confirmed this. "I'm no truck farmer," he explained with humorous contempt. "I turn this onion patch over to you. It's no place for me. In two days I'll be broad-casting wheat on a thousand-acre farm. That's my size"—a fact which I admitted. 14

An hour later mother and I went out to inspect the garden and to plan the seeding. The pie-plant leaves were unfolding and slender asparagus spears were pointing from the mold. The smell of burning leaves brought back to us both, with magic power, memories of the other springs and other plantings on the plain. It was glorious, it was medicinal!

"This is life!" I exultantly proclaimed. "Work is just what I need. I shall set to it at once. Aren't you glad you are here in this lovely valley and not out on the bleak Dakota plain?" 15

Hiring a gardener, I bought a hand-book on Horticulture and announced my intent to make those four fat acres feed my little flock. I was now a land enthusiast. My feet laid hold upon the earth. I almost took root. 16

With a cook and a housemaid, a man to work the garden, and a horse to plow out my corn and potatoes, I began to wear a composed dignity of an earl. I pruned trees, shifted flower beds and established berry patches with the large-handed authority of a southern planter. It was comical, it was delightful! 17

To visit among the farmers—to help at haying or harvesting, brought back minute touches of the olden, wondrous prairie world. We went swimming in the river just as we used to do when lads, rejoicing in the caress of the wind, the sting of the cool water, and on such expeditions we often thought of Burton and others of our play-mates far away, and of Uncle David, in his California exile. "I wish he, too, could enjoy this sweet and tranquil world, I said, and in this desire my brother joined. 18

It released him from the tyranny of the skies. All his life he had been menaced by the weather. Clouds, snows, winds, had been his unrelenting antagonists. Hardly an hour of his past had been free from fear of disaster. The glare of the sun, the direction of the wind, the assembling of clouds at sunset,—all the minute signs of change, of storm, of destruction had been his incessant minute study. For over fifty years he had been enslaved to the seasons. His sister's blessing liberated him. He agonized no more about the fall of frost, the slash of hail, the threat of tempest. Neither chinch bugs nor drought nor army worms could break his rest. He slept in comfort and rose in confidence. He retained a general interest in crops, of course, but he no longer ate his bread in fear, and just in proportion as he realized his release from these corroding, long-endured cares, did he take on mellowness and humor. He became another man altogether. He ceased to worry and hurry. His tone, his manner became those of a citizen of substance, of genial leisure. He began to speak of travel! 19

15 Ibid., p. 14.

16 Ibid., p. 15.

17 Ibid., p. 16.

18 Ibid., p. 18.

19 Ibid., pp. 169-170.

Through a land untouched by the white man's plow, we rode on a trail which carried me back to my childhood, to the Iowa prairie over which I had ridden with my parents thirty years before. This land, this sky, this mournful, sighing wind laid hold of something very sweet, almost sacred in my brain. By great good fortune I had succeeded in overtaking the vanishing prairie. 20

This revived hunger for land generated in me a plan for establishing a wider ranch down there, an estate to which we could retire in February and March. "We can meet the spring half way," I explained to my father. "I want a place where I can keep saddle horses and cattle. You must go with me and see it sometime. It is as lovely as Mitchell County was in 1870." 21

Valiant Aunt Lorette! Her face was always sunny, no matter how deep the shadow in her heart; and her capacity for work was prodigious. She was almost a perfect example of the happy, hard-working farmer's wife, for her superb physical endowment and her serene temperament had survived the strain of thirty years of unremitting toil. Her life had been, thus far, a cheerful pilgrimage. She did not mind the loneliness of the valley. The high hill which lay between her door and the village could not wall her spirit in. She rejoiced in the stream of pure water which flowed from the hillside spring to the tank at her kitchen door, and she took pride in the chickens and cows and pigs which provided her table with abundant food.

"Oh, yes, I like to go to town—once in a while," she replied in answer to Zulime's question. "But I'd hate to live there. I don't see how people get along on a tucked up fifty-foot lot where they have to buy every blessed thing they eat." 22

It was an iron soil. The valley was a furnace, the sky a brazen shield. No green thing was in sight, and the curling leaves of the dying corn brought back to me those desolate days in Dakota when my mother tried so hard to maintain a garden. Deeply pitying the captive red hunters, who were expected to become farmers under these desolate conditions, I was able to understand how they had turned to the Great Spirit in a last despairing plea for pity and relief. "Think of this place in winter," I said to Zulime. 23

As I went on I found myself deep in her life on the farm in Iowa, and the cheerful heroism of her daily treadmill came back to me with such appeal that I could scarcely see the words in which I was recording her history. Visioning the long years

20 Ibid., p. 178.

21 Ibid., p. 182.

22 Ibid., pp. 186-187.

23 Ibid., p. 195.

of her drudgery, I recalled her early rising, and suffered with her the never-ending round of dishwashing, churning, sewing and cooking, realizing more than ever before that in all of this slavery she was but one of a million martyrs. All our neighbor's wives walked the same round. On such as they rests the heavier part of the home and city building in the West. The wives of the farm are the unnamed, unrewarded heroines of the border. 24

It all came back as they talked,—that buoyant world of the reaper and the binder, when harvesting was a kind of Homeric game in which, with rake and scythe, these lusty young sons of the East contended for supremacy in the field. "None of us had an extra dollar," explained Stevens, "but each of us had what was better, good health and a faith in the future. Not one of us had any intention of growing old." 25

For seventy years he had faced the open lands, starting from the hills of Maine when a lad, he had kept moving, each time farther west, farther from his native valley. His life, measured by the inventions he had witnessed, the progress he had shared, covered an enormous span. 26

In these two volumes over which I have brooded for more than ten years, I have shadowed forth, imperfectly, yet with high intent, the experiences of Isabel McClintock and Richard Garland, and the lives of other settlers closely connected with them. For a full understanding of the drama—for it is a drama, a colossal and colorful drama—I must depend upon the memory or the imagination of my readers. 27

Summary

Professor Parrington makes some interesting comments on the work of Garland and Rolvaag. He calls Main-Travelled Roads the first chapter in the story of the 'Middle Border' and says that it is also a prologue to Giants in the Earth. He believes that Garland has told the story of the prairie settlement in the idiom of the generation that undertook the great adventure. He insists that Garland's first book is as complete an express-

24 Ibid., p. 219.

25 Ibid., p. 309.

26 Ibid., p. 399.

27 Ibid., p. 403.

ion of the mood of the last years of that century as Rolvaag's first book is an expression of the outlook of our own day.

The three books of Garland cannot be separated, for they form a continued story. There is, in the first two volumes, especially, a mood of bitterness and discouragement. At times the author seems to suggest the utter futility of a laborious existence. Throughout the three books, the figures of imbittered and despondent men and women darken the pictures of his realism. Garland seems to be questioning whether the prairies will ever be able to repay all that they have cost in human happiness. He has said, again and again, that the price of it all has been the sweat and blood of his parents and of the other pioneers of that generation.

The four intervening years which separated the story of A Son of the Middle Border and A Daughter of the Middle Border seem to have softened somewhat the tone and mood of the writer. It may be that his first two volumes have furnished an outlet for all the pent up bitterness of those boyhood days. At any rate, A Daughter of the Middle Border reveals a more sympathetic and kindly interpretation of his environment. There are, perhaps, a number of factors influencing this softened mood.

First of all, the author is at least a step removed from the soil; his success as a writer has given him assurance that he need not return to the sordidness of farm life as he knew it in boyhood days. In describing his father's economic independence, he says that his father was released from the tyranny of the skies; that he no longer ate his bread in fear, and that he eventually took on mellowness and humor. This feeling of in-

dependence, no doubt, explains Garland's outlook as well as that of his aged father.

Garland, like Rolvaag, has emotionalized his stories; he has given a psychology of the pioneer. He not only records what they did and said, but how they felt as they lived and worked. It is as if there had been thrown on the screen of time, a panorama of these years; and the reader shares the joys and sorrows, the doubts and triumphs of these makers of history.

Chapter V

Willa Cather was born in Virginia, in 1876, and, at the age of nine, came to the plains of Nebraska, where her father settled on a ranch near Red Cloud. Neighbors were few, and the majority of the settlers were Bohemian or Scandinavian. The young girl became deeply interested in the traditions and daily lives of these people. She often rode her pony twelve miles over rough reed grass to get the mail, stopping on the way to chat with the wives and children of the immigrant ranchers. At nineteen, she was graduated from the University of Nebraska, and her ambition was to become an author. She was deeply interested in portraying the lives, hopes, and frustrations of these pioneers with whom she had made friendly contacts. Her books deal with the West, and her associations with it are so strong that she has been described as a "characteristic" American, because her twenty years of residence in New York City have not robbed her of the western accent and bearing. Her two novels O Pioneers and My Antonia are used here as typical of her work.

O Pioneers

The story opens in the early eighties when the Nebraska prairies were still untamed. The characters of the story are of two races, Bohemian and Swedish. The story centers around Alexandra Bergson, who never lost faith in the land. At her father's death she takes charge of the farm, determined to carry out his dying wishes with respect to the land. Against the protests of her brothers, she holds on to the farm, lives through years of adversity, and sees prosperity come.

Citations from O Pioneers

But the great fact was the land itself, which seemed to overwhelm the little beginnings of human society that struggled in its somber wastes. It was facing this vast hardness that the boy's mouth had become so bitter, because he felt that men were too weak to make any mark here, that the land wanted to be let alone, to preserve its own fierce strength, its peculiar, savage kind of beauty, its uninterrupted mournfulness. 1

John Bergson had the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable. But this land was an enigma. It was like a horse that no one knows how to break to harness, that runs wild and kicks things to pieces. 2

"Don't let them get discouraged and go off like Uncle Otto. I want them to keep the land."

"We will, Father. We will never lose the land." 3

He worked like an insect, always doing the same thing over in the same way, regardless of whether it was best or no. He felt that there was a sovereign virtue in mere bodily toil, and he rather liked to do things in the hardest way. If a field had once been in corn, he couldn't bear to put it into wheat. He liked to begin his corn-planting at the same time every year, whether the season were backward or forward. He seemed to feel that by his own irreproachable regularity he could clear himself of blame and reprove the weather. When the crops failed, he threshed the straw at a dead loss to demonstrate how little grain there was, and thus prove his case against Providence. 4

For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or woman. 5

You feel that, properly, Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best. 6

If the world were no wider than my corn fields, if there were not something besides this, I wouldn't feel that it was much worth while to work. 7

1 Willa Cather, O Pioneers, p. 15.

2 Ibid., p. 21.

3 Ibid., p. 26.

4 Ibid., p. 55.

5 Ibid., p. 65.

6 Ibid., p. 84.

7 Ibid., p. 123.

Yes, she told herself, it had been worth while; both Emil and the country had become what she had hoped. Out of her father's children there was one who was fit to cope with the world, who had not been tied to the plow, and who had a personality apart from the soil, and that, she reflected, was what she had worked for. She felt well satisfied with her life. 8

Her mind was a white book, with clear writing about weather, and beasts, and growing things. Not many people would have cared to read it; only a happy few. 9

We come and go, but the land is always here and the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it--for a little while. 10

They went into the house together, leaving the Divide behind them, under the evening star. Fortunate country, that is one day to receive hearts like Alexandra's into its bosom, to give them out again in the yellow wheat, in the rustling corn, in the shining eyes of youth! 11

Summary

Here are two contrasting philosophies of life. Alexandra works in love and harmony with Providence and the soil. Her brother Oscar works like an insect, flies in the face of Providence, and, in figurative language, "scorches his own wings." Alexandra's soul expands to the world beyond her corn fields; she rejoices in the fact that Emil, the younger brother, has a personality apart from the soil; that he is not, like his older brothers, tied to the plow. Alexandra is not a slave to the soil, but, because of love, becomes its master--she owns it for a little while. "And the history of every country," says Willa Cather, "begins in the heart of a man or woman."

8 Ibid., p. 213.

9 Ibid., p. 213.

10 Ibid., pp. 307-308.

11 Ibid., p. 309.

My Antonia

The story of Antonia is told by Jim Burden, a friend of her childhood. This man of the world has never forgotten the fine Bohemian girl who meant so much to him during those lonely days on the prairie. Antonia is the child of immigrant parents who have come from Bohemia to get land for their sons and husbands for their daughters. Antonia's sensitive, music-loving father is overcome by the harshness of the new country, and Antonia is compelled to do a man's work on the farm. Later, she becomes a town hired girl, is betrayed, deserted, and left with a child. Antonia finally marries and settles on a farm, where she pours her love and energy into the soil. Here, many years later, Jim Burden finds her, battered by the long struggle, but with spirit unbroken. Surrounded by her large family and thrifty, fruitful acres, she is a woman who has triumphed over life.

Citations from My Antonia

The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. Queer little red bugs came out and moved in slow squadrons around me. Their backs were polished vermilion, with black spots. I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. 12

"My papa sad for the old country. He not look good. He never make music any more. At home he play violin all the time; for weddings and for dance. Here never. When I beg him for

play, he shake his head no. Some dayshe take his violin out of his box and make with his fingers on the strings, like this, but never he make the music. He don't like this kawn-tree."

"People who don't like this country ought to stay at home," I said severely. "We don't make them come here."

"He not want to come nev-er!" she busst out. "My mamenka make him come. All the time she say: 'America big country; much money, much land for my boys, much husband for my girls.' My papa cry for leave his old friends what make music with him. He love very much the man what play the long horn like this"—she indicated a slide trombone. "They go to school together and aæ friends from boys. But my mama, she want Ambrosch for be rich, with many cattle." 13

I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country. 14

By this time she could speak enough English to ask me a great many questions about what our men were doing in the fields. She seemed to think that my elders withheld helpful information, and that from me she might get valuable secrets. On this occasion she asked me very craftilly when grandfather expected to begin planting corn. I told her, adding that he thought we should have a dry spring and that the corn would not be held back by too much rain, as it had been last year. 15

Antonia stood up, lifting and dropping her shoulders as if they were stiff. "I ain't got time to learn. I can work like mans now. My mother can't say no more how Ambrosch do all and nobody to help him. I can work as much as him. School is all right for little boys. I help make this land one good farm." 16

The American farmers in our country were quite as hard pressed as their neighbors from other countries. All alike had come to Nebraska with little capital and no knowledge of the soil they must subdue. All had borrowed money on their land. But no matter in what straits the Pennsylvanian or Virginian found himself, he would not let his daughters go out into service. Unless his girls could teach a country school, they sat at home in poverty. The Bohemian and Scandinavian girls could not get positions as teachers because they had had no opportunity to learn the language. Determined to help in the struggle to clear the homestead from debt, they had no alternative but to go into service.... But every one of them did what she set out to do and sent home those hard-earned dollars. The girls I knew were always helping to pay for plows and reapers, brood sows, or steers to fatten. 17

13 Ibid., pp. 102-103.

14 Ibid., p. 115.

15 Ibid., pp. 138-139.

16 Ibid., p. 141.

17 Ibid., pp. 227-228.

She asked me whether I had learned to like big cities. "I'd always be miserable in a city. I'd die of lonesomeness. I like to be where I know every stack and tree, and where all the ground is friendly. I want to live and die here. Father Kelly says everybody's put into this world for something, and I know what I've got to do. I'm goind to see that my little girl has a better chance than ever I had. I'm going to take care of that girl, Jim." 18

As we walked through the apple orchard, grown up in tall blue grass, Antonia kept stopping to tell me about one tree and another. "I love them as if they were people," she said, rubbing her hand over the bark. "There wasn't a tree here when we first came. We planted every one, and used to carry water to them, too--after we'd been working in the fields all day. Anton, he was a city man, and he used to get discouraged. But I couldn't feel so tired that I wouldn't fret about these trees when there was a dry time. They were on my mind like children. Many a night after he was asleep I've got up and come out and carried water to the poor things. And now, you see, we have the good of them...." 19

In that singular light every little tree and shock of wheat, every sunflower stalk and clump of snow-on-the-mountain, drew itself up high and pointed; the very clods and furrows in the fields seemed to stand up sharply. I felt the odd pull of the earth, the solemn magic that comes out of those fields at nightfall. I wish I could be a little boy again, and that my way could end there! 20

This was the road over which Antonia and I came on that night when we got off the train at Black Hawk and were bedded down in the straw, wondering children, being taken we knew not whither.... For Antonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us, all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past. 21

Summary

This story reveals several outstanding characteristics of the foreign immigrant. It portrays the deep emotion of the older people whose lives are uprooted from their native soil; it proves the willingness of parents to sacrifice that the sons

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 383-384.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 364.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 419.

may have land and cattle; it shows that no kind of work is considered degrading for women, if it helps to pay off the mortgage on the farm and stock it with hogs and cattle; it explains that these foreign people were often distrustful and suspicious of American neighbors because they did not understand their language. Antonia, of the second generation, has heard the call of the soil and knows her work in life. She has tended her trees like children and wants to live and die where the stacks and trees are familiar and the ground is friendly. As Jim Burden surveys the scenes of his boyhood after long years in the city, he, too, feels the pull of the earth, the magic of the fields at nightfall, and wishes that his way could end there.

