LOUIS BROMFIELD: NOVELIST AS FARMER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF

ENGLISH AND THE GRADUATE COUNCIL OF THE KANSAS STATE

TEACHERS COLLEGE OF EMPORIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

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May 1959

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PREFACE

Louis Bromfield was one of the most successful of our contemporary American writers, a man who not only achieved success financially from his writings, but also won the applause of the reading public in America and abroad for his fiction. Winning the confidence of foreign countries with his sympathy and understanding, he earned recognition as an authority on current economic and political problems; and, still more important, he became a leader in American agriculture, which at the time was floundering in a wilderness of uncertainty.

This thesis about Louis Bromfield will be presented in eight chapters. The first will be a summary account of his life and writings. Following that, each part will be limited to a discussion of one particular phase of Bromfield's interest in and contribution to American agriculture. The subsequent six chapters will consist of:

CHAPTER II. Books about Agriculture

CHAPTER III. Attitude towards Farm People

CHAPTER IV. Understanding of the Physical Conditions of Farm Lands

CHAPTER V. Attitude towards the Natural Elements

CHAPTER VI. Attitude towards the Immediate Social and Political Aspects of Farm Problems

CHAPTER VII. Sympathy Toward Plant and Animal Life

At the conclusion of these chapters, Chapter VIII will be a brief summary and an appraisal of this unusual individual.

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[1] "The Wheel of Earth," Book Review Digest, Vol. 54, August, 1958, p. 299.

CHAPTER I

LOUIS BROMFIELD

One of the best of recent books is Helga Sandburg's The Wheel of Earth, in which the heroine, a Kentucky hill girl, finds contentment and usefulness by returning to the little farm that she had learned to love as a child.[1] This servitude to the earth, born of an earlier love of the earth with which many people make their peace, is "The Wheel of Earth" temperament in human nature that is as old as recorded history. The past is a procession of famous people, with such characters as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and President Eisenhower leaving the good earth to seek social, economic, and political success in urban centers, only to return to their first love. Such a cycle of events is definitely the true story of Louis Bromfield. It is, therefore, necessary that the essential facts of his "Wheel of Earth" life be studied in order to understand his writings and his career.

Louis Bromfield was born in Mansfield, Ohio, on December 27, 1896. The Mansfield community at the end of the nineteenth century was at the close of its pioneer,

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[1] "The Wheel of Earth," Book Review Digest, Vol. 54, August, 1958, p. 299.

agricultural phase, which Bromfield learned to love, and was just beginning to enter the period of industrial development, with its factories and slums, which he learned to hate. Bromfield's father, Charles Bromfield, was a rather rag-tag end of a long line of pioneer Ohio farmers. Unsuccessful as a business man, he raised his family on "enough--but never a plenty." He was a handsome man, gentle and simple, with a charm and honesty that won many friends--characteristics that were handed, package and wrapping, to Louis. Because Charles Bromfield's life influenced and molded his son's life, Louis made frequent references in regard to his father; and these are highly pertinent to Louis's career and life. In one of his books he proudly states, "My father . . . was a simple and friendly man."[2] Another time he writes, "Charley Bromfield was a kindly man who was a bad politician because he didn't pretend to like people; he really liked them."[3] Again, Bromfield quoted his father as saying:

> The man who has set money as his only goal and failed is perhaps the bitterest and most perverted of all specimens of humanity--and the greatest of all fools.[4]

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[2]Louis Bromfield, Animals and Other People. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955, p. 50.

[3]Louis Bromfield, Pleasant Valley. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945, p. 3.

[4]Bromfield, Animals and Other People, p. 53.

> My father was always a little "teched";[5] he was improvident and dreamy and never really succeeded at anything in terms of money and acquisitions; but, until after middle age, when he left the small town and country life for the city, he had a happy, rich and satisfactory life. . . . When he died he left me in money only debts, but in reality he left me the greatest fortune a man can leave his children--a good and rich and satisfactory way of living, in which all animals and all nature provided the very foundation.[6]

There were two chains of events in Louis's associations with his father that fashioned the patterns of his career. The first of these was that, as he went with his father on business trips all around Mansfield, he saw the horrible plight and living conditions in the city's slums--conditions that the bosses and industrialists did nothing to improve. The things that young Louis observed are well described by him in The Farm:

> On the heels of my father I caught glimpses of men going out of doors and windows in all directions, while in the middle of the dining-room there were a dozen or more swarthy men of all ages wolfing soup with bread floating in it from a large bowl placed in the middle of the table. Each man had a huge ladle that he dipped into the soup, which was sucked up with loud, animal like noises. The men had just returned from the mills and were perspired and dirty; the stench in the room was nauseating. I never forgot the scene, although at

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[5] "Teched" is an idiomatic expression Bromfield frequently used to describe someone who had a deep love of soil, animals, and people.

[6] Bromfield, Animals and Other People, p. 56.

the time I, a ten-year-old boy could not realize fully what I had observed.[7]

Bromfield's father, coming from generations of farmers, could never understand how business men could treat other human beings as no good farmer would ever treat his animals. It was no wonder that Charles Bromfield could never be a successful business man in that environment, or that his son could never forget it.

The second chain of events that links young Bromfield's life to his father's was the period spent on his Grandfather Coulter's farm. When Louis was seventeen, the Bromfield family moved to this farm, which had been the family home of his mother's family for generations. Bromfield's father, however, was no more successful as a farmer than he had been as a business man. He failed partly because he was too impractical, too visionary, and too generous; partly because the land had become impoverished by improper cropping and the consequent erosion; and partly because of the economic restrictions and pressures on all farming enterprises in the early years of the twentieth century. The Bromfield family was virtually forced by these circumstances to leave the old family farm and return to Mansfield. This was a bitter and a very frustrating experience to Bromfield, who

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[7]Louis Bromfield, The Farm. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933, p. 155.

had developed a fierce pride in his ancestors. They had been successful pioneers and prosperous farmers. Louis was wise enough to know that there were fundamental technical and economic problems that had caused the present dilemma in the Bromfields' efforts to farm. But he was too young to analyze them, and neither could the leaders of those days. In his own words, Bromfield stated these facts thus:

> In my boyhood in our rich county there were farms which were already out of circulation through erosion or greedy farming. We [the Bromfields] always had two or three of these farms at a time and my father's efforts to restore them were primitive in comparison with what can be done in these times. At that time there were no county agents and few agricultural bulletins and the efforts and information of the Soil Conservation Service were primitive or non-existent.[8]

So, when Louis returned to Mansfield to continue his education and seek his fortune, he carried with him the love of the soil and the determination to discover the reasons for the failure of the Bromfields and their lands. It took years of travel and study, a successful career in another field, and financial good fortune before he learned these reasons; but eventually the "Wheel of Earth" rolled back to the land of Bromfield's ancestors to bring him, not only peace and contentment but also fame and fortune.

When young Bromfield was sixteen years old, the fortunes of the Bromfield family were indeed at low ebb,

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[8]Bromfield, Animals and Other People, p. 59.

and these adversities brought Louis to the darkest and most frustrated period of his entire life. He was then in his senior year at the Mansfield High School. Midway through the year he was virtually forced by the family's circumstances to secure a job to help support himself and the rest of the family. He was allowed to work part time on the city's newspaper to secure a credit in journalism and to earn additional revenue. The experience that he received from this cub reporting, done as a seventeen-year-old high school senior, was of value to him in later life. It also furnished him with incidents, characters, ideas, and determinations that were later revealed in his fiction. Given unrestricted assignments, he saw, at first hand, vice and poverty that he did not know existed. As a reporter he became personally acquainted with notorious criminals, politicians, and "madams." He discovered the evils of the slums as at no time he had ever understood them before. Learning the sordid side of humanity in the police courts, mortuaries, saloons, and brothels, he uncovered news too sinister and too indecent to print; in his own words those observations made it impossible for him ever to be shocked again.[9]

These experiences as a cub reporter, nevertheless, started young Bromfield in the field of writing, which he

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[9]Bromfield, The Farm, pp. 303-4.

discovered he loved. Thus, the two ruling forces of his future career were set into motion before he was eighteen, and the two were to swing back and forth like a pendulum to the end of his life: love of writing about people, love of land and all growing things.

The pendulum soon swung back to the farm. Disillusioned and heartsick with the industrial and slum life his work as a reporter had revealed to him, young Louis resigned his newspaper job, moved with his parents to Grandfather Coulter's farm, and in the fall of 1914 enrolled in Cornell University to study agriculture. He left Cornell, however, at the end of the first semester because his grandfather had fallen and had broken his hip. Having great respect for this grandparent, who had taught him how to be congenial, to make friends, and to love and respect the soil, Louis worked on the Coulter farm for eighteen months, during which time the grandfather died. In this period, Louis thought about his work and his future. Concluding that there was something economically unsound about the farming profession and that there was something basically wrong with the current farming practices and the soil itself, he decided to leave the farm. Years later he expressed his feelings in these words:

> I did not understand then what all those ruined and worn out farms and hundreds of others like them meant to the economy of the nation, nor did I speculate as to what became of that last tenant, moving to another

> dying farm or into the slums of an industrial city, or, worst of all, taking to the road with his family as an indigent tramp. I only knew that the desolation I saw was somehow evil and wicked.[10]

Although he resolutely determined to find out what these troubles were, he reasoned that he would only get into a rut by staying on the farm. So, once more the pendulum swung him back to writing. In September, 1916, he entered Columbia University to study journalism. The war fever of World War I was at its peak; before the academic year was over, the energetic, impulsive Bromfield joined the United States Army Ambulance Service, which had been organized at Paris to work with the French Army. Thus attached to the French Army, he spent most of the time close to the front through the bitterest and bloodiest part of the war. As a soldier in action, he learned to respect and to admire the French soldiers. His views in regard to the war may be summarized in one line of a letter that he wrote home early in September, 1917: "The farther one comes from the front line the more hate and meanness is exhibited."[11] One of Bromfield's most prized possessions was the Croix de Guerre

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[10] Ibid., p. 59.

[11] Letter addressed to his family and printed in The Mansfield News early in September, 1917.

presented to him by the French Government for his "bravery and service during the war."[12]

Young Bromfield's war experiences were of immense practical value to his career as a journalist, political economist, and fiction writer because he found out that he could easily make and hold friendships; and, because of his tolerance and thirst for knowledge, he uncovered the best in European customs and people. The pendulum swung back and forth many times during his experiences in England, Germany, and France, where he talked, walked, and worked with farm peasants and others who loved the soil. He was uncovering the trouble with the Coulter and Bromfield farms back in Ohio. Even after he was mustered out of military service in May, 1919, he stayed in France, where he learned to speak French fluently.[13] Late in 1919, however, young Bromfield wisely decided to come back to the United States. There was little chance for an ambitious young American to succeed in the field of writing and reporting in a foreign country; and, while he had plenty of ambition, he was short on money. The question he was faced with was returning to Mansfield,

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[12]Howard J. Ward, Louis Bromfield. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956, p. 4.

[13]Morrison Brown, Louis Bromfield and His Books. Fair Lawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957, quoting from John Carter, "A Middle Western Factory Town," the New York Times Book Review, March 30, 1924, pp. 25-26.

his home town, or proceeding to New York to reenter the newspaper profession. He chose to go back to New York for two reasons: first, he correctly surmised that New York was the nerve center in the United States for literary work and literary criticism; second, he anticipated he could not return to Mansfield without again falling under the domination of his mother, who was a very possessive type of woman.[14]

No biography of Bromfield would be complete without a brief study of his mother, Annette Coulter Bromfield. As he neared maturity, his personality clashed with hers and the ensuing rift was never entirely healed. His mother's main fault was over-possessiveness, a characteristic she displayed toward all of those she intimately loved. Although she encouraged her son to become a reporter and to choose a literary career, she actually wanted to dictate to him what he should report and what he should write, much as she had dictated to his sister Marie the choices of a music career and of a husband. Mrs. Bromfield, unlike her husband, was ambitious and eager to assume responsibilities. Louis was undoubtedly wise to escape definitely and finally from his mother's over-possessiveness. He did, after all, owe much of his talent and ability to his mother's training and foresight. Despite the fact that her own "passion for music was

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[14]Bromfield, The Farm, p. 344.

thwarted," Mother Bromfield cultivated the taste for it in her children, even to the point of having them become good friends with Louis and Bertha Siegfried, two German immigrants in Mansfield, who were skilled musicians.[15]

Still more important for young Bromfield was the fact that his mother made the finest of the world's literature available to her children. Bromfield pays tribute to her indirectly when, in The Farm, he enumerates these books. Early in life he remembered the Greek and Norse mythologies, Aesop's Fables, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Foxe's Book of Martyrs, the animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton and Jack London, and Plutarch's Lives. In his adolescent years he discovered the novels of Cooper, Scott, Stevenson, George Eliot, and Meredith. His favorite authors, though, were Dickens, Thackeray, Galsworthy, and Balzac. Of all the novels that he read, Vanity Fair remained his favorite; but there were parts of Cousin Betty, Great Expectations, Nicholas Nickleby, and The Forsyte Saga that became fixed in his memory as though they had been his own experiences.[16] Undoubtedly, because Dickens and Galsworthy wrote so vigorously of the social conditions of their day, Louis was also dreaming of writing about the social wrongs he had

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[15] Ibid., pp. 290-91.

[16] Ibid., pp. 292-94.

seen in the slums of Mansfield, Ohio. In all fairness to Mrs. Bromfield, it must be stated that it was she who saw to it that these "windows to the world" were on the bookshelves of the Bromfield home. Moreover, she filled her children with the ambition and enthusiasm to read the world's classics and to understand them.[17]

It can thus be seen how vitally important it was for Louis Bromfield that his mother nurtured an early interest in music, literature, and all other cultural arts, because he was destined to become renowned as a literary, dramatic, and music critic. Together with an energetic, inquiring, and tireless personality, he had the training in the fine arts that his mother had been able to provide.

It should be stated that Mrs. Bromfield's exaggerated possessiveness was probably the result of her own frustrations. She had had to stop her education at sixteen, when she was forced by the failing health of her mother to assume the responsibility of caring for the rather large family. From then on she appeared to be one of those people who collect responsibilities as easily as a shaggy dog collects cockleburs. In point of fact, she always managed to run a hospital and hotel for relatives;[18] the more remarkable,

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[17]Brown, op. cit., p. 13.