Chapter VI

Margaret Wilson furnishes the following autobiographical sketch for the Wilson Bulletin of May, 1932:

I was born in Iowa in 1882, the most middle western of the middle western states. My forebears were in no sense gentlefolk. Being farmers, they were not good at keeping up appearances. Indeed, they were too poor to have an appearance to keep up. Yet they could stare reality in the face without batting an eye. They had a rather interesting collection of scorns, including a Scotch abhorrence of American methods of land exhaustion. They appreciated themselves too thoroly to wonder whether the world appreciated them or not, and they plowed with long heads and high hearts. And when their crops failed, they groaned internally only, attributing their failures not to lack of legislation, populistic or otherwise, but to their own lack of knowledge of the resources of the soil. While some agitated and paraded, they experimented, and devised better methods, and their wisdom has been justified by the children of their minds. To their lesser offspring they bequeath^{ed} a certain inclination toward the simplicities of life, so that to this day my nose prefers the fundamental and rhythmic odors of a sunny manure-pile to such jazzy intricacies of incense as burns, say, in St. Mark's of the Bowery. 1

The Able McLaughlins

The Able McLaughlins is a Harper prize novel. It is a story of a Scotch community in the Middle West during the '60's. It centers around the McLaughlins, a family of Scotch immigrants who have never for one moment considered Americans in general their equal; nor have they permitted their children to think the family anything common. Isabel McLaughlin hates the democracy that justifies tolerance toward the mediocre in life. A family, who thus pride themselves, ~~is~~ ill prepared for any reflection upon the family honor. Wully McLaughlin returns from Grant's army to find that the girl he loves has been violated by his cousin, Peter Keith, the scapegoat of the community. Wully grasps the situation, and without revealing the truth even

1 Wilson Bulletin, May, 1932. p. 600.

to his mother, he marries Christie and assumes the paternity of her child and the blame for its untimely birth. Wully drives Peter Keith from the community, swearing vengeance upon him should he ever return. Later, he does return, and Wully plans to hunt him down and put an end to his life. A few weeks afterward, Wully finds him in a dying condition. Instead of carrying out the revenge he has planned, Wully takes Peter home to his mother who has been driven insane over the loss of her son. Interwoven with the love theme in this story is a background of the soil showing the Scotchman's love of the land and his pride in tilling it.

Citations from The Able McLaughlins

The elder McLaughlin sighed with satisfaction as he talked. Even yet he had scarcely recovered from that shock of incredulous delight at his first glimpse of the incredible prairies; acres from which no frontiersman need ever cut a tree; acres in which a man might plow a furrow of rich black earth a mile long without striking a stump or a stone; a state how much larger than all of Scotland in which there was no record of a battle ever having been fought—what a home for a man who in his childhood had walked to school down a path between the graves of his martyred ancestors—whose fathers had farmed a rented sandpile enriched by the blood of battle among the rock of the Bay of Luce. Even yet he could scarcely believe that there existed such an expanse of eager virgin soil waiting for whoever would husband it. Ten years of storm-bound winters, and feverish, marketless summers before the war, had not chilled his passion for it—nor poverty so great that sometimes it took the combined efforts of the clan to buy a twenty-five cent stamp to write to Scotland of the measureless wealth upon which they had fallen. 2

Some of the immigrants had long since lost their illusions. But not John McLaughlin. He loved his land like a blind and passionate lover. 3

2 Margaret Wilson, The Able McLaughlins, p. 22.

3 Ibid., p. 23.

Though every other man of the neighborhood had been able, thanks to the wartime price of wheat, to build for his family a more decent shelter than the first one, that Alex McNair, fairly crazy with land-hunger, added acre to acre, regardless of his family's needs. 4

Even on the holy Sabbath of the Lord, Wully's father walked contentedly through his possessions, dreaming of the coming harvest, and of the eventual great harvest of a nation. 5

"I want to tell you something, father."

He stopped without a word, and stood listening.

"We're going to have a baby."

"'Tis likely."

"I mean--in December."

"December? In December!"

"Yes. That's what I mean."

John McLaughlin's long keen face, which changed expression only under great provocation, now surrendered to surprise. He stood still, looking at his son penetratingly a long time. Wully kicked an imaginary clod back and forth in the path. Presently the father said, with more bitterness than Wully had ever heard in his voice,

"It seems we have brought the old country to the new!" 6

Was it not for the children's sake they had endured this vast wilderness, and endured it in vain if the children were to be of this low and common sort? In their Utopia it was not to have been as it had been in the old country, with each family having a scholar or two in it, and the rest toilers. Here they were all to have been scholars and great men. 7

Some Americans might have smiled to know that this immigrant family never for a moment considered Americans in general their equal, or themselves anything common. They were far too British for that. Until lately it had never occurred to them that anyone else might manage somehow to be equal to a Scot.... But surely, Isobel McLaughlin moaned, her husband and herself had not let the children think that they were anything common. Had she not hated all that democracy that justified meanness of life, and pointed out faithfully to her children its fallacy? 8

He was a farmer who rode forth to preside at theorizing agricultural meetings, while the forests of weeds on his land grew unchecked up to the heavens. (Even two years ago, the wild

4 Ibid., p. 26.

5 Ibid., p. 49.

6 Ibid., pp. 78-79.

7 Ibid., p. 85.

8 Ibid., p. 86.

sunflowers near a culvert on that farm reached the telephone wires.) He was later on one of the first men west of the Mississippi to have pure-bred bulls, and east or west, no man confused pedigrees more convivially. 9

Soon after the garments of Barbara McNair dawned upon the congregation, her husband bought three hundred acres of land at three dollars an acre. There are those who say a man owning eight hundred and forty acres of land should be happy. Alex McNair was not. 10

To John, now, a field of wheat was a field of wheat, capable of being sold for so many dollars. To Wully, as to his father, there was first always, to be sure, the promise of money in growing grain, and he needed money. But besides that there was more in it than perhaps anyone can say—certainly more than he ever said—all that keeps farmminded men farming. It was the perfect symbol of rewarded, lavished labor, of requited love and care, of creating power, of wifely faithfulness, of the flower and fruit of life, its beauty, its ecstasy. Wully was too essentially a farmer ever to try to express his deep satisfaction in words. But when he saw his own wheat strong and green, swaying in the breezes, flushed with just the first signs of ripening, the sight made him begin whistling. And when, working to exhaustion, he saw row after row of corn, hoed by his own hands, standing forth unchoked by weeds, free to eat and grow like happy children, even though he was too tired to walk erectly, something within him—maybe his heart—danced with joy. Therefore he was then, as almost always, to be reckoned among the fortunate of the earth, one of those who know ungrudged contented exhaustion. 11

He knew what his father would say to the idea that a man getting a dollar and seventy cents for wheat, should leave his land. His father thought a man who left off tilling his land to dig gold out of it a poor shiftless creature. 12

Summary

So far this study has revealed the attitude of a number of immigrants toward the soil. People from England, Holland, Scandinavia, Bohemia, and Poland have passed in review. This story presents the native of Scotland with his rugged back-

9 Ibid., p. 139.
 10 Ibid., p. 151.
 11 Ibid., pp. 171-172.
 12 Ibid., p. 234.

ground. First are the farms of Scotland, sandpiles, as they are called, fertilized by the blood of heroes; the Scot's scorn of American 'soil scratching' and land exhaustion is emphasized; the stinginess of the Scotch ancestry is revealed; and again the Old World love of land for its own sake is manifested! However, the story seems true to life for it shows that not even all Scots run true to type. Squire McLaughlin is a theoretical farmer, presiding at agricultural meetings while the weeds grow as high as the telephone poles. The Scotch have the characteristics of genuine pioneers. Ten years of stern winters and unprofitable summers have not chilled their ardor for this vast expanse of land without stone or tree. They, too, are uncomplaining, thus proving themselves good sports. They place the blame for crop failures upon their lack of scientific knowledge of farming instead of reproving Providence and the weather. To John McLaughlin, of the first generation, a field of wheat was a field of wheat, representing just so many dollars on the market. To Wully, of the second generation, the growing grain means much-needed money, but those fresh green fields mean much more. They put him in a mood for whistling. The author says that such as he are to be reckoned among the fortunate of the earth, one of those who know ungrudged contented exhaustion.

Cornelia James Cannon's Red Rust is considered an epic of life in the wheat fields of Minnesota. She was born in St. Paul, and spent most of her girlhood in Minnesota. In this way she became familiar with the industrious Swedish farmers whom she characterizes in Red Rust. Her father was a lawyer who be-

came acquainted with these farmers through his professional services.

Red Rust is Mrs. Cannon's first novel. The material for this story had been simmering in her mind for years; but the actual work on the novel consumed only a few months during a summer vacation in New Hampshire. "Every morning at 7:30 she would make out orders for the cook, and lists of things the children could and could not do, and then she departed for a morning's work at the isolated guest house, with instructions not to disturb her except in case of sudden death!" 13

Mrs. Cannon admits that she was at a loss to know how to describe a threshing machine of the type used by the immigrant pioneers of Minnesota. Her problem was solved when she found an encyclopedia of machinery dated 1870. For data about wheat conditions and the habits of grasshoppers, she communicated with the Agricultural Department at Washington.

Mrs. Cannon is a sports-woman. Cannon Mountain, in Glacier National Park, was named for her because she was the first woman to make the ascent of the peak. Mrs. Cannon is intensely interested in problems of American democracy.

Red Rust

Matts Swenson, a young Swedish farmer in Minnesota, has one great ambition. He wants to produce a wheat able to withstand the blighting red rust. A brief article in the American Farmer's Journal entitled "Variation and Selection" quoted

from Darwin, gave the young farmer some suggestions which he later embodied in his experiments. Working early and late, he experimented with cross fertilization, using seed obtained from Sweden and that grown on the Minnesota farm. With the crossing of the two varieties of wheat, he hoped to obtain a plant which matured early enough to escape the red rust. After years of patient industry, the day-dreamer becomes a scientific farmer, although he does not live to enjoy the fruits of his labor. Interwoven with this background of the soil, is a thread of romance. Olaf Jensen, drunkard and wife-beater, is killed in a threshing machine accident. Matts marries Mrs. Jensen and takes care of five foster children.

Citations from Red Rust

Brigitta's melancholy, which grew deeper at each move from a place become familiar, lightened after the seed was in the ground. Some primitive instinct within, which bade the woman prepare against an uncertain future, seemed to be satisfied, and in the days that followed the first sprouting of the seeds her look was happier and her step more eager than it had been for many months. 14

His eye had fallen upon a brief item in the American Farmer's Journal, slipped in between a discussion of the fattening of hogs and a description of the best type of root cellar. The paragraph was entitled, "Variation and Selection," and was quoted from the same Darwin whom Matts already knew as a student of earthworms. 15

But was there no part that man could take in the blind struggle toward adjustment? He picked up the paper again and slipped it into the narrow circle of red under the lamp.

'Man does not attempt to cause variability, though he unintentionally effects this by exposing organisms to new conditions of life, and by cross breeds already formed. But variability being granted, he works wonders.' 16

14 Cornelia James Cannon, Red Rust, p. 7.

15 Ibid., p. 26.

16 Ibid., p. 27.

Matts drew a long breath. What a chance for a man to use this great gift of variability in nature to fill the earth with the best of living things! He remembered with a feeling of new understanding a stalk of beardless wheat which he had noticed this summer before when he was mowing the grain in the west field. It was bigger and heavier than any wheat he had ever seen before. He wondered whether a chance seed had come in a grain bag, or whether some power had been stirring in a common seed to bear like that. 17

"It's a nice country," he repeated, mechanically. "You'll like it." Then, as if sensing that she needed something other than the ordinary consolations offered to women, he added, "I forget to worry over the hard work, myself, because there are so many things in the world I like to know about. My back doesn't ache mowing if I can watch the bees in the clover. When I have a row of corn to hoe, I open the inside of an ant hill and look at the ants for a time and then I don't find the row so very long." 18

No child of New Sweden had a chance to see his mother quiet except on those topsy-turvy days after a new baby was born, when she lay in bed, white and still, with the newcomer beside her and everything in the house in confusion. Mercifully, those days did not come oftener than once a year, or the world would have seemed a threatening place to the young. 19

But back in his mind was a steady glow as he thought of his tiny experimental plot. No weeds should be allowed to grow there. Those precious grains could not take their chance with mongrel seeds planted merely to raise a crop, for the harvest of their planting was to be the testing of an idea. What a happy world, where the seasons could promise such harvestings! 20

If the wheat survived this summer and had still such heads as last, it would be the bearer of a seed worthy of experiment. Matts thought of the mountain in Syria where the parent grass was growing, unchanged from the earliest dawn of history. Its stalks were probably still food for the goats of the peasants, and its seed the main dependence of the birds of that country. But Matts felt only impatience at the idea of such monotony. His imagination, quickened by the hopes and dreams of his first humble planting, looked for the meaning of life in growth and change. Man did not need to accept the world as he found it. He held plastic nature in his hand to mould to his purpose. 21

17 Ibid., p. 28.

18 Ibid., p. 39.

19 Ibid., p. 69.

20 Ibid., p. 92.

21 Ibid., pp. 113-114.

Matts stood between the rows he planned to cross. Each row was to be treated as male parent of the opposite row, and to be itself fertilized with its neighbor's pollen. Most deft and delicate work was necessary to prevent self-pollination of the ripening flowers as they were being handled. Matts began by stripping off the basal spikelets of the ears and cutting away the upper third of the head as well. The central spikelets held the best grains and must be preserved. The discarded ones, above and below, would only rob them of their nourishment and must be sacrificed. So much of the process Matts knew from experience and observation. The other steps he took were based on the reading and thinking of the past winter, when, hour after hour, he had pondered on the problems ahead of him. 22

"Oh, Matts," cried Lena, "how happy you must be to have raised such a perfect seed, after all these years of work!"

"It hasn't been work. It's been play," answered Matts, shaking his head. Then he went on as though it was a relief to talk, "Did I tell you that my first planting ripened five days before any wheat in the county? Last Saturday I asked Burghardt and all the men that came into the store, and I found I beat them all by nearly a week." 23

"Do you see that?" he cried, "Well, those heads come from a five-acre field in Redskin County, each stalk as fine as that, and every other field for miles around ruined with the rust!"

The chief looked at the wheat with an astonishment that satisfied even the ardent Noyes.

"I never saw such fine wheat in my life," he said, "in rust years or any other."

"There never was such wheat," went on the young man, his words fairly tumbling from his mouth in his excitement. "And it's not accident, either. I came upon something in finding this handful that makes me want to work for a better America." 24

Summary

Red Rust is the first novel of the series that has shown a scientific approach toward farming so far as plant selection is concerned. Matts Swenson is more than a scientific farmer. He is in reality a botanist, and he is making use of expert knowledge to further the interests of a farming community.

22 Ibid., p. 185.

23 Ibid., p. 259.

24 Ibid., p. 317.

In conformity with a seeming law of life, he is a prophet without honor in his own country. His neighbors think him a poor farmer; to them he is a dawdler and a day-dreamer. To Matts, this experiment in cross-fertilization of plants is as much a passion as plowing, haymaking, and land-clearing have been for some of the other pioneers. He is a pioneer in more than one sense, and in order to further his work, he has dwelt apart. His intellectual plane has been higher than those of his fellows--so much removed, that he was called 'queer'.

Chapter VII

Ellen Glasgow was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1874. She was educated at home, and when she was about eighteen she began a systematic study of political economy and social theory. It is said that the most important thing she ever did was to break the sentimental tradition of the South. She has written principally about the middle-class of Southern whites, the descendants of Scotch-Irish settlers who are small independent farmers. She is said to know more about men than about women, but she knows chiefly men's limitations. She believes that success for a woman must be practically the same as for a man. She continues with this statement: "Success for a woman means a harmonious adjustment to life, but as long as a man's quest of a harmonious adjustment is not interrupted by having babies, woman's handicap is only too apparent." 1

Ellen Glasgow has not advocated tearing up the social contract, but she is conscious that nature's arrangements put women at men's mercy. And so she advocates that women must rearrange their emotions in order to offset their disadvantages.