[18]Bromfield, The Farm, pp. 243-44.

therefore, that she was able to keep and cultivate her love for the cultural arts despite the other cares that she accepted.

When Louis Bromfield returned from France, he accepted a job as a reporter for the New York City News Service. Although he was only twenty-one, he was very mature for his years, had experience as a reporter, and held a distinguished record as a World War I veteran. In addition he was handsome, over six feet tall, ambitious, energetic, and possessed of an irresistible ability to make and keep friends. Immediately successful as a reporter, he climbed rapidly from better job to better position. Leaving the New York News Service for the Associated Press, he became in two years the night editor, covering the United States. He resigned this position to take a new one as foreign editor of Musical America. His mother's love of music was paying big dividends.[19]

As Bromfield progressed from one position to another, he enlarged his circle of friends and gained experience and knowledge. He never stopped working, nor did he hesitate to change jobs for his own advancement. In 1923 and 1924 he was employed as an assistant to a theatrical producer, Brock Pemberton. Becoming a dramatic and music critic for The

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[19]Ward, op. cit., p. 1.

Bookman in 1925, he wrote reviews of plays, ballets, and musical productions. He later assumed the position of advertising manager for the G. P. Putnam and Sons publishing house.[20]

These were indeed busy days for Bromfield; in addition to the demands of many important jobs, he was giving every spare minute to creative writing. He wrote and voluntarily destroyed three novels because he did not think they were good enough for publication. Of this period in Bromfield's career, his assistant at Putman's noted:

> He had time for everything: time to do his job as advertising manager of G. P. Putman's Sons, time for endless talks, long luncheons, nightly parties, theatres, books, people of all sorts, and--heaven knew when--time for writing novels.[21]

Also he found time for romance. By the very nature of his work he came in contact with the elite society of New York City; it was here that he met Mary Appleton Wood, a popular young debutante who came from a well-known New England family of established social standing. Mary Wood, with a will and a mind of her own, was happy and satisfied to marry outside her social group. After all, Louis Bromfield was handsome, popular, and successful.. Since both

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[20]Brown, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

[21]Frieda Inescort, "Louis Bromfield of Mansfield," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 10, April 14, 1934, p. 629.

aspired to be writers and both loved literature, the couple were naturally attracted to each other. United in marriage on October 16, 1921, they were immensely happy; and Mary Wood was always the one important woman in his life. Three daughters were born to them: Hope, Ellen, and Anne. Mary Wood Bromfield died in September, 1952.

After his marriage, Bromfield continued to work for Putman's. However, he had already made plans for writing the novel to be known as The Green Bay Tree. Because she, too, had literary tastes and ambitions, his young bride was able to give him constructive criticism and encouragement to finish the manuscript, and the necessary impetus to submit it to a publisher. While they both felt that The Green Bay Tree was a good work, they were careful not to build their hopes too high, because Bromfield had already learned, as a literary critic, that aspiring authors usually overrate their creations. Since the couple were almost afraid to read the criticisms, once the book was published, they were immensely surprised that the reception was almost unanimously favorable, with many of the best critics decidedly enthusiastic. John Carter made this comment in the New York Times:

> It must be said, first of all, that it is a good novel. It tells the story of interesting people. More than that, it gives to that story unity, and form.[22]

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[22]Brown, op. cit., p. 5.

Mark Sullivan, writing in McNaught's Monthly of April, 1924, was even more enthusiastic:

> ...with due respect to Mr. [Sinclair] Lewis, The Green Bay Tree goes deeper to the fundamental reasons for things than either Main Street or Babbitt.[23]

The novel appeared in the best-seller lists and remained there for months. Almost overnight Bromfield had become the most talked-about novelist in America. Seldom, if ever, has a first work been so well received. With one publication, he had established his literary reputation immediately and thoroughly.

Thus, the long and successful writing career of Louis Bromfield was launched. He was only twenty-seven when he produced his first novel; but, during the next thirty-two years of his life, he wrote thirty full-length books, seven parts of books in conjunction with other authors, twelve uncollected short stories, ninety biographies, book reviews, and magazine articles, besides bringing before the public a syndicated column for sixty newspapers, and giving from fifty to a hundred public talks every year.[24]

When the royalties from The Green Bay Tree began to filter in, Bromfield found himself financially independent

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[23] Ibid., p. 29.

[24] Mary Bromfield, "The Writer I Live With," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 186, August, 1950, pp. 77-8.

for the first time in his life. Determined now to devote his entire time to writing, he resigned from the Putman Company, bought a home on Long Island, and dedicated himself to drafting his second novel, Possession. It was as successful as the first; his reputation as an author was more definitely established, and his book sales continued to climb. Bromfield had decided by this time to write two more novels correlating social themes that he considered pertinent to the times. These four books would form a tetralogy which he planned to call Escape, the central theme of which was the escape of energetic and ambitious persons from stifling, smothering restrictions and customs, and from overbearing, domineering environments.[25] Some critics suggest that he developed this idea from John Galsworthy's The Forsyte Saga, which had been one of his favorites from the literary world.[26]

Before he finished the tetralogy, Bromfield took his wife and their young daughter to France on a vacation trip that he expected to last three or four months. The family, however, became so fascinated with the country that the holiday extended over the next fourteen years. There were

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[25]Louis Bromfield, Foreword in A Good Woman. New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1927.

[26]Brown, op. cit., pp. 45, 50.

several reasons for this protracted stay, one being that they discovered they could live cheaper in France. Although Bromfield was now financially independent, the Yankee thrift inherited from his forebears still persevered. Another reason that he gave for his life as an "expatriate" was that he was determined to portray social changes, social and economic faults, and injustices of American society. By living in France, he felt he could evaluate these problems more objectively[27] and have better opportunity to meet literary and talented people.[28]

Before he had lived in France a year, Bromfield published his third novel, Early Autumn, which won the coveted Pulitzer Prize. Although he was scarcely thirty years old, he had in three years written three novels, secured a tremendous reading public, become financially independent, and won the world famous Pulitzer Prize for the best novel of the year.

A year later, Bromfield published A Good Woman. This story, too, was popular and eagerly read by his followers; and this novel was the last of the tetralogy that Bromfield had planned to be known by the general title Escape.

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[27]Dilly Tante, Living Authors. New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1931, p. 55.

[28]Brown, op. cit., p. 53.

It would seem that such an over-all title as Escape might suggest a central theme or a moralist's idealism. But there was no such motif present in Bromfield's writings, except as it may have been reflected indirectly or developed in the reader's mind. Bromfield knew the conditions and social injustices that he wanted to bring to the reader's attention. He simply painted the pictures vividly, even though the pictures were often black and sordid and unconventional, then left the moralizing to the reader. He had analyzed very thoroughly some of the industrial and social customs of the times from which his fellow Americans should "escape." The 1920's were years, for instance, in which American women were rebelling against standards that were denying them the right to vote, to seek careers, to earn men's wages, and to acquire equal educational opportunities. These were the things that Lily Shane escaped from in The Green Bay Tree. She is portrayed as an intelligent young woman who secured a good education by sheer determination, guided her own career successfully, overcame personal handicaps, and through it all lived a serene and contented life. Also in the story, there is the background of the vicious slum conditions and unfair labor conditions of "Cyprus Hill," which is simply a name to camouflage the Mansfield, Ohio, that Bromfield knew so well. He was writing about social conditions that he had observed personally--actually

executing a good job of newspaper reporting through the medium of fiction; and American readers were reading it and liking it.[29]

The "escape" in Bromfield's second book, Possession, is more personal in nature. In this story Ellen Tolliver is a young woman with rather unusual music ability. Escaping from the possessiveness of a very determined mother, the selfishness of an overly ambitious music instructor, and a bigoted, selfish husband, she succeeds finally in becoming a talented pianist in her own right. Ellen Tolliver is without doubt a fictional portrait of Bromfield's own sister Marie, who had had unusual ability as a pianist, but who had never developed her natural ability as much as Bromfield thought she should have because she had been "possessed" too completely.[30]

The third book in the Escape series introduces perhaps the strongest character of all of Bromfield's novels--Olivia Pentland, the heroine of Early Autumn, the story that won Bromfield the Pulitzer Prize. A healthy, normal woman, intelligent and ambitious, Olivia had married into the staid and proud old Puritan family of Pentlands. Her husband was Anson Pentland, an insipid remnant of the once virile

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[29] Ibid., pp. 49-51.

[30] Ibid., p. 40.

Pentlands, who had become completely overwhelmed by the trivial affairs of life and with the urgency of completing his book entitled The Pentlands of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Anson is chronologically ten years older than Olivia. Physically he was much more than that, but mentally much younger.

Anson Pentland was concerned about Sybil, their daughter, because she had gone horseback riding with 39-year-old Michael O'Hara, a very successful modern business man and politician. Anson advised Olivia to accompany the couple to keep an eye on Sybil. This Olivia did and, for the reason that she was bored with the dreariness and drabness of the Pentland house, thrilled with the sheer joy and excitement of these trips. Anson apparently never once considered the fact that it was Olivia, not Sybil, who was of the same age and mental capacity as Michael. Michael fell deeply and desperately in love with Olivia, who was confronted with a deep struggle of emotions--the love of a strong, vigorous, manly man who was not afraid to tell her how much he loved and appreciated her, while she was married to a man who had sold his body and soul to the "Pentland Tradition" and whose only show of love and emotion toward his wife had been a hasty peck of a kiss each morning as he left for work. But Olivia was a noble woman of strong character; and, although she yearned for Michael's strong and vigorous love, she

finally turned her back on him and returned to the drabness of the Pentlands. Much like Isabel in Henry James' Portrait of a Lady, Olivia resolved to make the best of a bad situation.

She, notwithstanding, very subtly saw to it that Sybil eloped to marry her true lover. The elopement shocked the ostensible Puritan traditions of the old House of Pentlands. Since this story is full of dark old family-closet skeletons, the reader actually feels a little timid about all the little personal, intimate details; it is almost like treading sacrilegiously on graves in a cemetery. The novel reflects some of Bromfield's caustic thinking from observation of the current New England that he gained from his courtship with Mary Appleton Wood. He and his young bride lived during several summer seasons with his wife's family at Ipswich, Massachusetts, where the ever alert Bromfield gathered his impressions of a rather decadent and self righteous stratum of "Puritanic Society." Bromfield's theme of "escape" in this story relates the attempts of Olivia and her daughter Sybil to escape from the sham and pretense of New England Puritan Tradition when in reality the original thrift, ingenuity, and religious devotion of the Pilgrim fathers were no longer existent.

The final book of the Escape tetralogy is A Good Woman, published in 1927. Emma Downes is the "good woman"

of the story. She is "a good woman" in that she is a member of the church and its auxiliaries and of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She ruined her own home, however, with a domineering possessiveness and pity and self righteousness that drove her husband to self-imposed exile and obscurity--to Australia and another wife; that made her son a rather spineless character without ambition or willpower, and that forced her daughter-in-law into suicide. Touches of real literary artistry are outstanding in this book, because Bromfield creates a feeling of tenderness, understanding, and sympathy for all the characters. Expressing much the same themes that Ellen Glasgow did in her novels, Bromfield makes the reader realize that life can be very cruel and that often there was little one could do about fighting back.

In A Good Woman Bromfield had again created a novel that was well received and warmly praised. Typical of the critics' comments was the following:

> He [Bromfield] has the sense of life that all great story tellers must possess, and he has the ability to recreate and govern a life stream that is the supreme power of such men as Balzac and Tolstoy. . . . He writes of the real world, but his realism is neither flat, nor base, nor vulgar.[31]

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[31]Ben Ray Redman, Louis Bromfield and His Books. New York: G. P. Putman and Sons, 1929, p. 1.

Anyone who has studied the life of Louis Bromfield recognizes Emma Downes as Bromfield's own mother. In this story Bromfield exercised his imagination to show what would have happened if his mother had had a son who would have given in to her possessive passion, or had had a husband who was worthless, apathetic, and philandering. The action in this story is intense and dramatic.

After completing his Escape tetralogy, Bromfield turned his talents temporarily to some briefer writings, in which he also proved himself to be extremely adept. He wrote several short stories that originally were published in American magazines; then, owing to their popularity, later were published in book form. During 1925 he drafted a chapter that was included in Bobbed Hair, a book that received much publicity, since it was written in conjunction with nineteen other fairly well-known writers. Under similar circumstances he composed a chapter entitled "Expatriate--Vintage 1927," which was incorporated into the 1927 edition of Mirrors of the Year; and he wrote a chapter entitled "A Critique of Criticism" for the 1928 Mirrors of the Year. These short story efforts, somewhat unusual because of the collaboration with such authors as Grant Overton and Elmer Davis, proved that Bromfield was a talented short story writer. His stories were published by such magazines as Forum, McCall's, Harper's Bazaar, Century, Collier's, and

McClure's. During 1929 he gathered thirteen of his short stories in one book and published it under the name of Awake and Rehearse. This group included such titles as "Justice," "The Life of Vergie Winters," and "The Apothecary."[32]

There was a continual stream of short stories from Bromfield's pen for the rest of his life. A second collection was published in 1934 under the title Here Today and Gone Tomorrow. This group of four, printed originally in Cosmopolitan, consisted of "No. 55," "The Listener," "Fourteen Years After," and "Miss Mehaffy."[33]

A third book of short stories appeared in 1944 with the title The World We Live In. This was a collection of nine short stories, six of them relating to World War II. "The Pond" is a touching, emotional story of a farm boy who was killed in battle and the effect of his death on his mother and young wife back on the Dakota farm. "Death in Monte Carlo" relates the manner in which a wealthy woman loses all sense of human dignity in her greed for money. Another is "Up Ma Ferguson Way," a memorable account of a remarkable woman who could overcome personal tragedy and persecution and still live a happy, contented, and useful life.

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[32]Brown, op. cit., pp. 61-63.

[33]Ibid., pp. 74-75.

Bromfield's last book of short stories appeared in 1947. It bore the title Kenny and contained just three works --"Kenny," "Retread," and "The End of the Road." Twelve additional short stories remained uncollected at his death.