At the close of the Civil War, social barriers in Virginia were broken down. Miss Glasgow remained impartial. She distinguishes clearly between equality of economic opportunity, which she favors, and social equality, which cannot be brought about. She recognizes that people of wealth may be vulgar, and that people in poverty may have refinement. Barren Ground is considered Miss Glasgow's best novel. The story has for its background the worn out soil of Virginia during the period following the close of the Civil War.

1 Grant Overton, The Women Who Make Our Novels, p. 158.

Barren Ground

Barren Ground is the story of Dorinda Oakley, a daughter of Virginia, of that Scotch-Irish farmer class designated "good people" as distinguished from good family. Dorinda's life has been as barren as her father's acres from which the family wrested a scant living. She falls deeply in love with Jason Greylock, much to her sorrow. On the eve of their marriage, he brings home another bride. Dorinda goes to New York to hide her disgrace. She is injured in a street accident, and her baby does not live. A surgeon in the hospital believes in her and helps her to regain interest in life. Dorinda realizes that her life must be rebuilt on the ground where it was destroyed, and so she returns to her old home and spends her life reclaiming the barren acres. In time, she marries Nathan Pedlar, not because she loves him, but because he can help her in the work she has chosen. In the end, she rescues Jason from the poorhouse where he was taken after losing health and fortune. He dies a dependent of the woman he has wronged. The years of effort and achievement gave Dorinda the thrill of a creator and took from her much of the bitterness of the early years.

Citations from Barren Ground

Thirty years ago, modern methods of farming, even methods that were modern in the benighted eighteen-ninties, had not penetrated to this thinly settled part of Virginia. The soil, impoverished by the war and the tenant system which followed the war, was still drained of its lingering fertility for the sake of the poor crops it could yield. 2

The tenant farmers, who had flocked after the ruin of war as buzzards after a carcass, had immediately picked the featureless landscape as clean as a skeleton. When the swarming was over only three of the larger farms at Pedlar's mill remained undivided in the hands of their original owners. 3

The country had been like this, she knew long before she was born. It would be like this, she sometimes thought, after she and all who were living with her were dead. For the one thing that seemed to her immutable and everlasting was the poverty of the soil. 4

"God! what a country! No body seems to ask any more of life than to plod from one bad harvest to another.... I wonder what the first Pedlars were like. The family must have been in the same spot for a hundred and fifty years."

"Oh, they've been there always. But most of the other farmers are tenants. Pa says that's why the land has gone bad. No man will work himself to death over some-body else's land." 5

All his life he had been a slave to the land, harnassed to the elemental forces, struggling inarticulately against the blight of poverty and the barrenness of the soil. Yet Dorinda had never heard him rebel. His resignation was the earth's passive acceptance of sun or rain. When his crop failed, or his tobacco was destroyed by frost, he would drive his plow into the field and begin all over again. — The earth clung to him, to his clothes, to the anxious creases in his face, to his finger nails, and to the heavy boots which were caked with manure from the stables. 6

"Well, I'm not a slave, anyway, like you and Pa," Rufus flared up. "I'd let the farm rot before it would be my master." 7

She shook her head. "No matter how hard you work it always comes back to the elements in the end. You can't be sure of anything when you have to depend upon the elements for a living." 8

There was nothing human about him except his fine prophet's head and the humble dignity of one who has kept close communion with earth and sky. He had known nothing but toil; he had no language but the language of toil. 9

"The truth is I've got the land on my back, an' it's drivin' me. Land is a hard driver."

"And a good steed, they say," she answered. "If you could only get the better of it." 10

3 Ibid., p. 5.

4 Ibid., p. 10.

5 Ibid., pp. 30-31.

6 Ibid., p. 40.

7 Ibid., p. 55.

8 Ibid., p. 73.

9 Ibid., p. 115.

10 Ibid., p. 123.

"I wish I knew the science of farming," she concluded earnestly. "Doctor Faraday says it is as much a science as medicine."— Is there any way I could learn farming from books?" Dorinda asked before he could reply. "I mean learn the modern ways of getting the best out of the soil?" 11

"You mean you'll go back and begin farming?"

"I mean I can't stay away any longer. I'm part of it. I belong to the abandoned fields." 12

"Whatever I give the farm will be always mine," she thought. "That was the way he felt. The farm isn't human and it won't make you suffer. Only human things break your heart." 13

"You're right thar, honey. Put yo' heart in the land. The land is the only thing that will stay by you." 14

"Well, the country goes against you when you ain't cut out for a farmer." 15

The difference was that at twenty her happiness had depended upon love, and at fifty it depended upon nothing but herself and the land. To the land she had given her mind and heart with the abandonment she had found disastrous in any human relation. "I may have missed something, but I've gained more," she thought, "and what I've gained nobody can take away from me." 16

"Put your heart in the land," old Matthew had said to her. "The land is the only thing that will stay by you." Yes, the land would stay by her. Her eyes wandered from far horizon to horizon. Again she felt the quickening of that sympathy which was deeper than all other emotions of her heart, which love had overcome only for an hour and life had been powerless to conquer in the end:— the living communion with the earth under her feet. While the soil endured, while the seasons bloomed and dropped, while the ancient, beneficent ritual of sowing and reaping moved in the fields, she knew that she could never despair of contentment. 17

11 Ibid., p. 237.

12 Ibid., p. 245.

13 Ibid., p. 299.

14 Ibid., p. 323.

15 Ibid., p. 399.

16 Ibid., p. 456.

17 Ibid., p. 509.

"I wish I knew the science of farming," she concluded earnestly. "Doctor Faraday says it is as much a science as medicine."— Is there any way I could learn farming from books?" Dorinda asked before he could reply. "I mean learn the modern ways of getting the best out of the soil?" 11

"You mean you'll go back and begin farming?"

"I mean I can't stay away any longer. I'm part of it. I belong to the abandoned fields." 12

"Whatever I give the farm will be always mine," she thought. "That was the way he felt. The farm isn't human and it won't make you suffer. Only human things break your heart." 13

"You're right thar, honey. Put yo' heart in the land. The land is the only thing that will stay by you." 14

"Well, the country goes against you when you ain't cut out for a farmer." 15

The difference was that at twenty her happiness had depended upon love, and at fifty it depended upon nothing but herself and the land. To the land she had given her mind and heart with the abandonment she had found disastrous in any human relation. "I may have missed something, but I've gained more," she thought, "and what I've gained nobody can take away from me." 16

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17 Ibid., p. 509.

Summary

Barren Ground delineates three types of farmers; three different people talk and these types stand forth.

Dorinda's father says, "The truth is I've got the land on my back, an' it's drivin' me. Land is a hard driver."

And Dorinda answers the old farmer—"And a good steed if you cōld only get the better of it."

And again Nathan Pedlar is heard to say, "Well, the country goes against you when you ain't cut out for a farmer."

Dorinda's father represents the patient plodder, a good man, but not a good farmer. It could hardly be said that he was not cut out for a farmer; he probably did not have the intellect to succeed at anything else. He, and his kind are slaves to any job.

Jason Greylock was not 'cut out' for a farmer, nor was he a doctor by inclination. He cared nothing for the land, and so the country went against him, and he eventually lost his farm. He was a mis-fit in the medical profession, and that led to dissipation. The poorhouse was inevitable.

Dorinda felt that she belonged to the abandoned fields; she was 'cut out' for a farmer. There are a number of reasons why she should succeed. First of all, she feels that it is her job, and it is her land she is reclaiming; second, she has studied the problem, and she understands why others have failed. Then, Dorinda has intelligence—good judgment it is often called in speaking of a farmer; and last of all, Dorinda will overcome the barren ground because human relationships have failed her; she is putting mind and heart into the soil. Farm-

ing is her compensation for other losses. Dorinda represents the new order of womanhood—the very antithesis of the 'clinging vine' type. She also represents the beginning of a new order in the South—that of scientific farming.

Julia Peterkin, author of Black April, was born in South Carolina in 1880. Left motherless when but a small child, she was reared by a Negro mammy. She was graduated from Converse College at sixteen and the following year was granted the M. A. degree. She taught for a time and then married W. G. Peterkin, a South Carolina planter. In this way she became mistress of Lang Syne Plantation where several hundred Negroes were employed. Here Mrs. Peterkin is said to have served as doctor, judge, jury, and Providence.

The front page of the book section of the Boston Evening Transcript for December 24, 1927, has an article, reported by Dale Warren, styled "Julia Peterkin—Impressions and a Conversation." Some interesting points in that interview will be reproduced here.

"I am not really a writer," says Mrs. Peterkin, "I am a housekeeper, a mother. I like to work with my hands, in the kitchen, in my garden. I like to ride and hunt, I like to play poker, I like to talk." She intimated that her work was not 'creative' and when asked why, she replied: "I don't know whether I'll tell you or not. You might not believe me; you might laugh at me. "I write—" she hesitated—"to get rid of the things that disturb me. I know it sounds peculiar, but that is the reason. On the plantation I am very close to life... it is all about me...several hundred negroes in fact. It's their lives that I've known. I've seen sickness and death, and superstition and frenzy and desire. My eyes have looked on **honor** and misery. All these things have staid with me and upset me. I have had to get rid of them, so I have written them out.... It is really all quite simple.

"Black April," Mrs. Peterkin explained, "goes by the name of a novel, but a large part of it is fact. When you are writing out of your experience you don't have to rely to any great extent upon your imagination. I have lived among the negroes. I like them. They are my friends, and I have learned so much from them. The years on the plantation have given me plenty of material; my life has been so rich, so why try to improve on the truth. When I wrote Black April I thought it would be the only novel I should ever write. So I tried to put everything into it.... But I had to leave out a lot. There wasn't room for it. That is why I'm writing another book...

"I shall never write of white people. Their lives are not so colorful. Our people live in the houses in which they were born. In the South we live on a piece of land which feeds us and to which, when we die, our bodies return." 18

Black April

Black April is the story of negro life on a South Carolina plantation. There is not a single white character in the story. This novel has vivid pictures of the cottonfields and the endless boll-weevil; of birth-night suppers and quiltings; of song, and prayer, and Sunday sermons; of hog-killings and 'possum hunting; of births, and deaths, and funerals; and binding it all into one composite picture, are the passions, and lusts, and superstitions of the Black race.

Black April, the giant foreman of Blue Brook Plantation, dominates the lives of all the other negroes. The story is woven around him and his children both acknowledged and unacknowledged. It tells of his virtues, vices, battles, and at last of his punishment.

Mrs. Peterkin says that Black April, Breeze, Big Sue, Maum Hannah, Zeda and a number of the other characters are real people.

She was present when Black April's toes came off and floated around in the tub. It was her father who amputated his limbs. In the final tragic scene, it was Julia Peterkin to whom April made his last request: "Bury me in a man-size box—You un-er-stan'?'— A man-size-box— I been-six-feet-fo'- Uncle—six feet-fo'!" 19

Citations from Black April

The breath of the earth was thick in the air, a good clean smell that went clear to the marrow of the man's bones. God made the first man out of dust, and all men go back to it in the end. The earth had been sleeping, resting through the winter, but now, with the turn of the year, it had offered life to all that were fit and strong. The corn crop, planted on the last young moon when the dogwood blooms were the size of squirrel ears, was up to a stand wherever the crows let it alone.

Tomorrow, he must plant the cotton while the young moon waxed strong. There was much to do. He needed help.

Soon as the moon waned, the root crops, potatoes, pindars, chufas, turnips must be planted. Field plants have no sense. If you plant crops that fruit above the ground on a waning moon, they get all mixed up and bear nothing but heavy roots, and root crops planted on a waxing moon will go all to rank tops no matter how you try to stop them. Plants have to be helped along or they wastetime and labor, just the same as children you undertake to raise. 20

Dead trees are best left alone. Trees have spirits the same as men. God made them to stand up after they die. Better let them be. 21

"No, no, Sue, dis boy ain' no runt. You feed em up. E'll fill out an' grow. Bread and meat all two is been sca'ce on Sandy Island since de dry-drought hit em las' summer. You keep de boy's belly full, an' dis time nex year you wouldn' know em."

"I wouldn' live on such po' land!" Big Sue bawled again. "Not me! Dis sand looks white as sugar. T'ank Gawd, us home yonder is on black land what kin hold water!" 22

19 Ibid., p. 260.

20 Julia Peterkin, Black April, pp. 14-15.

21 Ibid., p. 32.

22 Ibid., p. 48.

Years ago the garden had been stiff and trim, and the shrubbery had grown in close-cut bushes between the straight box hedges. But time had changed everything. Uncle Isaac was old and deaf, and instead of staying home at night and resting so he could work at the roses and keep them from running wild and getting all tangled up with the vines, he ran around to birth-night suppers and cut up like a boy. Uncle Isaac was too trifling to be the gardener now. 23

The land must be too rich, too rank for white people to thrive on it. Their skins were too thin, their blood too weak to bear the summer heat, and the fevers and sickness that hid in the marsh in the daytime, then came out to do their devilment after dark.

Black people ruled sickness with magic but white people got sick and died. White people leave money to their children, but black people leave signs. Give her signs every time. 24

"But de boll-evils is come. Dey ruint de whole crop year befo' last."

"De crop was good last year after we pizened 'em."

"But I tell you, I sho' don' believe in pizenin' 'em. No, suh! Gawd sent dem here an' we better leave dem lone. If I was you, I wouldn't run no pizen machine. At night too, when de cotton is wet wid dew, a pizen dust'll stick to you' feets. When I look out o' my door at night and see dat pizen dust a-floatin over de cotton fields in dem big white cluds, an' dat machine a-singin' like a locust, a-creepin' up and down de rows, th'own' out pizen I git too scared to look. No wonder de mens hates to take part in it. Dem pizened blossoms is done killed all de bees an de place, an' a lot o' de turkeys an de guineas died from eatin' de pizened evils. Better let weeds grow in de fields, I say. We kin do widout money till we git some crop to take de place o' cotton. Cotton's time is out. I'member when de had to give up plantin' indigo, and people said we was ruined. But cotton done just as good. Now cotton is failed, and we ought to wait till we git some kind o' crop to take its place." Uncle Bill heaved a mighty sign as he said it. "April is too brazen. E would buck Gawd A'mighty. Don't you try to be like em, Sherry. No. If April keeps on, e will land in Hell, sho' as e was born." 25

The marshes were buried. All the sticky, miry mud exposed by the morning was hidden. Through old flood-gates the rising water gurgled and bubbled into forsaken rice-fields. Grass, vines, trees, bushes rank, thorny and fetid, crowded and trampled one another, trying to gain a deeper, stronger foothold down in the broken dikes. Breeze gazed around him with long looks. As far as his eyes could see the earth was flooded. Wasted. Unsown. Abandoned.

23 Ibid., pp. 85-86.

24 Ibid., p. 125.

25 Ibid., pp. 149-150.

Uncle Bill sighed. It made him sad to think how the tide had destroyed the work of years. At first it crept timidly in, hardly enough for its shallow trickling to show. But it grew bolder and stronger as it took back the rich land, acre by acre, until it owned them all. All! 26

"You t'ink de place'll ever be sold, Uncle?" Sherry asked him presently.

"No, son. Not long as de li'l' young Cap'n is livin'! E was born wid two li'l' teeth, and when dem two li'l' teeth got ripe an' fell out, my Katy took 'em an went to the graveyard an' buried 'em in a clear place right longside his gran'pa.

"No matter whe' da li'l' boy goes or how long e stays gone from here, dis place'll hold to him. Dem li'l' two teeth'll make him come back to die an' be buried right here. You'll see. It's so. Just like I'm tellin' you. It'll be dat way. 27

The first white men who came here found the whole face of the earth covered with a thick forest growth of cypress, and gum and ash, matted, tangled with powerful vines and held by the tides that rose and fell as they do now, twice every day. These men brought slaves, Breeze's and Sherry's and his own great-grandfathers and mothers, African people fresh from the Guinea Coast. The slaves diked and banked up the land so the forest growth could be removed, then they canaled and ditched and banked it into smaller well drained tracts which were planted with rice. And rice made the plantation owners rich.

For years the lands were held by children and grandchildren of those first settlers, but nearly every old plantation home has been burned or sold or abandoned. The rich rice fields are deserted. The old dikes and flood-gates that stood as guardians are broken and rotted. The tide rolls over all as it did before the land was ever cleared. It has taken back its own. 28

All the cotton had been picked except scraps in the tip-top of the stalks. When these were gathered, the last chance for the women to make a little money would be over until early next spring when the stables were cleaned out and the black manure put in piles for them to scatter over the fields. 29

The sultry day was saturated with heat. The swollen sun shone white through the fog that brought the sky low over the cotton fields. The cotton pickers swarmed thick, sweat poured off their faces and hands and feet. Slowly, steadily they moved, up and down the rows of tall rank stalks, carefully picking every wisp of staple out of the wide-open brown burrs. 30

26 Ibid., p. 156.

27 Ibid., p. 150.

28 Ibid., p. 157.

29 Ibid., p. 199.

30 Ibid., p. 199.

Breeze picked on and on long after his back was tired and his fingers sore from the sharp points of the stiff burrs. The crocus sheets spread out along the road at the side of the field were piled higher and higher with cotton which was heaped up, packed down, running over. The last picking yielded more than anybody expected.