In the early 1930's Bromfield won the O. Henry Memorial Award for his short story writing. Later, he received many other short story citations both in America and France. He also cornered the Best Story Telling Award given by the Mutual Broadcasting Company. These coveted merits thoroughly appraise Bromfield's genius as a short story writer. Morrison Brown summarizes his capacity very well with these brief words:

> He [Bromfield] is indeed a very fine story teller; . . . all of the technique of good writing is in evidence and the interest factor is always high.[34]

While Bromfield was establishing his reputation as a short story writer and completing his Escape series of novels, his interest in soil and all growing things never lapsed. The Bromfields had not been in France long until they had taken a fifty-year lease on a plot of ground thirty-five miles north of Paris on the Nonette River near the little town of Senlis. The buildings were beautiful and well preserved, some dating back to the Roman Empire. On

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[34] Ibid., p. 104.

this tract Bromfield could harbor his pets unmolested and keep his "green thumb" ambitions growing. These pets were a purebred Boxer dog, "Rex," a tramp Scotty called "Dash," and a pet mongoose that he bought from a huge Pathan, who was abusing her. He took these opportunities seriously and gained the attention of France's agriculturalists by introducing some American plants, such as the Ponderosa tomato, the Hubbard squash, and hybrid dahlias. At one time he had more than three hundred and fifty varieties of flowers growing in his garden.[35] His French neighbors deeply appreciated his efforts in these enterprises; and he became an honorary member of the Workingmen's Gardens Association of France, which awarded him a diploma and a gold medal for his practical work in growing vegetables. Bromfield was very proud of these honors, for with them the Bromfield pride in agriculture was being redeemed. More and more he was discovering what was wrong with the Bromfield-Coulter farms back in Ohio.

The expatriate's home in Senlis also was converted into a stopping place and friendship center for famous intelligentsia from nearly everywhere. The Bromfields were soon brought into close fellowship with noted personalities like Gertrude Stein, Picasso, the Maharajah of Baroda, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Somerset Maugham, Edith Wharton, Edna

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[35] Ibid., p. 55.

Ferber, Ernest Hemingway, Lytton Strachey, Noel Coward, Gertrude Lawrence, James Joyce, and Hendrick Van Loon.[36] These associations opened doors of intimacies to the Bromfields all over the world, and the mounting income from the sales of Bromfield's novels made it possible to return these visits. Consequently, Bromfield, his wife, and their three daughters grew into world travelers. Visiting every place of interest to them, they saw bull-fights in Spain, attended harvest festivals at Sergovia, lived in a flat in London, went skiing in the Alps, and vacationed in Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Holland, the Dutch East Indies, and India. Wherever Bromfield wandered in the world, he was observing three things closely: human nature, political economy, and agriculture.[37]

The writing of novels, however, was still his career. In spite of his other activities, he was originating novels at the rate of one a year. Feeling that he had exhausted the social themes in his Escape series, he turned his attention to a new theme and a new style in The Strange Case of Annie Spragg. Each chapter is a complete episode. Beginning with a background story before Annie Spragg is born, episode after episode is told until her death many years later in

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[36] Ibid., pp. 55-57, 147.

[37] Ibid., pp. 6, 62.

Brince, Italy. Actually, this is a philosophical story of the religions of the world mixed up, as it often is, with sex. The novel was popular and sold well.

Twenty-Four Hours, published in 1930, is a story picturing and satirizing the different social strata in New York City. The action is centered around old Hector Champion and Savina Jerrold, two frustrated characters who, although definitely stationed in their respective social groups, should have married years before. Like The Strange Case of Annie Spragg, this story is told in the episode style, and was quite popular.

A totally different type of novel came from Bromfield's pen in 1933. Several times, since he had begun his literary career, the pendulum had swung back and forth between the two poles of interest in his life. While he had on several occasions introduced rural characters and settings into his short stories, he had never featured them in his long narratives.

The Bromfields had now lived in France for nine years, and it had been seventeen years since he left Grandfather Coulter's farm. The deep love and nostalgic feelings for all the Ohio farm life meant to him had now ripened and mellowed, and he was ready to express these affections in a literary way. His novel The Farm was the consequence and it was something new--new in style, in subject matter, and

in characters. It was new in style because it had no plot. It was new in subject matter because it was about Ohio farm life. It was new in characters because it was actually a story about the Bromfields and Coulters from the time the great-grandfathers had settled on their farms in Jeffersonian days. The characters are thinly camouflaged with fictitious names, but the careful reader knows almost at once that the "Willingdons" are the Bromfields and that "Johnny Willingdon" is Louis Bromfield himself. Bromfield dedicated the book to his daughters, Anne, Hope, and Ellen, so that "they would know what 'The Farm' and its farmers were like";[38] and, in that sense, it is a biographical and historical record. To the non-family reader, however, it is an excellent historical story of an American epoch in which integrity and idealism were truisms and "rugged individualism" was the rule, to be crowded out by crass commercialism and industry. Because the book lacked plot and any romantic scheme, Bromfield felt that it would not be popular. But his readers liked it and accepted it immediately. Book reviewer J. Donald Adams summed up the readers' reaction when he wrote, "The Farm is an honest book, a deeply felt book and a valuable record for this generation and for those which are to come."[39]

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[38]Bromfield, The Farm, p. v.

[39]J. Donald Duncan, "Mr. Bromfield's Family Chronicle," New York Times Book Review, August 20, 1933, p. 6.

This exceptional creation was listed among the best sellers for some time and always remained one of Bromfield's favorites from the long list of his own writings. Although generally catalogued among his fictional efforts, it is actually the first of six books that he was to write about the soil, farm people, plant life, and animals.

The pendulum was swinging faster now, but once more Bromfield turned to fiction. New adventures and new plots for stories were to be revealed to him when the family took a trip to India and the East Indies. Through a friendship with the Maharajah of Baroda in their home in Senlis, Bromfield had become interested in India. He liked India and its people; and following three subsequent visits to that country, he learned to understand native problems and ambitions. He gathered the settings and plots for two subsequent novels about India; yet, before he could set his ideas in writing, he struck off another novel, with an American setting and problems, that is of particular interest because it is partially biographical and casts the shadows of future events in the life of Bromfield himself.

The Man Who Had Everything, published in 1935, is the story of a dramatist who had become bored and weary with too much success. He feels that too often he acted and spoke only in sham and pretense just to pad and protect his own career. The Tom Ashford in the story thinks that,

on account of this, his own children are not growing up in a normal environment; and that, in a careful analysis, his whole life is vacant and purposeless. Because the pendulum of Bromfield's careers was soon to swing back to life at Malabar Farm in Ohio, the story partially casts a horoscope to his own future. Although the work was not very successful, it is interesting in its predictions of future events.

The novel that Bromfield had contemplated during his visits to India and begun in 1933 was finished and published in 1937. Because it was a well-written story, included a new setting of immediate temporal importance, and registered tense dramatic quality, The Rains Came became immensely popular with much of the world. It was soon translated into Italian, Swedish, Slovak, Hungarian, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Rumanian, French, Polish, Czech, Spanish, Dutch, Hebrew, German, and Hindu. More than 400,000 copies of the German translation alone were rapidly sold. The book received high praise from the literary critics of all of these countries.[40] Bromfield himself considered The Rains Came his greatest novel.[41]

This story is a long narrative in four parts, any one of which would meet the requirements for a short novel.

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[40] Brown, op. cit., p. 149.

[41] Ibid., p. 81.

There are a great many characters and several plots and subplots that at times are interwoven. The characters are a strange mixture of Hindu and Moslem, Christian and atheist, rich and poor, Indian, English, and American. Miss McDaid, the absolutely dependable nurse, is Scottish; Harry Bower is a big, stout, handsome Swiss; and Maria Lishinskia is a Russian servant.

India is portrayed in a general way; and the great contrasts of High and Low Caste, the Untouchables, rich and poor, famine and plenty, drought and devastating floods are vividly described. Here is a story in which the best and noblest in human nature seem swallowed up by evil, pestilence, and catastrophe. The reader is made to feel, however, that from all her problems, India is progressing towards the capacity for self-sufficiency and self-government. Certainly The Rains Came is a novel of purpose in the same category with Uncle Tom's Cabin and Grapes of Wrath, and the Indian people hailed it as "the only novel written about Modern India by a top-rank American author, with all the sympathy of an Indian."[42] The book influenced and prepared the world for the political independence India was to receive a few years later.

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[42]Maharajah and the Maharanee of Baroda, and Braj Kishan Koul Agyani, as quoted by Morrison Brown, Louis Bromfield and His Books, p. 87.

A sequel to The Rains Came appeared in 1940. Although A Night in Bombay also had its setting in India, it was never so successful as The Rains Came, partly because it was not as well written, partly because the content was not so good, and partly because all the pressures of World War II were in motion.

There were two events of tremendous importance that happened to Bromfield between the intervening publishing dates of his two Indian books. The first was the fruition of his life-long dream to go back to the farms of his youth to prove that the "idealism and integrity and rugged individualism" of his forebears could still prosper in modern times. The decision to return to Mansfield was hurried by the confusion and turmoil in Europe that preceded the onrushing World War II. Sending his wife and children on ahead to America, he closed out the home on the banks of the Nonette in France and headed for Mansfield. Here he bought a 1,000 acre tract of land near his boyhood home--a farm to become world famous as "Malabar Farm," a farm that was to inspire Bromfield to write five more great books about agriculture, animal, and plant life.[43]

The pattern of his career changed at this time. The pendulum continued to swing between his love of fiction

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[43]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 3.

writing and his love of the farm and all growing life. Before this return to the Ohio farm land, the stress or heavy beat of the pendulum had been back to his creative fiction; now the stress beat was on Malabar Farm and its problems. He created eight more fiction books after this time, including three or four of his best. They appear less frequently, however, because of the pressure of the job of farming at Malabar, and his concentration on serious writing about political science and modern farm problems. Besides his books on these subjects, his magazine and newspaper articles appeared in such nationally known magazines as Reader's Digest, the New Yorker, House and Garden, Recreation, Sports Afield, Theater Arts, the Saturday Review, the Rotarian, Scholastic, Saturday Evening Post, Life, Cosmopolitan, Natural History, and Esquire. Bromfield's fictional creations continued to slow down until 1951, when they ceased altogether.

The second important event came in 1939, when he established himself as an authority in the field of political economy by surprising everyone with the publishing of England, a Dying Oligarchy. This was a long pamphlet exposing the dangerous road Neville Chamberlain and a certain group of his followers were taking in dealing with Adolph Hitler and prophesying that Japan would enter the oncoming war as soon as she thought it was expedient. Although the

pamphlet was highly controversial at the time, subsequent events proved that Bromfield was absolutely right in contending that Chamberlain was selling Western Civilization to Hitler and Mussolini, and that Japan would attack the United States when she chose to.

Bromfield wrote two more books of this serious nature, A Few Brass Tacks and A New Pattern for a Tired World.

A Few Brass Tacks was published in 1946. In this treatise Bromfield verbially spanked the Roosevelt-Truman administrations for some of their internal policies. He thought the administrations were confusing money with wealth; that, by creating money artificially, they were causing inflation, and inflation was destroying rather than making wealth.

Another error of these administrations, according to Bromfield's philosophy, was glorifying and encouraging the mechanical and routine jobs of industrial centers in which the individual loses his creativeness and sense of personal dignity and happiness--the rugged individualism of his pioneer forefathers.

The third feature that Bromfield criticized was the administration's theory of curing the nation's agricultural problems with a program of scarcity instead of a program of plenty. He thought the government was subsidizing the poor farmer instead of encouraging the good one.

It is now generally agreed that Bromfield was right in his first two premises and partially right in the last one. Present agricultural laws in a way still subsidize the poor farmer; but, through intelligent guidance of the vast soil conservation programs, the better farmers are being encouraged to do soil conservation projects. So far Bromfield has missed his guess that the government's ideas of scarcity would bring about food shortages and economic panic. However, he simply miscalculated, largely because the American farmers quickly adopted and put into operation many of the farm practices that Bromfield himself advocated, such as: summer fallowing; growing grasses, sweet clover, and alfalfa to rebuild soil fertility; and the use of improved farm implements. The program of scarcity had become almost miraculously a program of plenty. Actually the program backfired on the administrations. It did not do what its advocates intended or what they thought it would do. In this respect Bromfield was right in his criticism.[44] His reporter's nose for facts, his wide association with informed friends, his experiences in his many travels, and his energetic, alert mind had made him an authority in political matters as evidenced by such comments as: "This

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[44]John Williams, "Big Riders on the Farm Gravy Train," Life, Vol. 46, March 23, 1959, pp. 26-29.

is a first-rate book, written in the old-fashioned spirit of inquiry, and by a good man."[45]

A New Pattern for a Tired World was his next venture into the field of political science. In this book, written in 1954, just two years before his death and a little over a year after the death of his beloved wife Mary, he is not so vindictive. Perhaps the vicissitudes of life had mellowed his thinking. A New Pattern for a Tired World is actually a record of his thinking and an attempt to make his readers think; an approach of "I wonder if we are right, and it seems to me this may be better," instead of "We're wrong. Let's change it." His thinking is that the unrest in the world today is a world-wide awakening of illiterate, down-trodden races and nations who are demanding personal and political dignity, and a share of the world's wealth and modern conveniences. He argues that we are making enemies of these people by supplying European nations with political and economic aid when those nations refuse to give up colonialism, which denies these people the independence and dignity they so much admire in the United States. He also maintains that the nations of the world, as a whole, are not yet ready for the ideal behind the United Nations. While

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[45]William S. White, New York Times Book Review, May 23, 1954, p. 3.

not advocating the abandonment of the United Nations, he suggests that the world could solve its economic problems by organizing four "blocks" of natural groups--groups with natural geographic, cultural, educational, and economic problems. These spheres of cooperative endeavor probably would be (1) North and South America, (2) Russia, China, and Japan, (3) India, Pakistan, and the rest of Asia, and (4) Western Europe with some of what is now "iron curtain" European country.

> A start in this direction of this goal built on an economic base would give the world something to look toward with hope, and might finally result in a world union. Communism, already proved a failure, would die a natural death as the plan would develop, bringing along with it the fruits of a dynamic capitalism such as that which has brought prosperity to the United States. Peace might then be established on a permanent basis. It would at least be a positive approach to our problems rather than a negative one of containment of Communism, which, even if successful, leads nowhere.[46]

We are still too close to the world situation to know how nearly Bromfield had the situation analyzed. Recent events, though, indicate that world thinking has at least gone part way with this pattern in the recent "free trade" agreements of the European nations, the alliance of Arab and African states, the Southeast Asia Pact, the alignment of China and Russia, and American attempts for economic conciliation and

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[46]Louis Bromfield, A New Pattern for a Tired World. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954, pp. 261-2.

consolidation with Canada, the South American nations, and the United States. There seems to be a slow but sure swing to Bromfield's New Pattern.[47] Bromfield had no fears of Communism, calmly maintaining that America had every right to have faith in her own ideals and that Communism would fall apart from the weights of its own faults.[48]

A New Pattern for a Tired World was translated into Hindu, German, French, and several other foreign languages, and has been carefully studied and debated. Undoubtedly it has molded and will continue to challenge the world's economic and political patterns.[49]

As busy as Bromfield was after he moved back to Malabar Farm in 1938--busy building his home and building the farm operations that would restore those eroded and worn out acres--, he continued to write fiction. There seemed to be no limit to the style of his writings or the variety of his themes. Wild Is the River was a new pattern in which many of the characters were wilder than the river. It is classed as a historical novel, although the historical part is not too authentic. Set in and around New Orleans, this romantic saga pictures the economic and political

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[47] Ibid., p. 260.

[48] Brown, op. cit., pp. 134-5.

[49] Ward, op. cit., p. 111.

turmoil and the resulting peculiarities of human nature in the "carpet-bagging" days at the close of the Civil War. Here is a story of violent crime, sin, and sex. One does not want to read it unless he knows the meaning of prostitutes, brothels, slatterns, harlots, patronesses, trollops, and "Madame La Lionne's establishments." The action of the story, written in 1941, is swift and explosive. Major Tom Bedloe, who loved women and sex above character and integrity, is a handsome specimen of male physique and attractiveness. The two strong characters are the innocent, vivacious, alert New England girl, Agnes Wicks; and the determined, patient Hector MacTavish, of Scottish ancestry, who had been dispossessed of his property by the carpet-baggers. The sincere romance of these two is a redeeming feature; the story was widely read, praised, and finally converted into a very popular movie production.

Until the Day Break appeared in 1942 in the midst of World War II. The plot concerns the underground activities of the loyal French patriots plus the Mata Hari activities of Roxie Dawn, an American girl originally from Indiana. The story was not popular in the United States because Americans generally were not proud of the performance of the French against the onrushing German armies. Bromfield found much more about the French to praise than his fellow countrymen were willing to accept.

In 1943 Bromfield had a new work ready for publication, the story of Mrs. Parkington, with its setting in the Park Avenue district of New York City. Mrs. Parkington's husband Gus had accumulated a fortune by "robber baron" methods that personified an age when men "believed that intelligence and honor could be bought at so much a pound," and fortunes were made by ruthlessly crushing everyone who got in the way. Mrs. Parkington is eighty-three years old as the story opens, and the action is told in retrospect. A woman of great patience and understanding, she lives to see her entire family debauched with inherited money, until the original family vitality again comes to life in the great granddaughter Janie, who falls in love and elopes with Ned Talbot. Their marriage is based on love and respect instead of on wealth and convenience. The novel was popular and a movie version of it was quite sensational.

One of the reasons for Bromfield's phenomenal success as a fiction writer was his ability to anticipate what the readers would like and to readjust his stories to the whims and fancies of the public. Because the public loved war stories during the stress of World War II, Bromfield wrote What Became of Anna Bolton in 1944. This was a melodramatic tale of an American woman, who at middle age had inherited a fortune. As an American expatriate in France, she was lonely, selfish, and frustrated until, fleeing ahead of the onrushing

Nazi armies, she was forced to face the hard facts of war. The plight of a child whose mother had been shot aroused her noblest instincts; then she discovered a joyous life and a good usage for her money by helping the child, the child's father, and other war refugees. The action of this story is swift and continuous, and the plot is fascinating and readable.

Three years elapsed before Bromfield's next fiction book appeared. During that period he wrote his famous farm book, Pleasant Valley, as well as A Few Brass Tacks and Kenny. Then, he gave recognition to the popularity of the "Western" craze by relating his one and only "Western," Colorado. Since it is a whopper of a tale, a reader is likely to receive a wrong impression of the yarn unless he understands that Bromfield intended it as a whimsical satire on Westerns. Morrison Brown states Bromfield's plan for this novel very well when he writes:

> Colorado is one of Bromfield's misunderstood books, according to the author. It was his intention to write a satire on "Westerns" and westerners. He was tired of hearing about a Western aristocracy from his friends in the west as well as other general hogwash concerning the development of the West. Bromfield called it a "story without social consciousness or self-consciousness." Through exaggeration of incident and character, Bromfield displayed the history of the Meaney family from the humble early days of P. J. Meaney through his rise to power in Silver City and then through the advance of his son Dick to Washington as the revered senator from Colorado.[50]

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[50] Brown, op. cit., p. 114.

Because Colorado is such a tall tale, it is simply an entertaining bit of literature; and that is exactly what Bromfield wanted.

There was a rash of "psychological" literature, too, that broke out about this time. Bromfield wrote a good brain developer in The Wild Country. Placed somewhere in the Blue Grass Region of Kentucky, the story relates the intricate, inquisitive, and interesting process of an adolescent boy Ronnie, who is growing to maturity on his grandfather's stock farm. Told in the first person, this narrative gives the reader the reactions of the boy as he learns the facts of life by caring for the livestock on the farm, by watching plant life as it grew, and by observing the antics of the neighbors and hired help as they did their courting and marrying. The boy's knowledge of these things and of himself continually expands as he gains more experiences until he finally reminisces:

> Between the Grand Tour--and all that had happened in the valley I had grown from a child to a man and so had crossed the "wild country" that can be filled with the passion and torment, the confusion and distress which no child can ever know, or understand.[51]

The public reaction to this book was good as is judged by the following quotation:

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[51] Ibid., p. 121.

> By coupling such events with scenes which he remembered from his childhood and by the use of a perceptive imagination Bromfield was able to build a story that had in it both psychological truth and an air of reality.[52]

Harrison Smith in his review of The Wild Country makes this conclusion:

> All the forces that make for the human drama of good and evil are loosed [in this book].[53]
>
> There is no telling whether Louis Bromfield will write a finer novel than this in the future, but at any rate, the reader will be grateful that he came back to live close to the land where he was born, and will hope for more novels that have the sensitivity and insight and honesty of The Wild Country.[54]

Bromfield was destined to write only one more novel, Mr. Smith, which was published in 1951. The story centers around a Wolcott Ferris, who personifies the many Mr. Smiths living in America. He is the little fellow, the common everyday man on the street caught in the confusion and perplexities of our rapidly changing world, the fellow who really needs psychopathic help as he struggles along in a mad world that Bromfield calls the "Age of Irritation." Mr. Smith is a dramatic story in that Wolcott Ferris, as a captain of a very small force on an outpost island in the

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[52] Ibid., p. 122.

[53] Harrison Smith, "Mr. Bromfield Comes Back," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 31, October 23, 1948, p. 13.

[54] Ibid., p. 14.

Pacific, is killed by a "no-good specimen of Southern 'white trash'" primarily because he was a decent sort of a fellow. It is tragic also because, although he had inherited a prosperous insurance business, and has an attractive and loyal wife and two well-behaved children, he still feels a lack of purpose and hollowness about his job, his family, and life in general.

The following comments indicate the great literary possibilities of this book. Marquis Childs gives this comment:

> Mr. Smith is a powerful and terrifying book. It is the Babbitt of a generation later; a confused lost and doomed Babbitt. Bromfield shears through the emptiness of our so-called civilization with an indignation that is fierce and yet restrained in its skill and artistry.[55]

Harrison Smith, in reviewing the book in The Saturday Review of Literature, writes:

> Mr. Smith is not only highly readable, but a trenchant comment on our times and on the prevailing mood of despair and introspection to which we have become accustomed since the end of the war. . . . There will be many Mr. Smiths who will, at least while they are reading this novel, identify their own lives and lost hopes with the despair of Wolcott Ferris.[56]

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[55] From a memoranda of Romona Herdman (Scrapbook) Publicity Director of Harper's. Quoted in Morrison Brown, Louis Bromfield and His Books. Fair Lawn, New Jersey: Essential Books, Inc., 1957, p. 182.

[56] Harrison Smith, "Babbitt of a New Generation," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 34, August 25, 1951, p. 13.

It seems quite fitting that the last novel from Bromfield's pen should be of so much worth, and it will probably increase in merit and literary appreciation as the years go on.

Although Bromfield's novels have been considered in this chapter, as have his short stories and his books on political economy, there is still another type of literature that the author attempted. As mentioned before, he had a real love and admiration for drama and the stage; he had been a drama critic for The Bookman; and, in addition, he had been an assistant to Brock Pemberton, a theatrical producer. Of course he would want to test his ability with this kind of literature, too. He had written a dramatization of The Green Bay Tree soon after it was published, but the adaptation had not been a success. In 1934 and early in 1935 he endeavored to win acclaim in the theatrical field by presenting two plays on New York stages. The first, De Luxe, was written in collaboration with John Gearon and portrays the decadence of end-of-the-line expatriates in Paris. The second theatrical adventure was an adaptation of Edouard Bourdet's Les Temps Difficiles, which Bromfield named Times Have Changed. Neither play was much of a success, although the author spared no pains in trying to have them presented well.[57]

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[57] Brown, op. cit., p. 76.

Bromfield made no further efforts to write drama until 1950, when he attempted to modernize the story of Helen of Troy and make it a hilarious vaudeville farce. The production, Helen of Memphis, met a cool reception, however, which caused Bromfield's flame for drama to die out, never to be rekindled.[58]

His talents, though, did achieve fame in the dramatic field through the media of the motion picture industry. Several of his short stories were made into movies, as were at least three of his full length novels. A few of these titles are: The Life of Vergie Winters, It All Came True, One Heavenly Night, A Modern Hero, Night After Night, Mrs. Parkington, Brigham Young, and The Rains Came (The Rains of Ranchipur). The last three are unquestionably some of the greatest movie productions of recent years. The annual income from the royalties of his movies run as high as $50,000.[59]

Bromfield's twenty-three books of fiction, his three successful books on political economy, and his four dramatic efforts have now been briefly considered. An appraisal of his five great books on agriculture and its related subjects will be made separately.

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[58] Ibid., p. 127.

[59] John Bainbridge, "Farmer Bromfield," Life, Vol. 25, October 11, 1948, pp. 111-114.

CHAPTER II

BOOKS ABOUT AGRICULTURE

Although the family's return to an Ohio farm had been precipitated by the onrush of World War II, it had been thoroughly anticipated and premeditated by Bromfield. Early in the first of his farm books, Pleasant Valley, he very clearly stated this fact. He had been away from Mansfield and the old Coulter farm for thirty years when he wrote:

> . . . during all those thirty years, sometimes in the discomfort of war, sometimes during feelings of depression engendered in Germany, but just as often during the warm, conscious pleasure and satisfaction of France or India or the Spanish Pyrenees, I dreamed constantly of my home country, of my grandfather's farm, of Pleasant Valley. Waking slowly from a nap on a warm summer afternoon or dozing before an open fire in the ancient presbytere at Senlis, I would find myself returning to the country, going back again to the mint-scented pastures of Pleasant Valley or the orchards of my grandfather's farm. It was as if all the while my spirit were tugging to return there, as if I were under a compulsion. And those dreams were associated with a sensation of warmth and security and satisfaction that was almost physical.[1]

It was therefore easy for him to answer Mrs. Bromfield's question of "Where shall we go?" when impending war clouds prompted their exodus from France. "To Ohio. That is where we were going sometime anyway."[2]

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[1] Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 5.

And so it was that Prodigal Farmer Louis Bromfield returned to the land of his ancestors, where he was destined to play a very important role in revitalizing and rejuvenating American agriculture. His return could hardly have been more timely, because American agriculture was almost bankrupt financially following the economic depression of the 1930's; physically weak from the dust storms of 1933, 1934, and 1935, the floods of 1935, and the terrible toll of erosion caused by careless and thoughtless farming; and the gloom and pessimism of those who wrote about the agriculture of that time. Typical topics of the farm writers of those years were such titles as "Our Plundered Planet," "Dust in the Eyes of Science," "The Downfall of Nations," and "Crops or Canyons." It was not so much that the authors of these writings painted and recorded true and shocking facts, as it was the despair and utter hopelessness of their future outlook for agriculture that had brought about the almost universal pessimism of those days. The wholesomeness, optimism, and practical common sense of Bromfield's Pleasant Valley was as welcome as the rainbow and sunshine after the gloomy storm clouds have dissipated. Here was the story of a man who took over a farm, eroded, apparently worn out, and worthless, and proved that it could be brought back to its original fertility and made to produce a profit; and while he was doing that, he enjoyed the farm and loved all the

nature forces he had set to work. With perhaps more literary accuracy and precision than he had set down in his earlier literary contributions, Pleasant Valley described in detail his home, his farm, his farm problems, and his farm animals. And the whole process was so simple and inexpensive that any farm family anywhere with intelligence and ambition could have done the same thing.

In Pleasant Valley, Bromfield pays tribute to such characters as "Johnny Appleseed," Aunt Mattie, Walter Oakes and his "Ninety Acres," the big Angus bull Blondy, the huge Boxer dog Rex, and the mother o'possum with her litter of "little clowns." The reader is soon convinced of the truth of the author's remark, "I make my reputation with a pen, but my heart is with the spade."[3]

Since Pleasant Valley was immensely popular almost as soon as it was published, it promptly made the best seller list and was reprinted in England, Germany, and France.