Thank God, the sun was setting at last. Wagons were rattling in the distance, coming to haul the cotton to the big gin house. This year's crop was done. 31

The summer's dry weather had been a big help. No rain came to wash the poison off. Sherry ran the poison machine over the fields at night when the cotton was wet with dew and the thirsty weevils drank poisoned dew and died. It was a scarry thing to see these great white clouds of poison dust raising and settling to kill. The people scarcely dared to look. 32

He wouldn't hold it against them if they'd work well in the daytime and plow the crop fast and keep the ground-crust broken and the grass killed. He and April would attend to the weevils next summer, all by themselves. With that big poison machine and three mules, he could poison forty acres a night. Instead of resenting what Sherry said, the men laughed good-naturedly and declared they were satisfied to leave the boll-weevil to Sherry and April. Let the devils fight the devils. 33

Sherry was gone. Zeda's Sherry. The most promising young man on the whole plantation. April's big-doings bullying had run him off. April would pay for it. He'd poison cotton by himself next summer. He could make the men do almost anything else, but he'd never get them to poison boll-weevils. They knew better than to fight Providence. April wasn't God. No. 34

As Uncle Bill worked he told Breeze he must always be careful to see that the moon is right before he killed a hog. A wrong moon would set the hair in a hog's skin so no knife on earth could move it. Meat killed on a waning moon will dry up to nothing, no matter how good you cook it. A certain quarter of the moon will make the meat tough and strong, another will rot it, no matter how much salt you pack around it. If Breeze would learn all the moon signs he'd be spared a lot of trouble as long as he lived. 35

"April wouldn't rest till e pizened dem boll-evils. I couldn't hardly sleep in de night all las' summer fo' dem machines a-joonin'. Everybody was scared to look out de door whilst April and Sherry was gwine round de fields. De pizen dust was same as a fog.

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- 31 Ibid., p. 201.
 32 Ibid., p. 207.
 33 Ibid., p. 208.
 34 Ibid., p. 215.
 35 Ibid., p. 234.

Lawd! I slept wid my head under a quilt ev'y night. April better had left dem boll-evils right whe' Gawd put 'em. I don't kill no kinder bugs exceptin' spiders. Not me! Fightin' Gawd's business'll git you in trouble. April's got off light so far, but e better quit tryin' to do all de crazy t'ings de white people says do. E sho' better! Bad luck's been hangin' round ever since dat radio-machine at de Big House started hollerin' an' cryin' an' singin' year befo' last. Peop'le ain' got no business tryin' to be Gawd. Not black people anyways. Let de white people go on. Dey is gwine to hell any-how!" 36

When the stables were cleaned out and black manure piled out in the corn-field, Joy went out at dawn with the other women, bare-footed, scantily dressed, a rough crocus sack made into an apron to hold the stuff, and scattered it all day long, up and down the corn rows, leading the women as they marched abreast, singing, "Follow me-" to their chorus, "We's a-followin' on," and ending, "I'll lead you gentel-eee home!"

When the cotton was up to a thick stand and ready to be thinned, she tied her skirt up high out of the dew and took her hoe and chopped row for row with the best hoe hands, leaving the stalks one hoe's width apart and cutting out every grass blade. She hung up eggshells to make the hehs lay well, fed them sour dough to make them set, patched the garden fence and filled the rich plot of earth with seed. 37

The weather was exactly right for the cotton; mornings wet with dew, noons fever hot; nights still and steamy and stifling. Except for the accursed boll-weevils the crop was most promising. The tender leaves multiplied and widened, and from morning until night they lifted their faces to get every bit of sunshine they could hold. The three-cornered squares clustered on the limbs, but not a blossom showed, for swarms of boll-weevils punctured these buds and made them drop off before a creamy petal could form. Well-nigh every fallen square held a grub. A few days more and they'd be weevils, ready to lay more eggs in new squares, and hatch more weevils. Unless something was done to stop them, the crop might as well be thrown away.

Uncle Bill and Uncle Isaac were upset. What were they to do? They sent every man and woman and child on the plantation to the field to pick the squares and try to catch the weevils, but the squares fell off behind them as fast as they picked those in front, and the pesky weevil fell off the stalks on the ground, too, as soon as anybody came near them. They played dead like 'possums, and they were colored so near like the dirt, the sharpest eyes couldn't find them. 38

36 Ibid., p. 247.

37 Ibid., p. 282.

38 Ibid., p. 283.

"You's right, Uncle. I know I don' relish plowin' f'om sun to sun not lessen I'm doin' some good. De more we plow, de more de cotton grows an' de more it puts on squares to feed de boll-evils. April pizened 'em last year. Sherry helped em den. Ie's send at Sherry to come home. Git a letter wrote to em an' tell em if we would come home we mens'll make em foreman. Ho 'bout dat?" asked Jake, Bina's husband. 39

The people all turned home. In groups of three or four they talked and laughed boisterously, boasting what a good crop would be made this year. The cotton plants were strong. Able. The grass well-nigh killed out. Poisoning would do the rest.

Every trace of down-heartedness was gone. Discouragement forgotten. Sherry would come back and kill all the boll-weevils. Blue Brook would roll in money next fall. 40

Summary

Black April shows the attitude of a primitive people toward the soil. No other group of people in America has been bound to the soil in the sense that the negro has been in bondage to it. He was, in the first place, brought from Africa and sold into slavery. From the very beginning his outlook on life extended no farther than his master's plantation. Life afforded him little beyond what he could eat and wear, and the soil furnished practically all of these things. Nor has freedom wrought any great change for the negro of the South. He is still bound by the ties of his greatest need, namely food. The negroes of Lang Syne plantation of whom Julia Peterkin is writing, are bound by their own ignorance and superstitions, reenforced by the white man's racial prejudices, to the very soil which their great-grandparents tended as slaves. If the crops fail, it is because Providence has withheld favor. Or perhaps the seeds were planted in the wrong

39 Ibid., p. 284.

40 Ibid., p. 286.

time of the moon; some sign has not been observed; or God is punishing a sinful people. Uncle Isaac kept reminding the young negroes that the white man left money for his children, but the black man left signs. Thus the negro is still in a peculiar way bound to the soil by chains as strong as those by which the white man held him in bondage.

Chapter VIII

Ole Edvart Rolvaag was born April 22, 1876, on the island of Donna, just south of where the Arctic Circle cuts the coast of Norway. His ancestors had been fisher folk for generations. Following a Norwegian custom, he took his name from a cove near the shores of his home. The barren ground with its gorse and heather, the long winter nights, and the stormy sea, gave a somber background for the future novelist. Rolvaag was compared unfavorably with his older brother and sister. His father said that he was not worth educating; so at fifteen he became a fisherman. This work did not appeal to him, and, after five years of discouragement, he wanted to escape to America. An uncle in South Dakota provided him with a ticket to the New World, and in 1896, he began life anew on his uncle's farm. After five years of struggling on the farm, Ole Rolvaag knew that farming was not his work. Once more, he turned toward education. To his surprise, he found that his mind was mature and receptive. In 1899, he entered Augustana College, a preparatory school in Canton, South Dakota. From there he went to St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, where he was graduated in 1905, at the age of twenty-eight. After a year of graduate study at the University of Oslo in Norway, he returned to St. Olaf as professor of Norwegian Literature. This position he held until his death in 1931.

While Rolvaag's art seems mainly European, Rolvaag himself, is typically American. He writes in America, about America, and his aim is to tell the contributions of his people to American life. Yet his work has to be translated out of a foreign tongue.

Lincoln Colcord, who has been quite intimately associated with Rolvaag and his work, has this to say about him: "Rolvaag is a born novelist. His chief interest is in stories of people--twists and turns of human nature. He watches life narrowly. Character and psychology are his main studies; he believes that the art of the novel depends wholly upon characterization. 'I am a realist, he says, I want a reflection of life on the pages, not an artificial plot. A true portrayal of any life scene carries its own plot, but it must be faithful in detail.'" 1

In an article appearing in The American Magazine, Rolvaag says, "As I look out over American history, I see certain facts stand boldly against the sky line. Were I asked to point to the two most vital chapters, unhesitatingly I should answer: The Westward Movement and Immigration." 2

Lincoln Colcord in his introduction to Giants in the Earth, says, "When I have asked Rolvaag the simple question, Did Norway or America teach you to write? he has invariably thrown up his hands." 3

In Living Authors there is this statement from Rolvaag: "The unforgivable sin is to write about life untruthfully." 4

Giants in the Earth

Parrington, in the editor's introduction to this story, makes the following statement: "With the growth of a maturer realism, we are beginning to understand how great was the price

1 Lincoln Colcord, "Rolvaag the Fisherman Shook His Fist at Fate." THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE, p. 37. March, 1928.

2 O. E. Rolvaag, "The Vikings of the Middle West." THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE, p. 44. October, 1929.

3 Colcord, Introduction to Giants in the Earth, p. xxxiv.

4 Living Authors, Dilly Tante, (editor) p. 349.

exacted by the frontier; and it is because Giants in the Earth, for the first time in our fiction, evaluates adequately the settlement in terms of emotion, because it penetrates to the secret inner life of men and women who undertook the heavy work of subduing the wilderness, that it is--quite apart from all artistic values--a great historical document." 5

Giants in the Earth is a tale of Norwegian settlers on the plains of South Dakota. The chief characters are Per Hansa and his wife Beret. The first part of the story describes the "land-taking"; the second part describes "founding the kingdom". Through the story there runs a double conflict; the first is between man and the earth; the second is between man and wife. Per Hansa glories in the struggle with the earth; he has come to found a home and wrest fruit from the soil. The second struggle makes him sick at heart. He sincerely loves his wife, Beret; and her hatred of the new country with its hard life, her homesickness for the comforts of Norway, the loneliness of the barren plains where there is nothing to hid behind, touch him deeply. He struggles on with the homemaking hoping that she will become reconciled. For a time, Per Hansa, apparent conquerer of his physical environment, lacks the spiritual strength to contend with Beret and her dark forebodings. But the joy he feels over the birth of the little son, Peder Victorious, restores him. Beret's primitive fear at length drives Per Hansa out into a blizzard to seek a minister for his dying friend, Hans Olsa. In the spring Per Hansa is found seated near a haystack with eyes set toward the west. Beret is restored by her primitive

5 Parrington, Editor's Introduction to Giants in the Earth, p. ix-x.

faith embodied in the parson, spokesman of God. Thus, she is reserved for a part in Rolvaag's next novel--the story of Peder Victorious.

Citations from Giants in the Earth

"Land? Good God! Per Hansa, what are you talking about? Take whatever you please, from here to the Pacific Ocean!" 6

They sat on until the first blue haze of evening began to spread eastward over the plain. The talk had now drifted to questions of a more serious nature, mostly concerned with how they should manage things out here; of their immediate prospects; of what the future might hold in store for them; of land and crops, and of the new kingdom which they were about to found.... No one put the thought into words, but they all felt it strongly; now they had gone back to the very beginnings of things..." 7

This vast stretch of beautiful land was to be his--yes, his--and no ghost of a dead Indian would drive him away!... His heart began to expand with a mighty exaltation. An emotion he had never felt before filled him and made him walk erect...." Good God!" he panted. "This kingdom is going to be mine!" 8

It reminded her strongly of the sea and yet it was very different.... This formless prairie had no heart that beat, no waves that sang, no soul that could be touched... or cared....

The infinitude surrounding her on every hand might not have been so oppressive, might even have brought her a measure of peace if it had not been for the deep silence, which lay heavier here than in a church. Indeed what was there to break it? She had passed beyond the outposts of civilization; the nearest dwelling places of men were far away. Here no warbling of birds rose on the air, no buzzing of insects sounded; even the wind had died away. All along the way coming out, she had noticed this strange thing; the stillness had grown deeper, the silence more depressing, the farther west they had journeyed. It must have been over two weeks now since she had heard a bird sing. Could no living thing exist out here, in the empty, desolate, endless waste of green and blue?... How could existence go on, she thought desperately? If life is to thrive and endure, it must at least have something to hide behind. 9

6 Ole Edvart Rolvaag, Giants in the Earth, p. 29.

7 Ibid., p. 32.

8 Ibid., p. 36.

9 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

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It reminded her strongly of the sea and yet it was very different.... This formless prairie had no heart that beat, no waves that sang, no soul that could be touched... or cared....

The infinitude surrounding her on every hand might not have been so oppressive, might even have brought her a measure of peace if it had not been for the deep silence, which lay heavier here than in a church. Indeed what was there to break it? She had passed beyond the outposts of civilization; the nearest dwelling places of men were far away. Here no warbling of birds rose on the air, no buzzing of insects sounded; even the wind had died away. All along the way coming out, she had noticed this strange thing; the stillness had grown deeper, the silence more depressing, the farther west they had journeyed. It must have been over two weeks now since she had heard a bird sing. Could no living thing exist out here, in the empty, desolate, endless waste of green and blue?... How could existence go on, she thought desperately? If life is to thrive and endure, it must at least have something to hide behind. 9

6 Ole Edvart Rolvaag, Giants in the Earth, p. 29.

7 Ibid., p. 32.

8 Ibid., p. 36.

9 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

The whole farm lay before him, broken and under cultivation, yielding its fruitful harvest; there ran many horses and cows, both young and grown. And over on the location where to-day he was about to build the sod hut should stand a large dwelling... A white house, it would be! Then it would gleam so beautifully in the sun, white all over—but the cornices should be green! 10

He straightened up the plow, planted the share firmly in the ground, and spoke to the oxen: "Come now, move along, you lazy rascals!" He had meant to speak gruffly, but the thrill of joy that surged over him as he sank the plow in his own land for the first time, threw such an unexpected tone of gentleness into his voice that the oxen paid no attention to him; he found that he would have to resort to more powerful encouragement, but even with the goad it was hard to make them bend to the yoke so early in the morning. After a little, however, they began to stretch their muscles. Then they were off; the plow moved... sank deeper... the first furrow was breaking.... 11

Per Hansa plowed and harrowed, delved and dug; he built away at the house, and he planted the potatoes; he had such a zest for everything and thought it all such fun that he could hardly bear to waste a moment in stupid sleep. It was Beret who finally put a check on him. 12

Again Per Hansa thrust his hand into the bag and his fingers closed on the grain. He felt profoundly that the greatest moment of his life had come. Now he was about to sow wheat on his own ground! 13

"But she is not entirely deranged, is she?"

"Partly or entirely--what difference does it make? If the fiddle is cracked, it's cracked...."

"Maybe so... Yes, yes...."

Still looking down at the hay, Per Hansa continued:

"I don't know that I am guilty of any other wrong toward her than that our oldest boy came before we were married; but in that matter we were equally to blame.... And then I brought her out here. I suppose that there is where the real trouble lies.... I don't believe she grieves much about that other affair.... No, it's this business out here—and for the life of me I can't see any sin in it." 14

"No, I must hurry home. I know I shouldn't have come, but—" Her voice suddenly left her. In a moment it came back, and then she went on, bravely: "It is so hard to see him go, without being able to help! And then we all have a feeling that nothing is ever impossible for you—and I thought that perhaps you might find a way out of this, too!" 15

10 Ibid., p. 46.

11 Ibid., p. 47.

12 Ibid., p. 50.

13 Ibid., p. 298.

14 Ibid., p. 383.

15 Ibid., p. 457.

One day during the spring after Hans Olssa had died, a troop of young boys were ranging the prairies, in search of some yearling cattle that had gone astray. They came upon the haystack, and stood transfixed. On the west side of the stack sat a man, with his back to the moulding hay. This was in the middle of a warm day in May, yet the man had two pairs of skis along with him; one pair lay beside him on the ground, the other was tied to his back. He had a heavy stocking cap pulled well down over his forehead, and large mittens on his hands; in each hand he clutched a staff.... To the boys, it looked as though the man were sitting there resting while he waited for better skiing.... His face was ashen and drawn. His eyes were set toward the west. 16

Summary

Two distinct types of people are described in Giants in the Earth. Per Hansa is the natural pioneer who confidently faces the future. He is the embodiment of primitive strength; he sows earliest, plows longest, builds largest, endures most, and dares most. In all the qualities of manly strength, Per Hansa towers above his fellow pioneers. He rejoices when the plow sinks into the soil; it is a profound moment when he begins sowing the wheat. The days are too short for Per Hansa to accomplish all that he desires, on this--his own kingdom.

His wife, Beret, typifies primitive fear. She has been overwhelmed in her love for her husband, and the prairie overwhelms her with its barren stretches and bitter loneliness. Parrington says that Beret, the wife of Per Hansa, brooding in her sod-hut in Dakota, afraid of life and of her own thoughts, and turning for comfort to a dark religion, is a type of thousands of frontier women who--as the historian Ridpath said of his parents--'toiled and suffered and died that their children might inherit the promise.' 17

16 Ibid., pp. 464-465.

17 Op. Cit., p. x-xi.

Peder Victorious

Peder Victorious is a novel of the second generation of Norwegian immigrants twenty years later than the story of Giants in the Earth. Peder is the son of Per Hansa and Beret, and the pioneer strength and love of freedom move in him as he takes over his New World inheritance. Peder finds himself in an English school learning a new language. The school resents his Norse accent, as much as his mother dislikes the English tongue. Peder's mother sees life only in terms of the Old World, while Peder must live in the midst of the New. Peder's life drifts further and further from his mother's ideals. His friends are not all Norwegians; the girl he loves is an Irish Catholic. For Beret, it is either estrangement or surrender, and the mother love decides in favor of Peder. Again, but in another way, the pioneer is overcome. Beret, as well as Per Hansa, has been defeated, for Peder is bound to play his own part in making a new America.

Citations from Peder Victorious

He felt himself becoming one with the growing dusk and with everything around him. The mystic spell of the night, now fast nearing, whispered of pleasant things to him. He wondered why the prairie drew itself in at night. 18

That which the mind in some hidden cove of a Norwegian Fiord, or on some lonely island--far out where the mighty sea booms eternally--through centuries had conceived of religious mysticism and there shaped so as to fit the conditions of life, now sought a natural expression on the open reaches of the prairies. New forces, forces which they themselves did not understand, were at work here. The lure of the unknown and the

the restless roving spirit of the race had torn them loose from their ancient moorings, from home and kindred and fatherland and from all that hitherto had given them a sense of security and a feeling of safety, and had led them into strange and far away lands. Now the tide bore them back again; their imagination was busily at work, painting enchanting pictures of the old home which they never more could regain; on evenings when the weather was fair, they might stand on the prairie and sense its presence in the gloaming as a sunken Atlantis. With these people the feeling of strangeness in this alien land and the utter impossibility of striking new roots here gave to their testimony the tone of deep, rich, spiritual experience. 19

In the old days God founded his kingdom with twelve common workmen--didn't they remember that? What if a few simple farmers set themselves the task of extending it? The new history they were making out here, and the pioneer's unfaltering faith in the future, told them that of course it would be possible! 20

St. Luke's intended to set up a state church and coerce people by force?... Ought they to consent to being shackled like slaves, out here in the kingdom which they themselves had wrested from the wilderness? 21

From eternity the prairie had lain here lapping sun and drinking moisture and had peered up into endless blue day, brimful to running over. At evening it had listened to strange tales told by the twilight breeze. But now other concerns had come to occupy the thoughts of the great plains giving it not so much as a moment of rest.

The sod huts crumbled and merged again with the earth out of which they had come. Sod is but sod, after all, and was never meant to shelter human beings so long as they can stand on their legs. Large dwellings and huge barns sprang up all over. Summers the Great Plain tried tornadoes; in spring and autumn, prairie fires, until heaven and earth roared in one blaze; during the winter she would let loose all the deviltry she could think of, by way of raging blizzards, spewing out a horror of snow and cold. But all in vain; the houses reared themselves faster than she could destroy them. Even the elements had to learn that the power of man had to be respected, especially when energized by a great joy. 22

One new settler after another put his plow into the ground until there waved fields from skyline to skyline.... ought not people settle here where everything that was stuck in the ground grew so one could hear it? 23

19 Ibid., p. 52.

20 Ibid., p. 54.

21 Ibid., p. 55.

22 Ibid., p. 115.

23 Ibid., p. 116.

In the Black Hills, gold was being dug right out of the ground. . . . Farming was after all only farming; it would take a long time to get rich that way. Many a poor devil, trusting to luck and selling what little he owned for what he could get at the moment, struck out for the West, perhaps never to be heard from again. 24

If it were true that Dakota territory was destined to become the richest grain country in the world--really a beautiful idea, he liked to believe in it--then it was hardly reasonable that either the South or the East could afford to destroy such an empire. Didn't they agree with them? Wouldn't the opposite be more likely to happen? For he was willing to eat snuff that, no matter whether people lavored with cotton, or dug in the mines or sold shirts, they'd all have to eat bread! Wasn't that true? 25

Joyous tidings kept floating in from the vast empires of the West. Montana was altogether a more beautiful country than either of the Dakotas. Who ever heard of such fertility? The merest whiff of the soil out there would send the seed wheat sprouting in the sacks! And no winter to speak of; nor as much as a sign of tornadoes in summer. Just beyond Montana lay Washington. If one didn't find Montana to his liking, he could move on to that Eden----a veritable Norway with ocean, mountains, and fishing. And all manner of fruit--man alive, you never saw the beat. The Dakotas were full of nothing but ignorant old cranks anyway, who simply could not see further than their own noses. People here had no idea of progress. Plague take it, why slave and never get anywhere. 26.

Summary

The opening lines of this novel are significant. They tell us that in his childhood Peder lived in three rooms. Pursuing the story further, the reader finds out the nature of these rooms. The room Peder enjoys most is the one in which he lives everything in English. This room is a grand adventure, and Peder enjoys finding new things to put into it. Peder was ushered into this room at school, where the teacher warned him

24 Ibid., p. 117.

25 Ibid., p. 133.

26 Ibid., p. 264.

that education was the only weapon against ignorance and inherited customs brought from the Old Country. In this room Peder was inspired by such men as Washington and Lincoln. Here he also came in intimate touch with democracy and the constitution.

The next room Peder was compelled to share with his mother. Here he was compelled to speak Norwegian; here he stored all his mother's Norse traditions. Peder was at times ashamed of this room, especially, when there was English company, or when the teacher reproved him for his poor accent.

The third room was a dim shadowy place where only God and he could come. His mother had been admitted once, but not any more. God had been the most real thing in Peder's life, but all that was changed since Peder's father had been found dead over on the prairie. God had completely changed. He was now a hard, relentless monster, treacherous, sly, cunning. Since He was invisible, one could expect Him to pounce down upon people at any time and strike them a blow. If the cough and fever did not avail, God turned loose the blizzard and got people that way.

So this is the world of the immigrant of the second generation. He is not concerned with the land-taking or subduing the soil, but with the laws and institutions that are to decide his destiny. Peder is confused, but it is evident that he must break with the Norse traditions. But whether Peder and his generation are to follow God or Mammon in the making of a new America is yet to be determined. Peder and his fellows have received the inheritance, but whether they establish 'the kingdom' is yet to be revealed.

Chapter IX

Haldeman-Julius: It is necessary to explain a situation where two people believe in a fifty-fifty arrangement enough to share the name equally. Marcet Haldeman was the daughter of a Girard banker and land owner. About 1914, Miss Haldeman drifted into New York in search of a career. There she was known as a niece of Jane Addams, just out of Bryn Mawr. Miss Haldeman had ambitions for the stage, and wrote fairy stories. It was in New York that she met Emanuel Julius, the young socialist, whose name appears last in the compound. After a time Miss Haldeman disappeared from New York, and it was not long afterward that Emanuel Julius quit his job on the New York Call only to appear in 1916 on the staff of the Appeal to Reason in Girard, Kansas. The romance begun in New York culminated in a marriage in Girard, Kansas. These people are writers, publishers and bankers. They are still leading Socialists appearing often as campaign speakers. Their home in Girard is open to numerous visitors, many of whom are poets, and radicals; there are also a few bankers. When the novel Dust appeared many people wondered how it was written. When asked about it, Mrs. Haldeman-Julius said:

"My husband takes care of his business, and I take care of mine. That is, in everything but writing. We do all our writing together. Usually, we go out driving and talk a chapter into shape; then we go home and write it.'

'And your subjects--?'

'They are the easiest part', says Mrs. Haldeman-Julius, decisively. 'We write about Kansas.'" 1

Dust

Dust is the story of Kansas farm life. It is also the tragedy of a Kansas woman who marries an overbearing, heartless man. Martin Wade was a practical man; his one passion was work and its material rewards. He selected his wife as he might have selected a work horse; she must be able to pull her end of the load. Martin wasted no time in sentiment. She, who was to have been his 'Rose of Sharon', soon became a farm drudge. The modern house which Martin was to have built for her became a four room cottage; the additional money could be used to buy land and build barns. Rose found little comfort in her son, for he, too, became a slave to the soil. In bitterness, he left the farm drudgery to work in a coal mine where he lost his life. Martin lived only for material things, scorning to ask favor of God or man. Face to face with death, he spent his remaining hours thinking of his accumulations and telling his wife what to do with the lands, herds, and mortgages. When all was over, and the farm and stock had been sold, Rose thought, "Martin's life, it was like a handful of dust thrown into God's face and blown back again by the wind to the ground." 2

1 "Haldeman-Julius", THE KANSAS CITY STAR, Sunday, April 30, 1922, P. 12C, Column 1-5

2 Haldeman-Julius, Dust p. 251.

Citations from Dust

"Before I die, I'm goin' to see your mother and you children settled. Some day, when you've got a fine farm here, you'll see the sense of what I'm doin' now and thank me for it."

The boy's cold, blue eyes became the color of ice, as he retorted: "If I ever make a farm out o' this dust, I'll sure 'ave earned it." 3

Mrs Wade toiled early and late, doing part of the chores and double her share of the spring plowing that Martin, as well as Nellie, could attend school in Fallon. 4

Now, with a check for sixteen thousand--sixteen thousand dollars!--in his hand, he stood dumbly, curiously unmoved.

Slowly, the first bitter months on this land, little Benny's death from lack of nourishment, his father's desperate efforts to establish his family, the years of his mother's slow crucifixion, his own long struggle--all floated before him in a fog of reverie. Years of deprivation, of bending toil and then, suddenly, this had come--this miracle symbolized by this piece of paper.. Martin moistened his lips. Mentally, he realized all the dramatic significance of what had happened, but it gave him none of the elation he had expected. 5

Besides, wasn't it all different now that he held this check in his hand? These sixteen thousand dollars were not the same dollars which he had extorted from close-fisted Nature. Each of those had come so lamely, was such a symbol of sweat and aching muscles, that to spend one was like parting with a portion of himself, but this new, almost incredible fortune, had come without a turn of his hand, without an hour's labor. To Martin, the distinction was sharp and actual. 6

He was practical; he fancied he knew about what could be expected from marriage, just as he knew exactly how many steers and hogs his farm could support. This was a new idea--happiness. It had never entered into his calculations. Life as he knew it was hard. There was no happiness in those fields when burned by the hot August winds, the soil breaking into cakes that left crevices which seemed to groan for water. That sky with its clouds that never gave no rain was a hard sky. The people he knew were sometimes contented, but he could not remember ever having known any to whom the word "happy" could be applied. 7

3 Ibid., p. 13.

4 Ibid., p. 22.

5 Ibid., p. 30.

6 Ibid., p. 32.

7 Ibid., pp. 45-46.

There was but one thing worth while and that was work. The body was made for it--the thumb to hold the hammer, the hand to pump the water and drive the horses, the legs to follow the plow, head the cattle and chase the pigs from the cornfield, the ears to listen for strange noises from the stock, the eyes to watch for weeds and discover the lice on the hens, the mouth to yell the food call to the calves, the back to carry the bran. Work meant money, and money meant- what? It was merely a stick that measured the amount of work done. Then why did he toil so hard and save so scrupulously? His answer was always another question. What was there in life that could enable one to forget it faster? That woman in there waiting for him--oh, she would suffer before she realized the truth of this lesson he had already learned, and Martin felt a little pity for her. 8

They were always expecting something from God; always praying for petty favors--begging and whining for money, or good crops, or better health. Martin would have none of this nonsense. He was as selfish as they, probably more so, he conceded, but he hoped he would never reach the point of currying favor with anyone, even God. With his own good strength he would answer his own prayers. This farm was the nearest he could ever come to a paradise and on it he would be his own God. 9

At forty, he owned and, with the aid of two hired hands, worked an entire section of land. The law said it was his, and he had the might to back up the law. On these six hundred and forty broad acres he could have lived without the rest of the world. Here he was King. 10

"No, I don't intend to try. He isn't my slave."

With overwhelming pride in her eyes, pride that shook her voice, she exclaimed: "Not anybody's slave, and not afraid to declare it. Billy is a different kind of a boy. He doesn't like the farm--he hates it--"

"I know."

"He loathes everything about it. Only the other day he told me he wished he could take it and tear it board from board, and leave it just a piece of bleak prairie, as it was when your father brought you here, Martin." 11

"When you've been married to a man nearly twenty-two years and have built up a place together, there's bound to be a bond between you," she eluded. "He just lives for this farm. It's almost as dear to him as you are to me, son, and it's a wonderful heritage, Bill, a magnificent heritage. Just think! Two generations have labored to build it out of the dust. Your father's whole life is in it. Your father's and mine. And your grandmother's. If only you could ever come to care for it!" 12

8 Ibid., pp. 59-60.

9 Ibid., p. 93.

10 Ibid., p. 94.

11 Ibid., p. 189.

12 Ibid., pp. 199-200.

He remembered how his own father had died on this farm-- he had had no possessions to think about; only his loved ones, his wife and children; but he had brought them here that they might amass property out of Martin's sweat and the dust of the prairie. Now he, the son, dying, had in his mind no thought of people, but of this land and of stock and of things. 13

"What has it all been about, that's what I want to know," he went on with quiet cynicism. "What have I been sweating about--nothing. What is anyone's life? No more than mine. We're all like a lot of hens in a backyard, scratching so many hours a day. Some scratch a little deeper than those who aren't so skilled or so strong. And when I stand off a little, it's all alike. The end is as blind and senseless as the beginning on this farm--drought and dust." 14

Summary

Dust, to use Biblical language, is the story of a man who built his house upon the sand. It is a review of a life founded upon materialism. To Martin Wade, the soil reflects nothing of the glory of a Creator, whom he fails to acknowledge. The crops from his fields are not food for hungry humanity, but a commodity which can be converted into money. Money swells his bank account; it is the stick which measures work--the only worth while thing in life. Work is the one thing that helps a man forget life.

Martin has never known happiness; his soul is too shriveled to absorb it. So he stubbornly shuts out of his life all spiritual values--he mocks at prayer and God. His strength will answer his own prayers; his farm is the only paradise he will ever know. Here he can be his own God. Why seek favor of his fellowman or Providence? So the God of Materialism carries Martin to the Gates of the Unknown and then deserts him. Face to face with death, he admits that the end is as senseless as the beginning--it is all drought and dust.

13 Ibid., p. 226.

14 Ibid., p. 236.

Pure Gold

Pure Gold is the last of the series of novels by O. E. Rolvaag. It was published the year before his death. A biography of the author was given with Giants in the Earth, and will not be repeated here. It is said that his story was suggested to the author, when some men digging in the ground, unearthed some buried treasure.

Pure Gold is the story of a man and woman whose very souls were shriveled by their greed for gold. Louis and Lizzie Houglum were ambitious to make their farm in Minnesota pay well. From the time of their marriage, they were planning and saving to pay off the mortgage on the farm. They worked hard and prospered. Then one day Louis brought home, as a present for his wife, a ten-dollar gold piece. This was the beginning of their lust for gold. They began denying themselves in every possible way to add more gold pieces to their store. Soon they had gold secreted in both house and barn. They spent long evenings and Sundays counting their hoardings. Gold pieces were dearer than children. At length, they grew suspicious of each other, and so they divided the gold pieces, each hiding his treasure from the other. At last the farm, and everything else they owned were converted into money, each taking his share. They then moved to town where they lived in some rooms above a store, still working and hoarding like misers. By this time, Louis and Lizzie carried their money in belts around their waists. One cold day they were found dead in their den, victims of fear and of the intense cold. The rags they were were burned and with them the hoardings of a lifetime.

Citations from Pure Gold.