A variety of subject matter and style is apparent in Malabar Farm, which was written between 1945 and 1946 and published in 1947. There are seventeen chapters in this book, five of them actual diaries of the happenings at Malabar Farm as they were periodically and spasmodically set down by Bromfield. Because of the tremendous interest

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[3]Brown, op. cit., p. 107.

manifested in his ideals and experiments, "Farmer" Bromfield was forced to record them. Already Malabar Farm was being visited annually by twenty to thirty thousand persons from all over the world, and Bromfield was making from 150 to 200 talks a year about the practical side of scientific farming. The opening sentence of Chapter I of this new book indicates the homeliness and spontaneity of the chapters:

> August 31: The drought broke today with a heavy, slow, soaking rain which began during the night and continued all through the day.[4]

Thereafter he jots down anything that is of the moment's interest to him. He relates these things in his own inimitable way:

> I know of nothing more comical than a hog making a hog of himself.[5]

> Susie's father, Blondy, the big Angus bull, simply knocked out the side of the barn this morning in order to rejoin his harem half an hour after we had shut him in a box stall.[6]

Almost every farm feature is discussed: wild birds, wild animals, ducks, turkeys, guineas, plowing, mowing alfalfa, filling silos, feeding problems, farm visitors, smoke houses, feeding hens, and the weird, blood curdling scream of a roaming, displaced catamount.

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[4]Louis Bromfield, Malabar Farm. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948, p. 10.

[5]Ibid., p. 13.

[6]Ibid., p. 19.

The remaining twelve chapters are actually masterfully written essays on a wide variety of subjects, such as: "The Passing of a Pattern," "Grass, the Great Healer," and "The Organic-Chemical Fertilizer Feud."

"The Passing of a Pattern" is a study of farm economics in which the efficiency of a farm planned for a specialized result is contrasted with the old accepted idea of "general farming." The economic planning of Malabar Farm is revealed as follows: only a small portion of all crops reserved for "cash" crops, the main emphasis placed on dairy cattle, pasture, and forage feeds. Emphasized with figures, Farmer Bromfield explains that the pattern of a specialized farm should fit the physical characteristics of that farm.

Getting directly into the field of biology and what it teaches about biomes and ecology, Bromfield becomes quite technical. His discussions, however, are not boring because they are written in such a simple, straight forward, homey style. As one commentator put it, "He [Bromfield] is certainly making his mark in the agricultural world as a great teacher who speaks in simple terms that the layman can understand and follow."[7]

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[7]Gordon Way, "Louis Bromfield," Farmer's Advocate. London, Ontario, Canada, October 26, 1950.

Preaching his gospel that an acre of good grass returns more net profit than any other crop and builds up the soil while it is doing it, he devotes two chapters to the subject "Grass, the Great Healer." Backed up with logic and facts, these are powerful chapters, written with all of Bromfield's zeal and ability.

One of the most outstanding chapters of Malabar Farm is the one entitled "Malthus Was Right." At the beginning of the nineteenth century Malthus theorized that, since the earth's population was progressively increasing, the land suitable for growing food was steadily decreasing because of erosion and depletion; the time would come when the earth could not feed its population. Bromfield wrote convincingly that, in spite of improved varieties, soil building knowledge, and land reclamation, the world is much closer to the crisis Malthus predicted than it realizes. Farmers and urban people alike were shocked into the understanding of the primal necessity of the soil itself and of the necessity of preserving it and building it back to its original fertility.

Two chains of thought had developed across the country as to the relative values of two processes of rebuilding crop land. One was the process of mixing organic matter into the soil by working weeds, straw, grass, legume crops, or even wood, into the ground. The other process is known as the chemical fertilizer method, a method by which increased

crops are produced by adding lime, nitrogen or phosphate, or other chemicals directly into the soil. Bromfield has a wise and realistic view of the organic-chemical fertilizer feud. He demonstrated that organic soil content could be built up faster by first using an analyzed chemical fertilizer, then adding the increased organic matter to the ground; he maintained that the use of chemical-fertilizer without such a build-up of organic content was futile.

In the chapter entitled "Out of the Earth We Are Born and to the Earth We Return," Bromfield proves the old saying, "We are what we eat." He cited the example of recruits entering military service from one state (Georgia), where soil erosion and soil depletion has been very heavy; seventy-five per cent of the young men were physically unfit for military duty; while from Colorado, comparatively a new state where soil fertility and mineral content is yet high, the figures were exactly the reverse.[8]

Having experienced the many farm hazards themselves, most farmers appreciated Bromfield's chapter in Malabar Farm entitled "Pride Goeth Before a Fall." The year 1947 saw most of the careful planning and hard work at Malabar Farm wasted because of rains, rains, floods, and then more rains.

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[8]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 297.

Out of these experiences, Bromfield came up with some sane philosophy about patience and endurance.

Ten years had elapsed since the Bromfields had begun their adventure. The farm had been so prosperous that it had mushroomed into a fantastic success and responsibility. Interested people from all over the world flocked to the place to see for themselves the miracles Farmer Bromfield had been describing in his books, magazine articles, radio talks, and farm speeches. Many of the curious and "Doubting Thomases" wanted to put their fingers into the redeemed Malabar soils. Bromfield's "dream farm" had become an international agricultural triumph, and its influence was felt around the world as farmers from Oregon and Florida, Texas and Maine, England, India, China, and Africa came to see, to talk, and to listen. Bromfield continually publicized the facts that the farm operations had to be practical and economical, not something to be accomplished by huge expenditures of money, time, and machinery.[9] Out of the Earth is the Bromfield book that appeared quite spontaneously in 1950 to report the farm facts and achievements of Malabar Farm, and to answer the many questions that the projects had prompted. It is a serious treatise in which the author wrote of such

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[9]Louis Bromfield, From My Experience. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955, p. 45.

matters as maintaining and restoring mineral content in depleted soil, growing deep rooted legumes, restoring the nitrogen-organic matter cycle, promoting grass farming, and establishing sub-soil moisture storage. Related in matter-of-fact and simple language, these revealing agricultural innovations are easily understood by the average farmer or lay citizen. There was none of the highbrow college professor scientific technical phrasings that often confused and overshot the average person.[10] Yet, while these measures were quite technical, they had high value and showed the brands of a worthy author. Note the literary worth of the following paragraph:

> But most of all there is the earth and the animals through which one comes very close to eternity and to the secrets of the universe. Out of Gus, the Mallard duck, who comes up from the pond every evening to eat with the dogs--out of all the dogs which run ahead leaping and luring the small boys farther and farther into the fields, a child learns much, and most of all that warmth and love of Nature which is perhaps the greatest of all resources, not only because its variety and beauty is inexhaustible but because slowly it creates a sense of balance and of values, of philosophy and even a wise resignation to man's own insignificance which bring the great rewards of wisdom and understanding and tolerance.[11]

Surely these thoughts sound like Bryant's or Wordsworth's set to prose.

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[10] Ibid., p. 44.

[11] Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 298.

The success of Malabar Farm continued to grow, to spread, and to become contagious as more and more of the practical and "hardheaded" farmers of the world were changed to students and disciples of Bromfield's theories. Because Texas had experienced some big erosion and soil depletion problems, a group of Texan farmers visited Malabar Farm and, after becoming converted to Bromfield's ideas, persuaded him to establish a branch Malabar farm in Texas. Consequently, Wichita Malabar, a four hundred acre farm, was established at Wichita Falls, Texas, and was operated under the same principles as the Ohio Malabar. In South America, Brazil was also having erosion and soil depletion problems; and it was not very long until Malabar Farm attracted a group of Brazilians to Bromfield. Thus it came about that the successful Ohio farmer was lured to South America to establish his Brazilian adventure, Malabar-do-Brasil.[12] All of these events are carefully described in the author's next book, From My Experience, which was published in 1955. The first and last chapters actually present Bromfield's philosophy of life and many sage views, formulated from years of vigorous, energetic, and first-hand experiences. At the time he did not know it, but in substance this book is autobiographical. He was planning more fiction and more

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[12]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 93.

contemplations in the field of political economy, but was not destined to complete them. From My Experience, however, was another literary success and remained on the best-sellers' lists for nearly three months.[13]

Bromfield's last book was also published in 1955. Animals and Other People is mostly a collection of stories about animals and pets and people who were "teched," as he intimated he was, with the love of nature and all life, both plant and animal. The story of the pet mongoose that the family had for several years is most unusual, and magnificently told. In like manner, Bromfield recounts graphic descriptions of their many pets, rivaling the stories of Jack London and Ernest Thompson Seton. Rex and Regina, huge Boxer dogs, and their offspring were favorites; yet the reader becomes immensely amused at Bromfield's stories about the Scotty, Dash, the seducer who tore the seat of the pants off the town jeweler, a "pompous, incredibly avaricious bore." The reader learns to know intimately Tex, Tony, Queen, and Sylvia, horses at Malabar; Haile Selassie, the karakul ram; the pet goats; and the orphan lambs, of whom daughter Ellen remarked, "They don't know they're sheep. We should get a mirror and let them look at themselves." Cleverly introduced, also, are Gilbert, the wild turkey

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[13]Brown, Louis Bromfield and His Books, p. 138.

gobbler; Donald, the duck; and Rachel, the Poland China sow, who, "when seen from the rear while walking, resembled nothing as much as a female resident of the Bronx walking down Broadway in a mink coat." After reading such personification of the many animals at Malabar Farm, one can understand why Ellen, Bromfield's youngest daughter, would exclaim, "The trouble with the animals on this farm is that they think they're people."[14]

Actually, Animals and Other People is a collection of many chapters that Bromfield had written and published previously in other writings and are simply gathered together in convenient book form. In these accounts, he gives the reader much of the detailed planning of the management of Malabar Farm and a generous portion of his philosophy of life.

Since Animals and Other People was fated to be Bromfield's last book, the following quotations fall almost like a benediction to his career and a summation of his philosophy:

> We (at Malabar) all know, I think, the great importance and solace of work; not the aimless monotonous work of riveting and fitting together nuts and bolts, but of work which creates something, work which leaves its own record, within the natural scheme of man's existence--the kind of work which

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[14]Bromfield, Animals and Other People, p. 136.

> contributes to progress and welfare of mankind, and the plenty of the earth upon which he lives. Wherever our children go in after life they will possess the knowledge of the fields and the brilliant beauty of a cock pheasant soaring above the green meadow in October. They will know how things grow and why. They will understand what goes on above the earth and in it.[15]

And here is a quick briefing of accomplishments of Malabar Farm:

> This much we have done with the land that has come into our hands at Malabar. Each day the forest grows greener and thicker. Each year the soil grows darker and deeper, and the crops a little heavier. Each year the water in the brooks and streams grows more steadfast and clear. The fish and wild game increase in number as the fertility increases. No longer does the water after heavy rains rush across bare land below us. No longer does the soil vanish by the ton after each rain to darken the streams and leave our fields bare and sterile. On the thousand acres of Malabar no living gully, however small, exists like an open wound today. . . Where there was once little, we have abundance . . . The law of Nature is not one of scarcity, but of abundance, and we have followed that law as nearly as we understand it.[16]

With the publication of Animals and Other People, the pendulum of Bromfield's literary career had swung for the final time. During the year 1955, in which his last two books were published, he had been ill with a siege of influenza and pneumonia from which he never entirely recovered. Knowing that there was something very much the matter with his physical condition, he took time out from his busy

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[15] Ibid., p. 94.

[16] Ibid., p. 92.

schedule for a hospital checkup in January, 1956. The doctors apparently were as baffled at his condition as he; and on March 18, following an infectious attack of a jaundice virus, he collapsed and died of a liver and kidney failure.[17]

It would seem that by writing and publishing thirty books in thirty years, in addition to writing twelve uncollected short stories, ninety magazine articles, pamphlets, and book reviews, editing a syndicated column for the Bell Syndicate, a newspaper system, making from 150 to 200 speeches a year, receiving countless formal and informal visits, and doing on the job work and planning at his three Malabar farms, he had literally and physically "burned the candle at both ends" until it was consumed.

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[17]Brown, op. cit., p. 151.

CHAPTER III

ATTITUDE TOWARDS FARM PEOPLE

"He who saves our soil with diligence
and care, gains more religious worth
than the repetition of a thousand prayers."
--Old Arabic Proverb

As has already been indicated, Louis Bromfield had very early in life generated a fierce pride in his ancestry because they had loved farm life and nature. He associated the deep attachment that his father, his Grandfather Coulter, and all the lineage of farmers back to old Colonel MacDougal, who had crossed the mountains to homestead the original farm while Thomas Jefferson was President, with land and growing things, with integrity, honesty, thrift, personal dignity, and good citizenship. This fierce pride survived the frustration of the farming failures and insolvency of his own family; in his writings, both fictional and real, he always depicted charitably all farm characters who were earnestly trying to understand nature and to do a good job of caring for the soil.

In his writings, Bromfield seldom got completely away from the rural settings that he knew so well as a youth or the individuals that had lived in those places. This custom of course simply follows the truism that "writers recount best those people and places that they know best."

Several of these instances have already been mentioned as his various books were briefed. It is interesting to note, moreover, that Bromfield treats these characters with compassion and understanding. They are never the villains of the sinister omens. A few of these "friends" appear over and over again in different stories and under different names.

One of Bromfield's favorite characters is a cousin, Phoebe Wise. She is the "Aunt Flora" in his short story by that name, the "Ma Ferguson" in a work with that title, and just Phoebe Wise in Animals and Other People.

Bromfield, himself, appeared as a shy boy in Possession, as an introvert in A Good Woman, and as a youth in The Wild Country.

Great Aunt Mattie is "Julia Shane" of The Green Bay Tree, and the "Aunt Phoebe" from Cedar Point, Iowa, in The Rains Came. Aunt Mattie is also the Mrs. Parkington and the "mother" in the short story "The Pond." "Ellen Tolliver" of The Green Bay Tree and "Lilli Barr" from Possession are personifications of Bromfield's own sister Marie.

"Old Gramp" in Possession is almost an exact replica of Bromfield's Grandfather Bromfield; the old gentleman is presented again somewhat in caricature as "Ransome" in The Rains Came. He reappears as the errant husband "Jason Downes" in A Good Woman.

Mother Bromfield is the "Hattie Tolliver" of The Green Bay Tree and Possession and "Emma Downes" in A Good Woman.

Likewise many of the physical settings are transposed places from Bromfield's boyhood haunts around Mansfield, Ohio. The farm so vividly described in "The Pond" is the old Coulter farm transferred to South Dakota. "Shane's Castle" of The Green Bay Tree was definitely the quaint Jones residence that was close to the edge of Mansfield, where Louis had been a frequent guest as a boy.

There is an old farmers' aphorism that declares, "You can take a farm boy away from a farm, but you can never take the farm out of a farm boy." This saying never fit anyone better than Louis Bromfield. The farm and the seeds sown there were almost continuously cropping out in everything he wrote and did.

Confucius once wrote, "The best fertilizer on any farm is the footsteps of the owner." This standard became a rule by which Bromfield measured farmers. He describes Walter Oakes, whom he honors in "My Ninety Acres," by quoting him as follows:

> There are two kinds of farms--'live' ones and 'dead' ones--and you can tell the difference by looking at them. A 'live' farm was the most beautiful place in the world and a 'dead' one was the saddest. It depended on the man who worked them--whether he loved the place

and saw what was going on, or whether he just went on pushing implements through the ground to make money.[1]

Bromfield worked eagerly with County Farm Agents and with anyone who he thought was sincerely trying to help solve agricultural problems. For those who were insincere, mercenary, and inefficient, he had utter contempt. He admired Thomas Edison, Louis Pasteur, and George Washington Carver for doing things that other people said could not be accomplished. In From My Experience he reflected on this idea very pointedly when he wrote:

> The tragedy is that again and again we find the highest positions of authority in many of our schools and universities are occupied by men of rigid mind, without imagination or the fundamental vitality which lies behind all true scientific advance and research, men who are lacking not only in imagination but even in curiosity, who are without discontent and are happy with things as they are since imagination, speculation and curiosity are uncomfortable and even dangerous elements which upset the even tenor of their lives in which, by being safe, a salary will go on forever with a pension at the end. This is essentially the mentality of the hack government bureaucrat everywhere and there is far too much of it in our agricultural education today.[2]

Because of the hard and often frustrating incidents he had encountered in his career up to this time, Bromfield knew the necessity of adjusting plans to meet changing circumstances. When he returned to farm life, he was smart

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[1]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 138.

[2]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 45.

enough to profit from this knowledge and constantly preached the necessity for an open mind. Sometimes the plans undertaken at Malabar Farm did not work out and had to be altered or dropped. Bromfield had been gathering facts and ideas for farm economy, operation, and rehabilitation in the many years that he had traveled abroad. After his return to Ohio, he had discovered, not the fertile fields he had known as a boy, but the stark desolation and sterility of deserted farm land. Carefully choosing the necessary farm helpers, he had:

> managed to find and create, not the unreal almost fictional life for which I hoped, but a tangible world of great and insistent reality, made up of such things as houses, and ponds, fertile soils, a beautiful and rich landscape and the friendship and perhaps the respect of my fellow men and fellow farmers. The people who come to the Big House are not the fashionable, the rich, the famous, the wits, the intellectuals (although there is a sprinkling of all of these) but plain people and farmers and cattlemen from all parts of the world.[3]

Never once, in the seventeen years he and his family had been expatriates in Europe, had he lost direct contact with the farm life or those who worked the soil. At first he sought out these people, in England, Spain, France, and India; then, because he was friendly, intelligent, and interested, they sought him. Two English farmers and two French gardeners even followed him to Malabar Farm.

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[3] Ibid., p. 7.

Captivated almost at once by the longings, ambitions, and hopes Bromfield expressed in Pleasant Valley, American friends warmed to his spontaneous and animated friendship. They came to see Bromfield's Pleasant Valley and Malabar Farm. Significantly, they, who came to see and to be encouraged and inspired, in turn inspired and encouraged Bromfield, who responded with dynamic energy and eagerness. He had, to quote Emerson:

> A day for toil, an hour for sport;
> But for a friend, life was too short.[4]

Malabar Farm was soon the American farmers' mecca. As early as 1939, it was the scene of a historic meeting of "The Friends of the Land," to which came some world famous agriculturalists: Bryce Browning, director of the Muskingum Conservancy District; Russell Lord, editor of The Land; Hugh Bennett, organizer and chief of the U. S. Soil Conservation Service; John Detwiler of London (Canada) University; and John Cunningham, dean of Ohio State Agricultural College.[5]

Appealing to the practical-minded, farm-loving citizens were the working principles established by Bromfield:

> [One] must bear in mind that none of these results were obtained by expenditures of great sums of money. There has always been one iron-clad restriction at

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[4]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Considerations by the Way."

[5]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 260.

> Malabar--that nothing should ever be done there which any farmer could not afford to do. The thousands of farmers who visit us each year know that this restriction has been kept. You cannot fool a wise and practical farmer. Malabar has never been a "show place" either in the buildings or in the expensive trappings of the millionaire's farm in the old days, but it is a beautiful place with its hills and valleys and forests and springs and streams, where we are willing to challenge the production per acre on any crop anywhere in the U. S.[6]

Another feature that won the public to Bromfield's friendship was his standing invitation, "Come and see for yourself. Nothing is hidden at Malabar." And they came--singly, in groups, and in crowds. By 1948, when Malabar Farm was published, "more than twenty thousand visitors, mostly practical farmers, as well as scientists and research men and women, passed through Malabar."[7]

On one occasion a Field Day was sponsored by Successful Farming magazine to demonstrate how rapidly top soil was being rebuilt at Malabar. Over eight thousand farmers with their families swarmed in from twenty-seven states. Since no such crowd had been anticipated, one can readily imagine the confusion and inconveniences that arose, both to the visitors and to the entire Bromfield household. Nevertheless, the guests were made to feel at home with all of the Bromfield warmth of friendship and hospitality; this

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[6]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 43.

[7]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 43.

tremendous emergency clearly indicated Bromfield's great heart and cordiality to friends in general and to farm folk in particular. Crowds continued to surge across Malabar's redeemed acres and fruitful fields. As a result, Bromfield and the management had to establish a policy for visitors:

> During the week, visitors are simply turned loose to go anywhere they like and ask any questions they liked from any man working on the place. On Sunday afternoons there are tours from May first to November first, conducted by the proprietor or by one of our Malabar staff where many of the things done there are explained in detail and any and every question is given a direct and honest answer.[8]

Anyone with a practical knowledge of farming and all of its complicated processes of plant and animal husbandry, together with the many quirks and peculiarities of human nature under such circumstances, will understand what it must have meant to Malabar Farm to have every year twenty to thirty thousand people tramping over growing crops, investigating valuable livestock, and prodding at machinery and buildings. But Bromfield drew his circles of friendship to take them all in. As these circles grew, Malabar Farm was practically forced to branch out into the Wichita Falls Malabar in Texas and to Malabar-do-Brasil deep in the heart of Brazil. But these extensions were only a small part of the chain reaction that spread across the whole United States.

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[8] Ibid.

Because of Bromfield's practical common sense, the farmers who came, saw, and listened were converted into disciples who went home to make their own farms into Malabar Smiths, Malabar Joneses, or Malabar Browns; and these believers influenced their neighbors once the results were observed. In addition, the success of Malabar advertised and emphasized the works of Farm Agents, the Soil Conservation Service, and the solid contributions of such fine agriculturists as Hugh Bennett, chief of the United States Soil Conservation Department; Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture; Clifford Hope, chairman of the Congressional Agricultural Committee; Russell Lord, author of Forever the Land; and Ed Faulkner, author of Plowman's Folly.

Through his friendly personality, Bromfield became a potent influence and a masterful teacher, simply by practicing, demonstrating, explaining, and loving the basic facts and theories of all plant and animal life. The far reaching effects of this man's neighborliness can hardly be estimated.

CHAPTER IV

UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF FARM LANDS

It is interesting in a study of a person as renowned as Bromfield actually to talk to some one who knew and associated with him. In a rencent conversation with Jerry Moxley,[1] the following remarks were made:

> Yes, I have met and talked to Louis Bromfield several times. He was immensely interesting. He impressed me for the depth of his research; he was a crusader for improved agriculture--all phases, crops, live stock and conservation. He was very observing and capable of selling his ideas; he would have been a success at anything he wanted to undertake. Perfectly at home anywhere, he would talk at a Rotary banquet, a Soil Conservation meeting, or sit on a wagon tongue and chat with a group of farmers, and convince them that they could grow better crops than they had grown, and build up their fields at the same time,--that there simply is no excuse for either soil erosion or soil depletion. Bromfield made it known that there were two things that made this nation,--children and soil, and he loved them both. He was a very independent thinker and talked so that everyone could understand him.[2]

This first-hand estimate of the mature Bromfield only reflects that from early childhood Louis Bromfield had been face to face with the prlblems of soil erosion and soil depletion. Apparently his father and his Grandfather Coulter

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[1]Jerry Moxley, a former Extension Animal Husbandry Specialist from Kansas State University, now owner and operator of Moxley Hall Ranch near Council Grove, Kansas, and an international authority and judge of Hereford cattle. One of Directors American Royal Live Stock Show.

[2]April 26, 1959, Dunlap, Kansas.

recognized how vitally these problems were to affect the future of our country, because Bromfield mentioned several times in his writings their futile and impractical efforts to stop these tragic losses. A long series of agricultural disasters, however, from 1920 until 1940, had forced the smug and placid among American farmers to face the cold, hard facts and had made all Americans understand the evil results these unfortunate developments would bring to their children and grandchildren. There were also newspaper comments, magazine articles, and books about the dire consequences of careless farming and erosion. Some of the outstanding studies were Paul Sears' Dust in the Eyes of Science, Russell Lord's Deserts on the March, Fairfield Osborn's Our Plundered Planet, and Edward Faulkner's Plowman's Folly. Bromfield knew all these men personally and was well acquainted with their writings. Paul Sears and Fairfield Osborn attended meetings of The Friends of the Land and appeared on the speaking platform together with Bromfield.[3] Russell Lord and Edward Faulkner had been guests in his home.[4] Over and over again Bromfield reminded his audiences of the somber facts that these other writers presented so forcibly. He reflects their thinking acidly in these words:

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[3]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 271.

[4]Ibid., p. 162.

> One has only to look at an ignorant disease-ridden mongrel Bedouin seated among the marble ruins of the once great Roman cities of North Africa to see and to understand what happens to countries and nations when their agriculture fades, their soil becomes worn out and their peoples lose their economic independence, their health, their vigor and their intelligence.[5]

During recent years the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture has performed a remarkable service for American crop and range lands. Big Hugh Bennett, as he was affectionately known, was head of this service and was also a close friend of Bromfield, who recognized him as an authority:

> Dr. Hugh Bennett of the Soil Conservation Service estimates that if the soil lost annually by erosion in the United States was placed in ordinary gondola cars, it would fill a train reaching four times around the earth at the equator. At the Georgia State Agricultural College tests made upon one acre of ground farmed by the conventional method used in cotton cultivation in that state showed an average loss of 127 tons of topsoil a year over a period of five years.[6]

Actually Bromfield had realized these facts for years--from the day he walked away from Grandfather Coulter's farm bitter and frustrated to seek a career in other fields. When he came back to Malabar, he remarked upon the point:

> I knew perhaps better than most because I had seen over the whole world what had happened to nations when their agriculture grew sick and their soil impoverished. What

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[5]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 323.

[6]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 105.

> happened was first economic sickness and then finally death, not only to agriculture but eventually of the nation and its civilization.
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> I knew in my heart that we as a nation were already much farther along the path to destruction than most people knew.[7]

These problems were of such tremendous importance to Bromfield that he simply could not sit idly by and do nothing about them. He reasoned:

> What we needed was a new kind of a pioneer, not the sort which cut down the forests, burned off the prairies and raped the land, but pioneers who created forests and healed and restored the richness of the country God had given us, that richness which, from the moment the first settler landed on the Atlantic coast we had done our best to destroy. I had a foolish idea that I wanted to be one of that new race of pioneers.[8]

Subsequent events proved that Bromfield's idea was not foolish and that he was indeed "one of that new race of pioneers" that he envisioned. Bromfield firmly believed that even these abandoned farm lands, unproductive though they were with the topsoil washed away, fields that no longer yielded crops or pasture for livestock, could be brought back to their original productiveness.[9] Constantly on the alert for such information as he traveled over the world, he had seen farm land in some corners of the civilized world that

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[7] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[8] Ibid., p. 48.

[9] Ibid.

had been nursed back to productiveness, often from sheer necessity. In his own words he affirms:

> And so during all the years away from my country I came to know farmers and agricultural stations in every part of the world, and I learned much, many things that we have not yet learned in agriculture even here in America. And always I had . . . a piece of earth in which I could work, watching and learning things about earth, water, air, plants and animals.[10]

Bromfield bought the thousand acres of Malabar Farm determined to prove his theories that those acres could again be made productive.

Malabar Farm was an ideal place for Bromfield to put his ideas into practice because the greater part of it was abandoned land. He had acquired actually five different farms: Poverty Knob, the Bailey Place, the Fleming Place, the Ferguson Place, and the Anson Place. Poverty Knob, or Mount Jeez, was "a desert of broom sedge, poverty grass, blackberry bushes and every sort of low-grade weed."[11] The Bailey Place for two generations had "the sorry reputation of being the thinnest farm between Newville and Little Washington," brown and red with sorrel, and brome sedge and poverty grass.[12] The Ferguson and Fleming farms were "thin, burned-out half-starved weedy pastures filled with iron

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[10] Ibid., pp. 50-51.

[11] Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 42.

[12] Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 144.

weed and wild carrot."[13] With the exception of some of the fields on the Anson Place, Bromfield had at Malabar Farm worn out and abandoned acres--acres which, as Bromfield pointed out, farmers had been taught for a generation or two could never be made productive again.[14]

Very early in his career at Malabar, Bromfield set forth the convictions he had formed when a young man on his Grandfather Coulter's farm and cherished continuously until they had become an obsession with him as fame and fortune followed him around the world. In Pleasant Valley, the first of his Malabar farm books, he put the product of his thinking down in black and white:

> There were three reasons why we bought these farms. One was that I loved Pleasant Valley and had never been able to escape it. Another was . . . in hill country there's a new world over the crest of every hill. . . .
>
> But there is a third reason, more profound than either of the others. There were things I wanted to prove; that worn-out farms could be restored again and that if you only farmed hill country in the proper way, you could grow as much as on any of the flat land. . . .[15]

The transformations of the worn out Malabar acres under Bromfield's theories read like a fairy story. In only a few years he proudly reported, "On the thousand acres of

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., p. 102.