Lars wasn't very strong on planning and such like--no one is perfect in everything, anyway.... She would have to stand by him and help think things out and decide. The first year they would have to get along without a hired man... perhaps the next, too... that way the'd save enough to pay all the interest on the mortgage, and save they must. 15

Her mind was constantly building pictures. There was the problem of the poultry; by tending the poultry well she could make enough to pay for the groceries she and Lars needed... perhaps buy their clothes also. Mentally, she was selecting the hens she intended to take with her when she moved.... Now that she was to set up in life for herself, it was only proper that Father and Mother should help her get established. 16

Of course they would have to be careful not to spend money needlessly. No cheap thing to entertain a lot of company... then, too, one could waste a lot of time that way... and since Lars was going to do all the work alone, she would have to be his hired man... for a while.... Later there would be other things to look after! 17

Lizzie milked the three cows, and sat stripping the last-- just fooling with the tits.... Too bad they had so few cows! More cows would mean more butter to take to town... bigger due bills with which to buy necessities for the house... more calves, too, and more hogs... in fact, more of everything. Not being able to extract another drop, she got up and put the stool away.. 18

Not waiting for her to answer, he fished out of the pocket-book a ten-dollar gold piece, first holding it up to the light, then dropping it on the table to let her hear the deep clang of it. "See, Lizzie, this is pure gold!" His voice had dropped low, in his eyes was a fascinated look. 19

Without a word Lizzie picked up the piece and examined it; she turned it about in her hand, weighed it, stared unbelievably.... Was it possible? How could this little thing be so heavy? As she studied it more closely her brows knit; finally she burst out in a gasp: "Did you ever! It can't be worth ten dollars-- this little thing?" The coin was the first gold piece she had ever seen and now she refused to believe her own eyes. 20

15 Rolvaag, Pure Gold, p. 20.

16 Ibid., p. 21.

17 Ibid., p. 22.

18 Ibid., p. 28.

19 Ibid., pp. 34-35.

20 Ibid., p. 35.

"Doesn't it beat all?" Louis marveled, lovingly; he felt happy, and proud of himself because of what he had done. "Just think of the value of that one small piece! I once saw a twenty-dollar piece... it wasn't much bigger but must have been considerable heavier.... Let me feel of it again!" He laughed quietly, to himself. "It almost makes a person feel spooky, doesn't it?" In Louis' face was boyish excitement. "If we had a few hundred fellows like this tucked away in our stockings, we could let the rest of the world do the worrying.... Now I'll tell you something," he went on, chummily. "You take him and hide him where he is absolutely safe!... I might have planked him, too, on the mortgage, but I just couldn't do it. I said to myself, 'you take that fellow home and give him to Lizzie'--- yes, sir, that's what I said! It makes you feel secure to have a little lay-by at home, something reliable that the neighbours don't know about, and that the assessor can't tax you for.... By and by we'll try to add a few more... it won't be many till that darned mortgage is in the stove, but I'll try to rope one now and then. What do you say, Lizzie?" 21

At last a question presented itself, a problem which seemed silly, for really, it should not be a problem at all: but what should they do with the money they laid by? Neither of them cared for more land than the two hundred acres they already had... No pleasure in owning a lot of land, and land was expensive-- very expensive unless farmed efficiently...it might easily become a liability instead of an asset. Money thus invested was out of one's reach...one couldn't even look at it.... And they got such fun out of seeing the money come in and the piles grow; they played with bank notes and silver dollars and their precious gold coins as youngsters do with fine toys. With them it was a game. By and by they had money in small bags, stuck away here and there in all kinds of improbable hiding-places. In the evenings as they sat there all alone, or on Sunday afternoons-- it was seldom that anyone called--they would bring out the bags, take out the money, play with it, fondle it caressingly; then, after having counted it with much care, they would hide the bags in their secret places. What could be more interesting? To make the bags swell--now, there was something worth striving for! 22

As they drove down the yard his eyes watered so that he could not see. The whole farm lay quiet and deserted. No life to be seen anywhere. Not a sound; not even a rooster crowed. The henhouse looked so squatty and forlorn.... Well, good-bye, old farm!

Lizzie, too, seemed out of sorts; you couldn't make her talk. Every once in a while Bratlien turned around shouting: "Are you there? If I had you insured I could make better time.... Hey! what was that?"

21 Ibid., pp. 35-36.

22 Ibid., pp. 80-81.

By and by Louis' mood brightened. He had nothing to feel sour about, he assured himself... The place had brought much more than they had hoped... all cash, too.. and the money was safe... Now they were moving to town to take life easy and have some fun.... No more milking, and dirty chores, and hard work.... He'd miss the cows, though... well, one couldn't have everything... they had said good-bye and were through! 23

Again she was out on the farm, mothering a struggling, hungry life. She heard a pig grunt brute satisfaction because she rubbed its back with the point of her shoe. She put her hand under a brooding hen to rob its nest and the mother snapped angrily till the blood oozed out. The pain gave Lizzie pleasure.... No, no; it was most fun of all to teach new-born calves how to drink; as the soft palate sucked her hand she knew voluptuous pleasure. As she came back to her window above Jenkins' store her sense of forsakenness deepened into profound gloom. She saw it clearly now: Out there she had lived close to the very life-force itself, had felt its pulse beats... in town she had been cast into a void of grey aloneness. Getting up from the window, unconsciously she chewed the knuckles of her left hand, walking aimlessly back and forth between the two little rooms. The feeling that she had been betrayed, that life at every turn of the road had tricked her and led her astray, was fast growing into hatred toward all mankind. 24

Summary

Pure Gold is not a sequel to Peder Victorious in the sense that the latter is to Giants in the Earth. However, the three novels should be taken as a unit in considering the work of Rolvaag. The first book of the series carries the Norse immigrants into the land of promise. It pictures the joy of Per Hansa, the typical pioneer, in planting and reaping on the land that is to him a kingdom. The land is his own and an inheritance for his children. It is true that Per Hansa is overcome in the 'Land Taking', but his strength survives in his son, Peder Victorious. The story of Peder, as this study has shown, is not concerned with his struggle for mastery of the soil; Per Hansa accomplished

23 Ibid., pp271-272

24 Ibid., pp. 282-283.

that for him. Peder struggles to master a new language and to adjust himself to new conventions--social, religious, political. Peder has taken over his New World inheritance, and the questions arise--What will he do with it?; and does Rolvaag intend to suggest in Pure Gold a possible answer to the question?

Two of the characters in Pure Gold, Louis and Lizzie Houg-lum, are of the second generation of pioneer immigrants. They start saving with a worthy motive--that of releasing their Minnesota farm from mortgage. However, before the debt is paid, they have but one all-absorbing passion--love of gold. They sacrifice neighbors, friends, respect for each other, everything in life worth while, in their lust for gold. At last, the farm which should have held many tender memories is sold. The old people drive away with scarcely a backward glance, for has not the farm brought more than they expected-- Why should they feel downhearted? And so, like Martin Wade, they carry their earthly possessions to the very gates of the Unknown, and there they surrender at last the price of their own souls.

It is possible that in the years following the World War, Rolvaag may have read the sign of the times and offered this interpretation. The great Norseman, who seems to have sensed so deeply the heart throbs of his people, may have realized the impending danger, and so, before embarking on that last, long voyage of the Vikings, left Pure Gold as a last message to his people in the New World.

Chapter X

Louis Hemon has been known as a French-Canadian, and Maria Chapdelaine is said to be his first story. The truth is that Hemon was not a Canadian but a Frenchman, and Maria Chapdelaine is his last work, published after his death. The book has run through six hundred and fifty editions. For a time little was known of the author, perhaps because of the fact that he was of a shy, secretive nature and belonged to no literary circle. He was born October 12, 1880, and was killed July, 1913.

Grief over the death of his wife drove Hemon upon the sea until he came at last to the Lac Saint Jean country in Canada. The inhabitants of the country, those hardy, simple French, who wore out their lives against stumps and rocks, 'making land', interested him. These people, whose existence was so lonely, so hard, so self-sufficient, but who yet contrived to find a measure of contentment, appealed deeply to Hemon. He hired out to a farmer, Samuel Bedard, who is the Samuel Chapdelaine of the story, for eight dollars a month.

"For eighteen months he worked with these people, lived with them, talked around their fires at night. He learned the ideals, the aspirations, and the creed of the old French in Canada. For him, as for Maria Chapdelaine, the voice of Quebec, "half a woman's song and half a priest's chant," became articulate. He, too, felt in it 'the dear solemnity of the old culture, the sweetness of the ancient language jealously guarded, the splendor and barbaric force of this new country, where an ancient race had found again its youth.' 1

1 "Louis Hemon," KANSAS CITY TIMES, April 29, 1924. (Taken from BOSTON TRANSCRIPT.)

It was during the year and a half in this Canadian farmer's home that he wrote Maria Chapdelaine, and after posting it to the editor of the Paris Temps, he set out with his pack. His route lay along the tracks of the Canadian railway, and, perhaps because of deafness, he did not hear the train which cost him his life. It has been said of Hemon's stories that he is the historian of a people without a history.

Maria Chapdelaine

Maria Chapdelaine is a simple romantic tale of the back country of Quebec about Lake St. John. Maria is the daughter of a French-Canadian pioneer whose passion is for the clearing rather than for the tilling of the soil. The father repeatedly builds up a home in the wilderness, only to sell it and seek the uncleared ground again. The family have few contacts with the outside world. Maria is beautiful and desirable. Her lover, Francois, the trapper from the far North, is caught in a Christmas snow storm and is lost. The death of her lover intensifies Maria's hatred of the cruel solitude and the long winters. Soon, she is called upon to make a choice between two lovers: one from a hospitable section of the States, the other her own neighbor. Maria wavers in her choice, but she finally decides upon the young man who will make a home for her near her own people. The background of the story is rich in its descriptions of pioneer living, of the clearing of the forests, and of farming during the short Canadian summer.

Citations from Maria Chapdelaine

"But the soil is rich in these parts," said Eutrope Gagnon.

"The soil is good but one must battle for it with the forest; and to live at all you must watch every copper, labour from morning to night, and do everything yourself because there is no one near to lend a hand."

Mother Chapdelaine ended with a sigh. Her thoughts were ever fondly revisiting the older parishes where the land has long been cleared and cultivated, and where the houses are neighbourly-her lost paradise. 2

When the boys are back from the woods we shall set to work, they two, Tit'Be and I, and presently we shall have our land cleared. With four good men ax in hand and not afraid of work things will go quickly, even in the hard timber. Two years from now there will be grain harvested, and pasturage that will support a good herd of cattle. I tellyou that we are going to make land."

"Make land!" Rude phrase of the country, summing up in two words all the heartbreaking labour that transforms the incult woods, barren of sustenance, to smiling fields, ploughed and sown. Samuel Chapdelaine's eyes flamed with enthusiasm and determination as he spoke. 3

For this was the passion of his life; the passion of a man whose soul was in the clearing, not the tilling of the earth. Five times since boyhood had he taken up wild land, built a house, a stable and a barn, wrested from the unbroken forest a comfortable farm; and five times he had sold out to begin it all again farther north, suddenly losing interest; energy and ambition vanishing once the first rough work was done, when neighbours appeared and the countryside began to be opened up and inhabited. Some there were who entered into his feelings; others praised the courage but thought little of the wisdom, and such were fond of saying that if good sense had led him to stay in one place he and his would now be at their ease. 4

"At their ease..." Truly to know what it means one must have toiled bitterly from dawn to dark with back and hands and feet, and the children of the soil are those who have best attained the knowledge. 5

According to the Chapdelaines, never had the country been visited with such a drought as this, and every day a fresh motive was suggested for the divine displeasure. Oats and wheat took on a sickly colour ere attaining their growth; a merciless sun withered the grass and the clover aftermath, and all day

2 Lois Hemon, Maria Chapdelaine, pp. 38-39.

3 Ibid., p. 39.

4 Ibid., p. 40.

5 Ibid., p. 41.

long the famished cows stood lowing with their heads over the fences. They had to be watched continually, for even the meager standing crop was a sore temptation, and never a day went by but one of them broke through the rails in the attempt to appease her hunger among the grain. 6

Madam Chapdelaine shook her head. "There is no better life than the life of a farmer who has good health and owes no debts. He is a free man, has no boss, owns his beasts, works for his own profit... The finest life there is!" 7

"There is no man in the world less free than a farmer... When you tell of those who have succeeded, who are well provided with everything needful on a farm, who have had better luck than others, you say:-- 'Ah, what a fine life they lead! They are comfortably off, own good cattle.' That is not how to put it. The truth is that their cattle own them. In all the world there is no 'boss' who behaves as stupidly as the beasts you favour. 8

"Of course you are quite free to choose, and I have not a word to say against him. But you would be happier here, Maria, amongst people like yourself."

Through the falling snow Maria gazed at the rude structure of planks, between stable and barn, which her father and brother had thrown together five years before; unsightly and squalid enough it appeared, now that her fancy had begun to conjure up the stately buildings of the town. Close and ill-smelling, the floor littered with manure and foul straw, the pump in one corner that was so hard to work and set the teeth on edge with its griding; the weather-beaten outside, buffeted by wind and never-ending snow--sign and symbol of what awaited her were she to marry one like Eutrope Gagnon, and accept as her lot a lifetime of rude toil in this sad and desolate land... She shook her head.

"I cannot answer, Eutrope, either yes or no; not just now. I have given no promise. You must wait." 9

To the countryman, all things touching the soil which gives him bread, and the alternate seasons which lull the earth to sleep and awaken it to life, are of such moment that one may speak of them even in the presence of death with no disrespect. 10

To pass her days in these lonely places when she would have dearly loved the society of other human beings and the unbroken peace of village life; to strive from dawn till nightfall, spend-

6 Ibid., p. 121.
 7 Ibid., p. 194.
 8 Ibid., p. 195.
 9 Ibid., p. 219.
 10 Ibid., p. 261.

ing all her strength in a thousand heavy tasks, and yet from dawn till nightfall never losing patience nor her happy tranquillity; continually to see about her only the wilderness, the great pitiless forest, and to hold in the midst of it all an ordered way of life, the gentleness and the joyousness which are the fruits of many a century sheltered from such rudeness--was it not surely a hard thing and a worthy? And the recompense? After death, a little word of praise. 11

The poorest farmer sometimes halts in yard or field, hands in pockets, and tastes the great happiness of knowing that the sun's heat, the warm rain, the earth's unstinted alchemy--every mighty force of nature--is working as a humble slave for him... for him. 12

"If you wish I will marry you as you asked me to... In the spring--the spring after this spring now--when the men come back from the woods for the sowing." 13

Summary

The story of Maria Chapdelaine seems to tell us that there is such a thing as being pioneer-minded. Samuel Chapdelaine has a passion for "making land" as he calls it. This compells him to dwell on the very edge of civilization, and the loneliness and bitter hardships would crush those whose minds and hearts are in tune with a friendlier life. In the words of Sam Walter Foss,

"There are souls like stars that dwell apart in a fellowless firmament." 14 These French pioneers seem to endure a remote existence with patience and fortitude. And when Maria is free to choose between the rude structures of the pioneer settlement and the stately buildings of the town, she chooses to remain where the soil is familiar even though it be in a desolate land.

11 Ibid., pp. 272-273.

12 Ibid., p. 277.

13 Ibid., p. 288.

14 Sam Walter Foss, "The House by the Side of the Road."

This choice can hardly be accounted for, unless we admit a psychology of the pioneer, and that he differs from his fellows just as the stars in the firmament differ.

Martha Ostenso was born in 1900 near the little village of Haukeland, high up in the mountains of Norway. The Ostenso family had lived on the coast of Norway in the township which bears the family name since the days of the Vikings. Her father was of a roving disposition and emigrated to America when Martha was two years of age. In describing the early years Miss Ostenso says: "The story of my childhood is a tale of seven little towns in Minnesota and South Dakota. Towns of the field and prairie all, redolent of the soil from which they had sprung and eloquent of that struggle common to the farmer the world over, a struggle but transferred from the Ostenso and Haukeland of the Old World to the richer loam of the New. They should have a story written about them, those seven mean yet glorious little towns of my childhood!" In one of them, on the dun prairies of South Dakota, I learned to speak English....

When I was fifteen years old I bade good-by to the Seven Little Towns. My father's restless spirit drove him north to the newer country. The family settled in Manitoba.

It was during a summer vacation from my university work that I went into the lake district of Manitoba, well toward the frontier of that northern civilization. My novel, 'Wild Geese,' lay there, waiting to be put into words. Here was the raw material out of which little towns are made. Here was human nature stark, unattired in the convention of a smoother, softer

life. A thousand stories are there, still to be written." 15

Miss Ostenso received most of her education in Minnesota and at Brandon Collegiate School in Canada. She afterward attended the University of Manitoba. In 1921 and 1922 she took a course in the technique of the novel at Columbia University. Her first novel, Wild Geese, won a \$13,500 prize.

Wild Geese

Wild Geese is the story of farm life on the frontier of northern civilization. The story centers around the family of Caleb Gare, the most prosperous farmer in Oeland. Caleb is described by the author as "a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence". 16

Caleb domineers his family with his snake-like personality and a damaging secret which he holds over his wife. His daughter, Judith, defies him, but he punishes her cruelly. Caleb's field of flax is to him an invisible God, demanding not only the good in him but the evil as well. Some of the old Greek feeling creeps into the story for divine justice seems at work to right the wrongs done the family and to punish Caleb. In the end, he is submerged in a cruel swamp while trying to save his flax from a forest fire. The land at last demands the life blood of its slave.

15 Overton, The Women Who Make Our Novels, pp. 247-248.

16 Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese, p. 35.

Citations from Wild Geese

Caleb lifted the lantern and examined the wick. Things would turn out to his liking. He would hold the whip hand. Judith, yes, she was a problem. She had some of his own will, and she hated the soil....was beginning to think she was made for other things....getting high notions, was Judith. She would have to be broken. She owed him something....owed the soil something. 17

The ditches along the wood road became a gray blur of pussy willows; and one day Lind heard the first robin. It was a time of intense wonder in the north, after the long, harsh months when the heart is shut out from communion with the earth. 18

Except for the blows of Martin's hammer on the soggy shingles there was not a sound abroad. The air and the earth seemed to be held together in a glass bowl. There was that thin luster over everything that comes only on a clear April evening. The dank, clinging smell of newly turned soil rose like a presence. 19

"I was just thinking how lucky you people are up here to have spring so close to you," Lind said, glancing up at him.

"Yes, we are very, very lucky," he responded slowly, carefully. "But few of us know it."

"Don't you think most of the farmers realize it--in one way or another?"

"No," he said. "Here the spirit feels only what the land can bring to the mouth. In the spring we know only that there is coming a winter. There is too much of selfishness here--like everywhere." 20

Lind wondered, as she had wondered time and again since coming to Oeland, if there were any means in her power by which she might bring a little happiness into the lives of the Gares. And then in a moment, she was overwhelmed by her helplessness against the intangible thing that held them there slaves to the land. It extended further back than Caleb, this power, although it worked through him. 21

Oh, how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and a mind hidden here in the woods. The fields that Caleb had tilled had no tenderness she knew. But here was something forbiddenly beautiful, secret as one's own body. And there was something beyond this. She could feel it in the freeness of the air, in the depth of the earth. 22

17 Ibid., p. 16.

18 Ibid., p. 24.

19 Ibid., p. 25.

20 Ibid., pp. 32-33.

21 Ibid., p. 36.

22 Ibid., p. 67.

Caleb's sons--Caleb's children, what were they? Well born it was true, and not out of wedlock. But twisted and gnarled and stunted as the growth of the bush land he owned, and barren as had been his acres before he had put his own life's blood into them for a meager yield. 23

They talked of the strange unity between the nature of man and earth here in the north, and of the spareness of both physical and spiritual life.

"There's no waste--that's it," Mark observed, "either in human relationships or in plant growth. There's no incontinency anywhere. I've made trips around Yellow Post since I've been here, and I haven't talked with a single farmer who wasn't looking forward to the time when he wouldn't have a grain of any kind in his bins if he didn't rake and scrape for all he's worth now. They seem to have no confidence in the soil--no confidence in anything save their own labor. Think of the difference there would be in the outward characters of these people if the land didn't sap up all their passion and sentiment." 24

"Yes, I think perhaps human life, or at least human contact, is just as barren here as farther north," Lind remarked. "The struggle against conditions must have the same effect as passivity would have, ultimately. It seems to me that one would be as dulling as the other--one would extort as much from human capacity for expression as the other. There's no feeling left after the soil and the live stock have taken their share." 25

There was a transcendent power in this blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life, and death. It was more exacting even, than an invisible God. It demanded not only the good in him, but the evil, and the indifference. 26

Martin loved the land, but there was something else in him that craved expression. It had been represented by the dream of the new house, the dream of the thing that was to be made by his own hands, guided by his own will. 27

Everything was working out smoothly this year, at last, and as it would work out in the years to come. The completion of a perfect cycle: plowing, harrowing, planting, growing, reaping, and threshing. In all life, where was there such harmony as could be found in the cultivation of the land? Caleb could well afford to be mellow and content before the wide testimony of his success as a farmer, as a tiller of the soil. 28

23 Ibid., p. 76.

24 Ibid., p. 104.

25 Ibid., p. 106.

26 Ibid., p. 171.

27 Ibid., p. 177.

28 Ibid., p. 277.

There was a spirit in the flax--the growing of it was a challenge to a man's will in this gaunt land. It took Caleb Gare to raise flax. 29

The fire was racing ahead. Only a little while now, and it would have the flax.... a fine, abundant growth it was.... only a little while.... ah, the over strong embrace of the earth.... Caleb closed his eyes. He felt tired, too tired to struggle any more. He had given his soul to the flax.... well, it would go with him. He could see it shimmering still, gray silver, where the light of the fire fell upon it. The earth was closing ice-cold, tight, tight, about his body.... but the flax would go with him.... the flax. 30

Summary

In *Wild Geese*, Martha Ostenso has set forth the philosophy that there is unity between the nature of man and the earth. She contends that in the cold, barren north there is a spareness in both physical and spiritual growth. The earth, overwhelmed by the long, cold winters, becomes tyrannical and bears crops grudgingly. Caleb Gare, in his efforts to wrest a living from the reluctant soil, has become a tyrant to his family, and they in turn are slaves for Caleb and the land.

The author voices her philosophy in the conversation of her characters, and she records as the words of one of them, "Here the spirit feels only what the land can bring to the mouth. In the spring we know only that there is coming a winter. There is too much selfishness here---like everywhere. 31

Mark Jordan expresses the same feeling as he talks with Lind Archer--"There's no waste either in human relationships

29 *Ibid.*, p. 319.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 352.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

or in plant growth. They seem to have no confidence in the soil--no confidence in anything save their own labor. Think of the difference there would be in the outward character of these people if the land didn't sap all their passion and sentiment." 32

And again Mark continues, "The austerity of nature reduces the outward expression of life, simply, I think, because there is not such an abundance of natural objects for the spirit to react to. We are, after all, only the mirror of our environment." 33

Lind Archer agrees with Mark and expresses her observations in these words--"There's no feeling left after the soil and the livestock have taken their share." 34

For Caleb, at least, there was a spirit in the flax, a transcendant power that lifted him above the petty things of life; but alas, it was a malignant spirit, as exacting as an invisible God. It demanded of Caleb, evil as well as good. The only member of Caleb's family who had not come under the spell of this harsh spirit of the land was Judith; she had heard the call of the wild geese--going free.

32 Ibid., pp. 104-105.

33 Ibid., p. 105.

34 Ibid., p. 106.

Chapter XI

Phil Stong, author of State Fair, has too recently sprung into literary prominence to have a good biography available. William Gaines, in A Broadview Note Book, has a few timely remarks about him.

"Phil Stong, a young fellow from Keosauqua, Iowa, writes with sympathetic understanding of his people of the midwest. He has been away from home for years--came to the big city because he thought he had to, to get ahead in the world. Stong was ambitious to do things in a literary way, but he didn't hold it against his native country because it is not the literary center of the land.

'They've got their own interests out there,' says Stong. 'And if one of their number has different interests, he should be content simply to move somewhere else.'

The point is that Stong didn't come away, make good and spitefully snap back at his people. He wrote a dozen novels before he got one into print, but he didn't go biting about that." 1

In commenting on State Fair, Virginia Swain (Mrs. Phil Stong) says that he wrote the book last summer in five of the hottest weeks she has ever known in New York. "I doubt that he knew it was hot weather in New York. The only warmth he felt was the lovely, earthy heat of the black soil of Iowa, drifting up around the truck that carried the Frakes family and Blue Boy through the prairie night toward the light and stir and passion of the State Fair." 2

1 William Gaines, A Broadview Note Book, THE EMPORIA GAZETTE, p. 4, Column 3. (April 25, 1932.)

2 Virginia Swain, "The Tawdry Lucifer," WINGS, p. 6. (May, 1932)

State Fair

State Fair is the story of the Frakes, a prosperous, contented family of Brunswick, Iowa. The big event of the year for them is State Fair Week, when the family, consisting of the father and mother, a son, Wayne, and a daughter, Margy, get into a truck and drive to Des Moines. The family are notable prize winners. This year Mrs. Frakes will enter her favorite sweet pickles, and Mr. Frakes is confident that Blue Boy is the finest boar in Iowa. The family make the trip in the night for Blue Boy's comfort, and in the morning pitch their tent and begin the week's enjoyment. Wayne has unusual success at a hoop-la stand, and Margy finds pleasure on the roller-coaster. Before the first day has passed, both Wayne and Margy have fallen desperately in love. Aside from Mrs. Frakes' triumph in pickles and Blue Boy's winning of first honors, the rest of the story is concerned with the love affairs of Wayne and Margy. Although the young people seem in danger of losing their heads for a time, family stability plays its part, and the young people go home untarnished by the experience.

Citations from State Fair

Abel frowned at the Storekeeper. "Call me all the names you want to, but don't say anything against that hog. I've got faith in my hog. I believe in my hog." 3

"Margy, you have to plan--everything. I've got the whole Fair planned right now. If you're careful you can make everything you want come out the way you want it to. I always have." 4

3 Phil Stong, State Fair, p. 12.

4 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

Restless beyond endurance, Margy danced across the lawn to the garage. Her mother was darning stockings; there was not much to do in a well-managed farm-house on Sunday. 5

"Here." She pointed at a cardboard carton between her feet. Along the wall of Melissa Frake's kitchen at home was a long row of yellow and red ribbons which she had won for angel's food, devil's food, and layer cake; cherry preserves made by the old Stidger recipe which had come down in the family for generations uncounted; for chicken dressing; for raised bread; for doughnuts. There were two blue ribbons--one for candied cherries and for a mincemeat to which Mrs. Frake had surreptitiously added some sherry wine the doctor had once prescribed as a tonic for Margy. 6

"Why don't you go back with Wayne?" Abel asked. "There's plenty of room on top of that crate, and he's got some kind of a bed fixed up there."

"And sleep over that hog? No, thank you."

Abel laughed. "That's a special hog. It isn't everybody that gets a chance to sleep on the crate of a hog like that. Besides, he's been washed and curried till he's probably cleaner than any of us. We've been washed, but we haven't been curried." 7

There was none of the tension in their farm life to make them impatient with each other very frequently; there was a placidity and a kind of intellectual self-containedness in it--the independence of long hours at solitary labors--which had prevented them from ever being bored with one another. 8

Abel patted his son on the shoulder. "I know you're interested. It's just a contest, of course, like running a furlong, or seeing who can roll a peanut the fastest with his nose. There's no difference at the bottom as far as patience and practice and work is concerned. But one reason I want to win is that all of you have understood the patience and work it's taken to bring up a critter like Blue Boy. Well, tomorrow's the day." 9

Her mother shrugged young and rounded shoulders, slowly. "But what can I enter now? I've got the very most that woman can get out of the Fair exhibits. I've always come to the Fair looking for new prizes, better prizes. Now, unless I start raising horses or something there's nothing more to do." Suddenly, she smiled at her daughter. "I'm just joking. The Fair's enough fun even if you didn't have anything entered." 10

5 Ibid., p. 40.

6 Ibid., pp. 57-58.

7 Ibid., p. 59.

8 Ibid., p. 112.

9 Ibid., p. 137.

10 Ibid., pp. 155-156.

When they had gone, "Oh, my Lord," said Abel. "I own the finest hog that ever was, and the Storekeeper owes me five dollars." 11

Abel and Melissa, with Marge, were to attend the show in the evening at the Stock Pavilion, and see Abel presented with the great trophy which testified that he had aided the State of Iowa by improving its hogs. Wayne was truly sorry that he could not be there and his regret was evident in his voice.

"Dad, I didn't have any notion it would be like this! They've never even given a trophy before--and they didn't haul the winners around the way they're doing this year. If I'd known I never would have told this fellow I'd go to the show. The greatest hog raiser there ever was and his own son not there to see him win," he lamented. 12

"This is a good day to rest," Abel corroborated placidly. "To-morrow we've got to pack and we won't be home till Sunday. Sunday evening, if I'm not mistaken, the younger members of our household will have people to see. And Monday" --he sighed-- "back to the clover, the feeding of hogs, and the fence-post holes. Well, all good things must come to an end." 13

"Frakes," she said quietly, as they drew up that long ascent which gave them a moment's silence again, "think you ought to manage things and not let things manage you. I'll bet if Job turned up in the Frakes family with God's hand against him, that when he scattered ashes on his head he'd pick out ashes that were good for the hair." 14

She forged ahead. "What would your friends in New York talk to me about? Back in Brunswick, I'd be useful and people would like me. I could run a house. I'd have children, four or five, and they'd grow up like me and live to bring more land into the family. We still like land, we farmers, even though it's nearly ruined us lately." 15

At his look of bewilderment her tone became gentler. She patted his hand. "Can you imagine me living on your farm, Wayne, milking cows and all that sort of thing--?"

"The Hired Man milks the cows," he interrupted stiffly.

"I don't know anything about farms," she said, impatiently, "except that what you would expect of your wife is something I couldn't be--how can you be so silly?" She was near crying. 16

11 Ibid., p. 182.

12 Ibid., p. 185.

13 Ibid., p. 199.

14 Ibid., p. 207.

15 Ibid., pp 216-217.

16 Ibid., p. 236.

The Hired Man met them, full of excitement, questions and jubilation. Margy looked at the house, which had been open to air all day, stout and spreading and homely. Had she ever left here? Through her drowsiness she felt some memory that she was changed, but how she did not know. She felt, here in the yard at home, that there had been no Fair, no change, no Pat. 17

"Absolutely," said the Hired Man. "You gointa put the trophy in there with him, Abel, or do we just bring it out for him to look at feeding times?"

Abel laughed. "Say, would you mind putting up the truck? I'm feelin' just a little mite sleepy myself." 18

Summary

It is a long way from Hamlin Garland's Main-Travelled Roads to Phil Stong's State Fair. Both were written in the face of economic depression, at a time when things seemed to be going against the farmer. Garland's may be styled the pessimist's picture of farm life, while Stong's presents the optimist's view. Garland has drawn a life-size portrait of the farmer as he struggles up the long slope toward success. Stong has painted on rosy-tinted canvas the scene of arrival. One presents the psychology of struggle, the other of success.

The keynote of State Fair is "farm management," for the mother very plainly says that the Frakes family believe in managing things and not in letting things manage them. She illustrates her point by saying, "I'll bet if Job turned up in the Frake family with God's hand against him, that when he scattered ashes on his head he'd pick out ashes that were good for the hair." 19

17 Ibid., p. 254.

18 Ibid., p. 255.

19 Ibid., p. 207.

Stong differs from Garland in that he has sketched only part of the story. The reader does not know who did the managing and struggling, whether it was Abel Frakes, his father, or his grandfather. However, common sense says that some one paved the way for Abel's well regulated farm and prize winning Blue Boy.

According to State Fair, the children of this prosperous farmer have been reared in the school of orderliness and stability, which renders them immune from the pitfalls and dangers of city life. This school seems also to have furnished a fund of humor which always serves man well. What a splendid thing it would be if farm life in 1932 could furnish such a genuine background for all its sons and daughters. The progress of civilization would be almost assured.

However, it is a pleasant diversion to have a glimpse of the successful farmer; that there are such in America is an accepted fact. It is fine to know that a man like Phil Stong can leave a rural community without carrying a grudge; that his childhood memories are not marred by bitterness. No doubt it is good psychology during the present years of economic uncertainty to have some one write a novel that leaves out the sweat, the grime, and the soul-sapping discouragement that are so often pictured as the lot of the farmer. So the reader should hail State Fair as the presentation of the new type of farmer, and hope that Phil Stong is the herald of a new day in the farm life of America.

Chapter XII- Summary

A brief resume has been made of each novel used in this study, and it is now time to summarize the results of the survey. Before doing this, it is well to restate the question--"What is the Spirit of the Soil"? or, laying aside figurative language--What is the Real Meaning of the Soil as found in some of the modern 'Novels of the Soil'?

This research has emphasized the fact that the soil is, first of all, God's challenge to mankind; that man, made of the very dust of the earth, communes with the Creator through the elements of his own body. This something outside of man, this Dominating Power of the universe, has been designated by various names-- God, Creator, Nature, The Elements, The Thinking Part, and The Genius of the Divide. This study of the novel is primarily a search for the ways in which the people of America, the pioneers who have settled this vast expanse of land, have interpreted the challenge given to mankind. This summary will be given under the following heads:

1. Man's dependence upon the soil.
2. The call of the soil.
3. Man's unity with the soil.
4. Phases in the struggle for mastery of the soil.
5. Nationality and its relationship to the soil.
6. The soil as a teacher of mankind.