[15] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

Malabar no living gully, however small, exists like an open wound," and water losses and top soil erosion were eliminated by simple and easily executed engineering.[16] Probably no farmer ever cooperated more fully with the United States Soil Conservation technicians, for Bromfield constructed all the necessary grassed waterways, contours, terraces, check dams and shelterbelts. Then he went to work on two of his pet theories. These are clearly stated in Malabar Farm, where Bromfield describes his practices in elaborate detail:

> (1) That mineral balance plus nitrogen and indeed all the laws of balance in soils . . . have great bearing upon the health of plants, animals, and people and that in the case of plants a great bearing upon their resistance not only to disease but to the attacks of insects as well.
>
> (2) That any good subsoil . . . possesses a fertility which, if managed properly, may be eternally available and very possibly inexhaustible. The problem is to make that hidden, locked up fertility available to plant life, and available in sufficient quantities.[17]

Bromfield proceeded to put these theories into practice in several ways. After laboratory tests of soil samples from the various fields indicated the vital mineral deficiencies, he applied sometimes as much as four tons of lime per acre, and used a chemical fertilizer mixture of

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[16]Louis Bromfield, Out of the Earth. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950, p. 144.

[17]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 143.

phosphorous, nitrogen and potash as needed when the crops were planted in each field.[18] Once a crop was started on a field, the procedure was simply to cooperate with nature, under a code Bromfield reiterated over and over in his writings and in his speeches, "the universal law of fertility--the cycle of birth, growth, death, decay, and rebirth."[19] Crops of alfalfa and sweet clover--deep-rooted, legume building crops that brought up deep seated mineral supplements to the top soil and added huge quantities of nitrogen nodules--were seeded along with ladino and alsike clover. To complete and prolong the grazing season, pastures of Brome grass were established. All crop residues were plowed under, together with all accumulated barnyard manure, and the fields were plowed deep, to a depth of ten or twelve inches as a rule, for two reasons: to bring up fresh subsoil that had a richer mineral content, and actually to plow under the worn out top soil that had been left on the surface. A system of plowing was soon established that left much of the old crop residue on top of the ground, where it played important roles in reducing wind and water erosion while

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[18] Ibid. Bromfield gives quite a complete discussion of these chemical fertilizer needs in Chapter XIII, "The Organic-Chemical Fertilizer Feud," pp. 274-294.

[19] Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 143.

at the same time absorbing and holding water where it fell.[20]

All of these enterprises were being closely watched and questioningly followed by alert farm-minded people around the world because Bromfield was publishing accounts of them in his books and magazine articles and broadcasting them in his speeches and radio talks.[21] In three or four

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[20]Bromfield, From My Experience. Plowing to leave organic matter on or near the surface is pictured in great detail in Chapter VIII, "On Building Topsoils Ten Thousand Times Faster Than Nature," pp. 288-310. Bromfield describes the Scotch plow, the Graham plow, the Seaman tiller, and the Killifer chisel plow explicitly.

[21]"The Land Shall Make You Free," Cosmopolitan, Vol. 111, June, 1940.
"It's a Farmers' War, Too," Colliers, Vol. 111, June 12, 1943, pp. 11 +.
"We Aren't Going to Have Enough to Eat," Reader's Digest, Vol. 43, August, 1943, pp. 111-17.
"Evangelist of Plowman's Folly," Reader's Digest, Vol. 43, December, 1943, pp. 85-9.
"Friends of the Land," Reader's Digest, Vol. 44, January, 1944, pp. 61-4.
"The Mason Place," The Rotarian, Vol. 64, February, 1944.
"Can the Farm Catch Up with the Machine Age?" Reader's Digest, Vol. 45, October, 1944, pp. 77-80.
"Our Great Stake in Agriculture," Vital Speeches, Vol. XI, May 15, 1945, pp. 470-475.
"How to Read a Landscape," Reader's Digest, Vol. 49, October, 1946, pp. 25-28.
"If You Take Care of Your Soil, It Will Take Care of You," House and Garden, Vol. 91, April, 1947, pp. 87-88 +.
"Lessons from Malabar Farm," New York Herald Tribune, Annual Report, 1948.
"We Don't Need to Starve," The Atlantic, Vol. 184, July, 1949, pp. 57-61.

years Bromfield began to report the results of his "daring pioneering":

> Poverty Knob has for a long time now been producing good pasture which in a season of good rainfall will carry a head [of livestock] to an acre and a half or two acres. Our best, fastest-growing young stock pass their summers there, without any grain whatever.[22]

"Poverty Knob," it will be remembered, was "a desert of broom sedge, poverty grass, blackberry bushes, and every sort of low-grade weed" when it was incorporated into Malabar Farm. Likewise, the Bailey Place, which had "the sorry reputation of being the thinnest farm between Newville and Little Washington," had now been transformed

> . . . within a year into thick, succulent emerald-green alfalfa, brome grass and ladino. There was the corn which changed in four years from sickly three-foot stalks bearing nubbins or nothing at all to a high level of production, and the miracle of the field that jumped in wheat production from 5 to 52 bushels per acre in four years, and the miracle of the grass which jumped from less than a ton per acre of weedy, wooden timothy to four and a half tons per acre of succulent legumes and brome grass.[23]

The conversion of the "thin, burned-out half-starved weedy pastures filled with iron weed and wild carrot" of the Ferguson and Fleming farms was equally surprising:

> And on the Fleming Place, fields which once would not yield 15 bushels of oats per acre produced in the summer of 1947 over 80 bushels. . . . And the high field on

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[22]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 42.

[23]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 144.

> the Ferguson Place, once a barren, eroded field which in 1947 produced 60 bushels and better wheat per acre . . . . And the blue grass pastures on the Ferguson, Fleming and Bailey Places . . . are carrying . . . twenty times and more the number of cattle they carried only five or six years ago.[24]

It had been generally accepted among agricultural authorities that it took nature ten thousand years to build one inch of top soil, the implication being that once the top-soil was lost it could not be replaced by man within that time. Bromfield completely exploded that theory at Malabar. This is how he explains what happened:

> In evolving the process, which was later applied generally to all the poorer lands at Malabar, we have also built many inches of good top soil where before there was none.
>
> The Soil Conservation Service men say that it took nature ten thousand years to build an inch of topsoil and they are quite right, but it does not take man that long and today at Malabar where only a few years ago there was only bare eroded topsoil, we have topsoil three to seven inches deeper than the original virgin topsoils, and far more productive than the original soils. It was accomplished by the uses of grasses and legumes . . . by the intelligent use of lime and chemical fertilizers (translated eventually into the organic form of green manures) and by the use of modern power and deep-tillage implements. . . . Most of our fields . . have the structure and fertility of truck garden soils.[25]

Of course, he had every right to be proud of these accomplishments. And Bromfield, as those who knew him testify, made himself immensely popular by issuing this

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

challenge, both in his speeches and in his writings; and the more farmers and the more aristocratic agriculturalists contemplated it, the more they warmed up to him.

> And the reader must bear in mind that none of these results were obtained by the expenditure of great sums of money. There has always been one iron-clad restriction at Malabar--that nothing should ever be done there which any farmer could not afford to do. . . . Malabar has never been a "show place" either in buildings or in the expensive trappings of the millionaire's farm in the old days, but it is a beautiful place with its hills and valleys and forests and springs and streams, WHERE WE ARE WILLING TO CHALLENGE THE PRODUCTION PER ACRE ON ANY CROP ANYWHERE IN THE U. S.[26]

When one remembers that a record like this had been "pioneered" on land that had been condemned as "barren and sterile beyond redemption"[27] only a few years before, he understands why most people interested in farming were both amazed and inspired by such results. They were also curious and skeptical. Consequently, they came to observe at first hand when Mr. Bromfield announced:

> The other slogan has always been "Come and see for yourself." Nothing is hidden at Malabar. During the week, visitors are simply turned loose to go anywhere they like and ask any questions they like from any man working on the place. On Sunday afternoons there are tours from May first to November first, conducted by the proprietor or by one of our Malabar staff where many of the things done there are explained in detail and any and every question is given a direct and honest answer.[28]

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[26]Bromfield, From My Experience, pp. 42-43.

[27]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 144.

[28]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 43.

The thousands of farmers and other interested people who swarmed to Malabar Farm to see, hear, and feel what this "new twentieth century pioneer" had done to "barren and sterile" acres certainly reflected Bromfield's understanding of the physical conditions of our farm land. They came twenty to thirty thousand a year and, on one occasion, between eight and ten thousand in one day.

After a decade of "the new pioneering" on Malabar Farm, Bromfield had proved himself to be one of the most useful and constructive figures in all American agriculture.

CHAPTER V

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NATURAL ELEMENTS

Emily Dickinson once exclaimed that it took "a bee, one clover, and a reverie to make a prairie."[1] Previously, Thoreau had remarked that all of life is wrapped up in a "single green weed";[2] and, with dramatic terseness, Tennyson condensed philosophy and religion into the trenchant comment that both "man and God" would be known if the "flower from a crannied wall" were understood. In a like manner, Bromfield, in one sentence, compresses his attitude towards soil and its natural elements: "We should never forget that in a cubic foot of highly productive living, well-balanced soil, every law of the universe is in operation."[3] Bromfield made this statement about "a cubic foot of soil" many times, but with variations. The following modification of the maxim also furnishes his basic rule for all life:

> Within such a cubic foot of soil, the fundamental rule of all life on this planet is constantly in operation: the law of birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth.[4]

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[1] Emily Dickinson, "The Prairie."

[2] Quoted by Bromfield in Malabar Farm, p. 375.

[3] Ibid., p. 309.

[4] Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 310.

A good farmer or gardener will understand this formula at once in a practical way. On the other hand, the average layman has to study the law. Physically, ninety per cent of a cubic foot of soil is inorganic matter--sand and pulverized, ground-up rock. The other ten per cent is composed of organic matter (decayed vegetation), and phosphate, nitrogen, potash, calcium, twenty or more trace minerals, and bacteria of all sorts. But the important fact is that the wealth and health of the whole civilized world depends on that ten per cent of the cubic foot of earth. This vital fact Bromfield had learned in the years he had been away from the Coulter farm, and he had found the answers necessary to maintain that cubic foot of soil at its peak of fertility.

The original top soil of the virgin land that the pioneers broke up for agricultural purposes consisted of the top six to ten inches of dark colored earth. If it grew good grass or forests before it was plowed, it grew good crops afterward. It was fertile because Mother Nature had made it that way through a long process of "birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth" of plant life--a leaf, a branch, or a root at a time. Through extensive root systems the necessary mineral elements were taken from the subsoil and, through the leaves from the rain and sunshine by photosynthesis, they were added to the topsoil. With the coming

of the pioneers' plows, this process was stopped. In the course of a few crop years, it was reversed; and by a process known as erosion, the primary elements were lost from "that cubic foot of soil."

Bromfield accurately explains what happened by defining two types of erosion: erosion from the top and erosion from the bottom of the foot of soil. Erosion from the top is caused by taking the forage and grains from the crops planted, and by sheet erosion brought about by the rain, snow, and hail that pelted the exposed cultivated soil. The fine particles of organic matter and soluble mineral are easily separated from the coarser particles of inorganic matter, and these essential elements are soon carried away by wind and water. The erosion from the bottom is caused by rain or snow water leeching the mineral content of the soils that do not have sufficient humus or organic matter down through the inorganic subsoils until they are no longer available for the growing crops.

Many chapters of Bromfield's five books on agriculture give technical information and observations of these erosion processes: "My Ninety Acres," "The World Within the Earth," "The Business of Plowman's Folly,"[5] "The Organic-Chemical Fertilizer Feud," "Out of the Earth We Are Born and

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[5]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley.

to the Earth We Return,"[6] "A Somewhat Technical Chapter for All Who Love and Understand the Soil," "More of the Same," and "On Building Topsoils Ten Thousand Times Faster Than Nature."[7]

Almost everyone knows the results to farm lands that have had their thousands of cubic feet of soil eroded in these ways. The crops of hay, forage, and grain grow smaller and smaller until at last the operator can no longer survive by farming those acres and must abandon them. But Bromfield went further than merely pointing out those facts. He showed that depleted acres would also produce depleted citizens, depleted physically, spiritually, and politically. It would only be a matter of time until the individuals who subsisted on the food produced from such soil would slip back to the serfs of the Middle Ages, the coolies of modern Asia, and the Jeeters of Tobacco Road.

In his chapter "Out of the Earth We Are Born and to the Earth We Return," Bromfield tells his readers that there are twenty-two elements essential to human and animal life as well as to plant life. The normal way for human beings and animals to receive these twenty-two elements is by eating

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[6]Bromfield, Malabar Farm.

[7]Bromfield, From My Experience.

cereals or vegetables grown from ground that contains them. Going into considerable detail he pointed out that:

> The latest research in relation to the dread leukemia, a malady related to cancer, has shown that a definite connection exists between the coincidence of the disease and a deficiency of zinc in almost infinitesimal quantities.[8]

Of course, health is both wealth and happiness; in order to have health, wealth and happiness, the American people spend great sums for research and hospitals and "drives" of all kinds, including cancer drives. Perhaps, as Bromfield insinuates, more attention should be made to prevention and a balance of necessary zinc in the primary source of all food, the soil itself.

For years, anemia has been a disease that has baffled doctors and scientists and has been a deadly killer, especially among children. Continuing his studies of the basic elements in the soil itself, Bromfield declared:

> . . . During the last generation it was discovered that anemia occurred only in areas completely deficient in cobalt. Once this element was added to the soils upon which the food of both cattle and people was grown, the disease completely vanished.[9]

This idea certainly merits the attention of every thinking person. Scientists know that it is not too difficult a task to add all the cobalt necessary for any soil. If, by simply

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[8]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 304.

[9]Ibid., p. 300.

adding cobalt to the soil, all the suffering and heartache of anemia can be eliminated, it should be done.