Man's Dependence Upon the Soil

Man's whole scheme of progress is dependent upon the ease with which he can wrest sustenance from the earth. In The Great Meadow, Elizabeth Roberts records how the white man was killed by the Indians when he went outside his stockade to make fields. She tells how Kentucky was settled by pioneers who were searching for a more fertile soil. American Beauty recalls that the New Englander found the soil rocky and barren; so he migrated to richer lands or turned to commerce or fishing for a livelihood. Per Hansa, the Norwegian, planted his potatoes on his Dakota kingdom before building his house; and in Red Rust, Matt Swenson's mother wore an anxious face until crops had been planted. These 'Novels of the Soil' are filled with the tragedies of the pioneer when the soil for some cause withheld its bounty.

The Call of the Soil

In a number of these novels mention has been made of 'the call of the soil.' Nature speaks a various language, and there are those who seem to have no capacity to hear or understand. Such characters as Dorinda Oakley, Antonia Shimerda, Alexandra Bergson, Selina De Jong, and Matt Swenson, hear the call of the soil. To them, excessive toil is not drudgery, for in it they find fulfillment. Alexandra's house is the big out-of-doors, and it is in the soil that she expresses herself best. Selina is feeding Chicago's children and educating Dirk as well. Dorinda is filling a void in an otherwise desolate life--the land will not make her suffer; she can depend upon the soil. Antonia

loves her trees as if they were people, and on the farm her children can grow up tall and strong like them. Matt Swenson spent long hours producing rust proof wheat, and he said it was not work but play. Thus, it seems that some people are soil-minded.

But again, there are those who are slaves to the soil, held captive by necessity. Dorinda Oakley's father has the land on his back, and it is driving him. Alexandra's brother, Oscar, works like an insect--he is tied to the plow with no personality apart from it. Pervus De Jong dies a martyr to truck-gardening because he had no judgment, no power of mastery over the soil. Perhaps these are the people of whom it is said, "they are not cut out for farmers, and so the country goes against them." #

Then there are those like Martin Gare who love the land, but alas, something else within them calls for expression. Martin wants to make things with his hands--his dream is to build a house. And again, there are the Hamlin Garlands who can see the beauty of waving grain and sense the fragrance of new mown hay; but the joy and inspiration depart when they must labor to produce it. The great call for Garland is in the field of books and literature, in the wild mountain scenery, or in the picturesque habitation of the Indian. There are men like True Baldwin who rebel at picking rocks from a New England hillside. They find the city a better place to make money. ^{Let,} True Baldwin and Jim Burden, and those of kindred spirit, find the country a

Where citations have previously been indexed, they will not again be listed in the footnotes.

satisfactory place to end their way.

It is not surprising to find in this study evidences of the fact that those who hear the call of the soil, who derive an inspiration from it, are the successful farmers. Willa Cather voices this bit of philosophy through one of her characters- "We come and go, but the land is always here, and the people who love it, and understand it, are the people who own it--for a little while."

Man's Unity With the Soil

History tells us that primitive man was superstitious, that mythology is his attempt to explain those things of the universe which were not readily discernable. This study of the modern novel reveals the fact that man is still, in many instances, groping his way toward a knowledge of the soil in a kind of superstitious awe.

A number of these novels tend to prove that there is unity between the nature of man and the soil. The novels of Canadian background show that in the cold, barren North, man is at low ebb both physically and spiritually. What he eats and wears occupies his time and consumes his energy. One of the characters in Wild Geese, in describing the people of the far north says- "And the human beings are like totems--figures of wood with mysterious legends upon them that you can never make out. The austerity of nature reduces the outward expression in life, simply, I think, because there is not such an abundance of natural objects for the spirit to react to. We are, after all, only the mirror of our environment. Life here at Oeland, even, may seem a negation, but it's only the reflection from so few exterior natural objects that it has the semblance of negation. These people are thrown

inward upon themselves, their passion stored up; they are intensified figures of life with no outward expression-- no releasing gesture." 1

By way of contrast the reader turns to the South, for there, the fever and the heat reduce man's capacity for a higher plane of living. The white man has made his escape through the toil of the Negro just as Caleb Gare has escaped the drudgery while his family slaved. In Elizabeth Roberts' The Time of Man, the reader gets a glimpse of the "poor white" of the South, who is little above the Negro in general intelligence. Ellen Chesser was told that rocks grow. Ellen declared that she had never seen 'em a-growin', but her father assured her that there would be more rocks to pick up next year on the very ground they were then clearing.

In Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground, Dorinda Oakley is conscious of this unity- "While she stood there she was visited by a swift perception, which was less a thought than a feeling, and less a feeling than an intuitive recognition, that she and her parents were products of the soil as veritably as were the scant crops and the exuberant broomsedge. Had not the land entered into their very souls and shaped their moods into permanent or impermanent forms? Less a thought than a feeling." 2

1 Ostenso, Wild Geese, pp. 105-106.

2 Glasgow, Barren Ground, p. 125.

Phases in the Struggle for Mastery of the Soil

The pioneers of America have contended with fever, and pestilence, and drought, and blizzard, and tornado; and many have considered these things God's visitation upon a sinful people. They are, at least, important phases in the struggle for mastery of the soil.

The scientific approach to farming is comparatively recent. Ellen Glasgow, in Barren Ground, says that methods considered modern in the benighted 1890's had not yet penetrated to the thinly settled parts of Virginia. Dorinda Oakley in this story, reclaims her father's barren acres by studying scientific methods of farming. Selina De Jong, in So Big, is successful where her husband fails, in part, at least, because she sent to Chicago for a book on truck-gardening. In Red Rust, Matt Swenson applies a few of Darwin's principles of plant selection and cross-fertilization and produces the rust-proof, beardless wheat. In Edna Ferber's American Beauty, Orange Oakes Olszak finds a way to make the worn out New England farms pay. He resorts to modern machinery and scientific farming. State Fair, the last novel of the series, gives the reader a glimpse of a well regulated farm. Little is said of scientific management; nothing need be said, for Abel Frakes, in this novel, is a farmer among farmers.

Women had an outstanding part in the shaping of rural America. They have had vision and have borne with fortitude their part of the drudgery of farm life. While they have not themselves been deserters, they have planned something besides farm life for their children. Selina De Jong gives herself un-

sparingly to the soil, but she does not wish to give her son. Dirk is not to be a truck farmer and go to the hay-market. She would gladly send him to an agricultural college, but to have him follow in the footsteps of his Dutch ancestors, no, never! In Herbert Quick's The Hawkeye, Fremont McConkey's mother makes untold sacrifices that her son may be something more than 'just a farmer.' In Willa Cather's O Pioneers, Alexandra Bergson gives the best years of her life to the farm her father had wrested from the Nebraska wilderness, while she sends her younger brother, Emil, to college. He is not to be tied to the plow as her older brothers had been. And so, with this encouragement, it is no wonder that the second generation of pioneers drifted toward the towns and cities. Nor is it strange, that, in a few years after this, the cry arose, "back to the farm."

Nationality and its Relationship to the Soil

In the twenty-one novels reviewed, twelve different nationalities are represented. Their attitudes toward the soil as expressed in modern fiction will be briefly surveyed.

In American Beauty, Edna Ferber gives the reader a glimpse of the American Indian. There is no indication that Old Chief Waramaug and his tribe have any reverence for the fertile meadows of the Housatonic valley, which they sold to Captain Oorange Oakes and his English friends. They went through the ancient Indian ceremony of turf-and-twig, the money and trinkets were given over, and the Red man with drew from these rich hunting grounds. It is the hunting grounds, and not the soil, as such,

that the Indian prizes.

Later Hamlin Garland describes the Indians after they have been removed to the western reservations. By this time their spirit is broken; not because the white man is tilling their soil, but because the buffalo is disappearing from the prairies, the fish from the rivers.

American Beauty also gives an interpretation of the Puritans of New England. Edna Ferber says that they were not farmers at all, these early settlers and their offspring. They had, she says, a practical and almost Teutonic-ambition for trade and enterprise. She tells how the enterprising drift away to the cities or to the more fertile land of Ohio and Texas, leaving behind the incompetent, the sick, and the old. The stay-at-home brothers till the rocky fields, and the spinster sisters sit by the fire and spin, and the old people begin to fill the cemeteries. "Then the landscape settled down into the rigor of death. Only the orchards persisted in the spring.... and the old stone fences, erected in sweat and blood; and the ancient houses, neglected, stricken, gray. They took on the color of the land itself, and the land settled down, grimly content, and folded its drab garments upon its stony bosom, for it had had revenge upon a people who had taken it without love." 3

In considering the foreign immigrant, many of these novels have mentioned the "Old World" love of land. After telling the reader why the Puritan of New England did not succeed as a farmer,

3 Ferber, American Beauty, p. 65.

Edna Ferber goes on to say---"Now, more and more, into this dessicated community--into this unvital region with its manless households--came these foreign people in whom the blood of many countries combined to make the Slav. Blood of the Hungarians was in them, of the Austrian too, perhaps, of the Saracen, of the Pole, the Russian, the Bohemian. They came to this new country eager, humble, worshiping the dirt they plowed, the furrows into which they sowed the seed. They loved the land with the ardor of born farmers who came from a country where land has always been scarce and precious." 4

The Poles, who made the Connecticut Valley blossom, are described as farmers who work laboriously. They perform by hand what modern machinery could have done in one tenth the time. Long hours of labor mean nothing to them, for they are serving the land. The women and children also work in the fields. These Poles live on cabbage, potatoes, and salt pork, which they raise. Their money goes into the land, or back to Poland. They begrudge the wage of hired help, or perhaps they hate to have their beloved land tended by another.

In O Pioneers, Willa Cather gives the attitude of a Nebraska Swedish farmer in these words, "John Bergson had the Old World belief that land, in itself is desirable. But this land was an enigma. It was like a horse that no one knows how to break to harness, that runs wild and kicks things to pieces. He had an idea that no one understood how to farm it properly, and this he

4 Ibid., p. 88.

had often discussed...." However, John Bergson's dying request was that his children should keep the land.

My Antonia is the story of a Bohemian family who came to Nebraska to get 'much lands for their boys and much husbands for their girls.' Antonia works just like her brother, Ambrosch. "School is all right for little boys," says Antonia, "I help make this land one good farm" Willa Cather explains that the Pennsylvanian or Virginian, no matter in what straits, never permits his daughters to go out into service; that unless they can teach a country school, they sit at home in poverty. But the Bohemian and Scandinavian girls not only work like men in the fields, but they go out into service and send home their hard earned dollars to pay for machinery and live stock or perhaps to help pay off the mortgage.

In So Big, Edna Ferber says that the phlegmatic Dutch-American truck farmers were high priests consecrated to the service of the divinity, Earth. Klaas Pool toils like a slave in the fields and barns. Maartje's day is a treadmill of cooking, scrubbing, washing, and mending, beginning at four in the summer and five in winter. Pervus De Jong protests when his wife goes to the field. "De Jong women folk they never work in the fields. Not even in Holland. Not my mother or my grandmother. It isn't for women."

In Vandemark's Folly, the Norwegian, Magnus Thorkelson, said that forty acres 'bane pretty big farm in Norway', and that his father raised ten children on twenty acres. Rolvaag has given the characteristics of the Norwegian immigrant in Giants

in the Earth. Per Hansa has the 'Old World' love of land. No day is long enough for him to accomplish all he wished to do on the farm that is to him a kingdom. A thrill of joy surges over him when he plows his first furrow; and when he prepares to sow wheat, he feels that the greatest moment of his life has come. Beret, his wife, at times works in the field.

In Maria Chapdelaine, the French Canadian farmer's passion is for the clearing, and not for the tilling of the soil. However, Madame Chapdelaine praises farm life--"There is no better life than the life of a farmer who has good health and owes no debts. He is a free man, has no boss, owns his beasts, works for his own profit.... The finest life there is!" And again, in the same story these words show respect for the soil-- "To the countryman, all things touching the soil which gives him bread, and the alternate seasons which lull the earth to sleep and awaken it to life, are of such moment that one may speak of them even in the presence of death with no disrespect. "

In Wild Geese, Mark Jordan, one of the characters in the story, describes the Icелander's attitude toward the soil--"I've made trips around Yellow Post since I've been here, and I haven't talked with a single farmer who wasn't looking forward to the time when he wouldn't have a grain of any kind in his bins if he didn't rake and scrape for all he's worth now. They seem to have no confidence in the soil--no confidence in anything save their own labor." 5

German thrift is indicated in this quotation from Ellen Glasgow's Barren Ground -- "Spring after spring, the cultivated ground appeared to shrink into the "old fields" where scrub pine or oak succeeded broomsedge and sassafras as inevitably as autumn slipped into winter. Now and then a new start would be made. Some thrifty settler, a German Catholic, perhaps, who was trying his fortunes in a staunch Protestant community, would buy a mortgaged farm for a dollar an acre, and begin to experiment with suspicious, strange-smelling fertilizers...." 6

Julia Peterkin's Black April describes a primitive people with whom superstition reigns supreme. Trees have a spirit the same as do men. God made them to stand up after they die; so they should never be cut down. The boll-weevil is sent by Providence; therefore, all but the most daring of the Negroes know better than to poison it. Root plants sown in a waxing moon will all go to rank tops, and a wrong moon will set the hair in a hog's skin so that no knife on earth can move it. Meat killed on a waning moon will dry up to nothing, no matter how one cooks it.

The Scotch, the last of the list, may be styled intensive farmers. They have a scorn of American land exhaustion. According to Margaret Wilson, author of The Able McLaughlins, the Scotch attribute their crop failures to lack of scientific knowledge of the soil rather than to any lack of farm legislation. John McLaughlin is said to love his land as a blind and passion-

6 Glasgow, Barren Ground, pp. 4-5.

ate lover. The McLaughlins work in their fields until they stagger. "To go to supper while yet one could straighten up without a sharp pain in his back would have been laziness." 7 John McLaughlin thought that a man who left off tilling his land to dig gold out of it was a poor shiftless creature.

The Soil as a Teacher of Mankind

Selina De Jong sometimes thought that perhaps it would have been better for Dirk to have stayed on the farm where he might have found time to dream; then other thoughts crowded upon her-- "I suppose the day is past when the genius came from the farm. Machinery has cut into his dreams. He used to sit for hours on the wagon seat, the reins slack in his hands while the horses plodded into town. Now he whizzes by in a jitney. Patent binders, ploughs, reapers--he's a mechanic. He hasn't time to dream. I guess if Lincoln had lived today he'd have split his rails to the tune of a humming, snarling, patent woodcutter, and in the evening he'd have whirled into town to get his books at the public library, and he'd have read them under the glare of the electric light bulb instead of lying flat in front of the flickering wood fire.... Well...." 8

Hamlin Garland feels that the prairie left some worthwhile pictures in his memory, for he says, "All the charm and mystery of that prairie world come back to me, and I ache with an illogical desire to recover it, and hold it, and preserve it in some

7 Wilson, The Able McLaughlins, p. 173.

8 Ferber, So Big, pp. 296-297.

form for my children. --It seems an injustice that they should miss it.... "

In Vandemark's Folly, Herbert Quick expresses his feelings about the Iowa prairie-- "We went through some hardships, we suffered some ills to be pioneers in Iowa; but I would rather have my grandsons see what I saw and feel what I felt in the conquest of these prairies, than to get up by their radiators, step into their baths, whirl themselves away in their cars, and go to universities." And again, Quick has Jacobus Vandemark say, "The prairies took me, an ignorant, orphaned canal hand, and made me something much better. How much better is not for me to say."

When an interviewer asked Herbert Quick what he considered the lesson of the great Midwest, he replied: "The great lesson of the Midwest lies in its proof that all civilized humanity needs to build up a great society is free access to land by free men and women; and its future will be joyful or sad, as it solves the problem of giving men in a settled and civilized community the same liberty they had when land was free; joyful if it solves this problem, sad if it fails in the solution. But this is the problem of the ages for all peoples." 9

Willa Cather believes that the soil teaches beautiful lessons, for she says of Alexandra Bergson-- "Her mind was a white book, with clear writing about weather, and beasts, and growing things. Not many people would have cared to read it; only a happy few."

9 Holmes, "Herbert Quick- Bard of the Great Midwest," THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT. P. 13. July 1, 1922.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the writer wishes to say that this is not an exhaustive survey of the 'Novel of the Soil'. While it is based upon twenty-one novels covering a twenty year period, it is only fair to admit, that forty novels over a longer period would have been much better. An interesting field awaits the student who cares to survey the world's fiction in search of "The Spirit of the Soil." A number of novels, which carry the study into the fields of other lands, are listed, as an appendix to this study.

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