One of the most costly of all livestock diseases is Brucellosis or Bangs disease, which, transmitted to human beings through the use of milk from infected cows or by direct contact through open wounds, is known as Undulant fever. In persons, it is often fatal; recovery is a slow, painful process. The following statement of Bromfield's is therefore significant:

> Experiments with manganese and dairy cattle tends to prove that its presence in feed has a definite effect as a control and protection against the feared and destructive Bang's disease, which in humans takes the form of undulant fever.[10]

Today most dairy and livestock men know and understand the need of a mineral supplement for livestock feeds. Probably no other one person called their attention to that necessity any more forcibly or consistently than did Louis Bromfield. The American Dairy Association is constantly stressing the value of all dairy products to men, women, and children--especially children--because these foods contain sufficient amounts of available calcium for bone and teeth growth. Bromfield shows the need of calcium in the soil by poignantly stating

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[10] Ibid.

> . . . A pregnant cow, like a pregnant woman suffering from a deficiency of calcium in her diet, will take the calcium out of her bones or her teeth in order to provide the necessary mineral to herself or the baby she is carrying.[11]

Successful florists and greenhouse operators already understood the need of the mineral elements for successful plant growth and know how to make those substances available for plant growth. But Bromfield realized the average lay farmer needed to understand those facts, too, and he found the facilities and the will to get that information to them.

It is a matter of common knowledge, Bromfield reminds his readers, that a deficiency of iodine in the food raised in some communities--in Switzerland most notoriously--has caused a prevalence of goiter and other glandular troubles; and more recently dentists have learned that the lack of just a trace of fluorine causes tooth decay. He sums up his thoughts with these words:

> The formula for a minerally well-balanced soil capable of producing healthy plants, animals, and people, as we know it today, should contain abundant organic material in the process of decay, bacteria, moulds, fungi, earthworms, calcium, phosphorous, potassium, nitrogen and a wide variety of trace elements such as manganese, magnesium, boron, copper, cobalt, iron, and at least twenty or thirty others. It should be soil in which the whole

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[11] Ibid., p. 303.

eternal cycle of life, growth, death, and rebirth should be constantly in progress.[12, 13]

It is interesting to note that the 1957 Yearbook of Agriculture contained twelve chapters about the basic elements in soil and their relationship to fertility. Probably nothing corresponding to this has ever been published before by the United States Department of Agriculture. Each chapter was written by a thoroughly trained authority. Here are the titles of these twelve chapters: 1. "Nitrogen and Soil Fertility," 2. "Soil Phosphorous and Fertility," 3. "Soil Potassium and Fertility," 4. "Sulfur and Fertility," 5. "Iron and Fertility," 6. "Zinc and Soil Fertility," 7. "Boron and Soil Fertility," 8. Copper and Soil Fertility," 9. "Manganese and Soil Fertility," 10. "Trace Elements," 11. "Living Organisms in the Soil," 12. "Toxic Elements in the Soil."[14]

To meet the formula for "a cubic foot of soil," Bromfield established definite practices to restore those depleted Malabar acres. With a few variations he used three. First, he grew deep-rooted, legume building crops to bring up deep-seated trace minerals from the subsoil and to build nitrogen content. Sweet clover, ladino, white

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[12] Ibid., p. 319.

[13] Soils. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1957, pp. 80-172.

[14] Ibid.

clover, alfalfa, and soy beans were the crops best adapted for this purpose. In addition to the primary objective, these crops also furnished hay, forage, and pasture for livestock, as well as green manure, organic matter, and the necessary bacteria to decay it in the soil.

The second practice was to grow cover and protection to the top of the soil; this was done primarily with Brome grass, Sudan grass, and the native grasses--blue grass and grama. Three things were accomplished by this method of restoration. A covering of grass would protect the top soil from sheet erosion, because the grass would keep rain and snow from hitting the ground directly, thus guarding the mixture of organic and inorganic substances. Grasses would also shade the ground and protect it from the intense heat of direct sun rays and increase the number and action of essential bacteria. And then, finally, grasses provide hay crops and succulent pasturage for livestock.

Grass, the great soil builder and healer, was one of Bromfield's favorite subjects. By commenting on it in many and devious ways, he preached his gospel that an acre of good grass returns more net profit than any other crop and builds up the soil while it is doing it. As presented in his two long chapters in Malabar Farm on "Grass, the Great Healer," he supports his argument with logic and facts.

The third practice to restore depleted soil was by the direct application of the four main minerals: phosphorus, nitrogen, potash, and lime. Generally, the deficient trace minerals should be supplied through a soluble mixture, applied either by a machine that is somewhat like a wheat drill or by aereated irrigation. Either way it is done, the work must be in cooperation of a careful chemical analysis or what is known as soil testing. These soil tests reveal the kind and amount of mineral deficiencies, and the operator then knows exactly what minerals to add or to counterbalance. There are inexhaustible quantities of lime stone rock in the United States that can be pulverized for field application of lime deficient fields; and phosphate, nitrogen, and potash can be manufactured for such uses at a comparatively low cost and in apparently unlimited quantities.

Essential bacteria can be added to worn-out soils through the droppings of live stock and the application of barn yard manure. Bacteria and yeast moulds can even be manufactured and applied to land, as is demonstrated by the now generally accepted practice of "inoculating" clover and alfalfa seed before planting.

This is a brief summary of Bromfield's attitude toward the natural elements. In his own words, "We should never forget that in a cubic foot of highly productive, living, well-balanced soil, every law of the universe is in

operation." By recognizing this law and doing the practices outlined above, he could say with pride and accuracy:

> . . . where only sixteen years ago there was no topsoil whatever, fields revealed a healthy DARK topsoil to a depth of about eighteen inches.[15]

Reversing the rule of the scientists who, a few years ago, accurately maintained that, "It took Nature ten thousand years to build an inch of good productive topsoil," Bromfield calmly announced: "We are now building top-soil ten thousand times faster than Nature."[16]

To all the citizens who were closely associated with the soil, Bromfield's observations were startling revelations. The public was stunned into the realization that, from a bread and butter point of view, the minute particles of soil were just as important to growing plant life as the discoveries of atomic research were to the scientific world.

The time will soon come, Bromfield suggests, when all tin canned foods and fresh fruits and vegetables will be labeled as a practical health protection, A, B, C, D, according to the mineral content of the food involved.[17] He was that serious in his attitude toward the natural elements in our soil.

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[15]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 307.

[16]Ibid., p. 208.

[17]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 305.

CHAPTER VI

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE IMMEDIATE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF FARM PROBLEMS

Writing about his youth while he was following his father from farm to farm on business matters--farms that were already badly eroded and poverty stricken--Bromfield declared:

> I did not understand then what all those ruined and worn out farms and hundreds of others like them meant to the economy of the nation, nor did I speculate as to what became of that last tenant, moving to another dying farm or into the slums of an industrial city; or, worst of all, taking to the road with his family as an indigent tramp. I only knew that the desolation I saw was somehow evil and wicked.[1]

From these statements, it is evident that Bromfield had been a student of the social, economic, and political problems of the farmer practically all of his life. He continued to study these farm problems and to seek persistently for answers and solutions to them. Progressively more the master of these farming difficulties as he returned to his Ohio farm, he spoke out with the authority, prestige, and leadership that he had earned as an acclaimed writer of fiction. Mincing no words, he records in the first of his "on the farm" books:

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[1]Bromfield, Animals and Other People, p. 59.

> A sick agriculture in any nation sooner or later infects the whole economic structure with its sickness. In every depression we have ever experienced, the signs of catastrophe appeared first of all in our agricultural population. Yet in all the "post-war planning" of the past two years, agriculture has been mentioned but rarely. It is all labor and industry. More than half the population of this country lives on farms or in villages, small towns and cities largely or wholly dependent upon agriculture for their prosperity. If this great potential market becomes useless through economic illness, labor and industry may attempt to go on functioning but they cannot continue to function long. And today, even in the midst of the so-called war boom, agriculture is still sick with a sickness which will show up more violently when the war is over.[2]

As the years progressed, Bromfield spoke out with even more vehemence against the social and economic injustices that he saw in agriculture. He reiterated his ideas in A Few Brass Tacks and A New Pattern for a Tired World. Probably, in none of these writings does he express these grievances any more poignantly than in the first few pages of Malabar Farm, written shortly after World War II:

> And do not be misled by cries of "surpluses," and "What shall we do with surpluses?" For a thousand years there have been no real surpluses of food produced on the farms of the world or in this country. There has been only poor and inefficient distribution, exploitation of the buyer, and high prices for which this distribution is partly responsible. These things--poor distribution and high prices--create artificial surpluses which have no reality in a world where half the people suffer all their lives from malnutrition and the diseases arising from it, and where at least 500 million people are born and die without ever having enough to eat one day of their lives.[3]

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[2]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 246.

[3]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 4.

Many of Bromfield's readers had never considered or understood the facts of malnutrition and food shortages outside of the United States. Now, these uninformed were made cognizant of the fact that, with his first-hand knowledge of world affairs, Bromfield knew what he was writing about. Often, to the chagrin of and with the disapproval of selfish and narrow-minded politicians, he suggested other legislation to alleviate these farm problems:

> Government might well have helped the American farmer and the national economy by spending the billions it has spent not upon bribes, parity guarantees, subsidies, ever-normal granaries and other artificial methods of propping up an imperilled economy, but in finding the proper, efficient and economical means of getting American-raised food to other nations and peoples or even to the Americans themselves who need it but are prevented from buying it by high prices which they cannot afford.[4]

Via radio talks, public speeches, and magazine articles, as well as his books, Bromfield warned the American citizens of the results he anticipated with existing farm laws. The following quotation is a good summation of his views:

> And I repeat that a subsidized agriculture must always be a burden to the avepage citizen in terms both of taxes and high prices.[5]

These were immensely unpopular comments at the time Bromfield made them. Public opinion, however, has changed

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[4] Ibid., p. 5.

[5] Ibid., p. 7.

as government surpluses of cotton, wheat, and rice have piled higher and higher along with the costs and taxes of the whole farm program. A recent issue of Life magazine has undoubtedly expressed current attitudes in a long article which is illustrated with many pictures and which clearly vindicates Bromfield's views. This article is an exposé of the results of the farm subsidy program which was planned originally to reduce surpluses of wheat, cotton, corn, and rice and to aid needy farmers by guaranteeing them a good price. After twenty-six years of operation, the United States government now owns nine billion dollars worth of surplus grains and cotton; moreover, the surplus grows larger every year. In addition to these gigantic surpluses, just as Bromfield indicated, quite often the poor farmer has become more careless with his farming operations and less ambitious for his economic welfare, while the program has made the prosperous operator richer. At least one wheat farmer, one rice farmer, and three cotton farmers drew subsidy checks in 1957 for one third million dollars each; and a cotton grower drew one for $1,167,502 for the same year.[6]

Whitley Austin, editor of the Salina Journal, summed up the extremely controversial subject of current farm programs conclusively in a recent article:

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[6]John Williams, "Big Riders on the Farm Gravy Train," Life, Vol. 46, March 23, 1959, pp. 26-29.

> These programs, designed to smooth the bumps of glut and shortage, have become what many consider a Frankenstein. Even the most kindly admit we have a costly bear by the tail and can't figure how to cut loose.[7]

Bromfield insisted that another handicap to agriculture was the spiralling rounds of inflation, unbalanced budgets, and higher taxes. Taxes are something, he insists, that are shuffled and shuttled and passed along from employer, to employee, to consumer until they come to the land and its products. Then, because there is no place else to pass these taxes, the land pays them. It is obvious that all taxes--personal, land, sales, profits, and income--are included in that spread between the net prices paid for the products of mines, oil wells, forests, and farms, and the prices paid by the consumer. This in-between spread is a wedge between the raw product and the consumer's price. The more the consumer's resistance to high prices and the larger the tax wedge, the greater is the pressure that wedge puts on the land itself. No matter how well taxes are camouflaged, basically they are nothing less than a mortgage on land. This handicap is apparent because the very soil must be used to pay this mortgage and the interest thereon first, even before operation or living expenses. The greater the

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[7]Whitley Austin, "Two Big Problems," Salina Journal, April 15, 1959, p. 4.

National Mortgage, the more the soil is likely to be depleted.[8]

In conjunction with the arguments that spiralling rounds of inflation handicapped agriculture, Bromfield also insisted that inflation destroys wealth rather than creates it.[9] If a farmer would invest seventy-five dollars in a Series E War Bond, at the end of ten years he should receive one hundred dollars--his original capital plus a fair rate of interest. On the other hand, because of inflated values, the farmer can buy less with the hundred dollars than he could have ten years before with seventy-five dollars, the inflation has destroyed a part of his wealth. The following statement illustrates how inflation now affects economy:

> The nation has suffered three rounds of inflation in the post-World War II period, which together have raised overall living costs by 60 per cent and have reduced the dollar's buying power by nearly two-fifths in a period of little more than a decade.[10]

Another idea of the social and economic attitude of Bromfield's is:

> Raising industrial and white collar wages serves only to increase in turn the cost of food. The answer lies

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[8]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 246.

[9]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 286.

[10]Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Yearly Statement, 1959, p. 3.

> with a better and more productive agriculture which lowers the price of food and increases the value of every man's dollar.[11]

The following quotation very well concludes Bromfield's views towards the social, political, and economic problems of agriculture:

> It is safe to say that the greater part of the agricultural land of America is a depleted soil, deficient both in organic material and in minerals, and in the older regions of the East and Deep South, the deficiency has reached proportions which made it virtually impossible in some areas to produce people who are capable of learning or of helping themselves, even with the aid of schools and expenditures of money in terms of subsidy and relief. The economic and social problem of large depleted areas of the United States are, as they are in the case of an individual farm, largely those of soil and secondarily of diet.[12]

One of the most interesting observations in regard to present social aspects of modern agriculture is expressed in the chapter "The Passing of a Pattern," in Malabar Farm, with many subsequent references to the theme in later writings. His own words explain it eloquently.

> The pattern of the general farm has, I think, outlived its usefulness and its economic justification, and to a certain extent so has the pattern of self-sufficiency. The successful farmer of the future in the United States will be, . . ., not a frontier farmer living in a little world of his own with a few cows, a few hogs, a few chickens, ten acres of corn, ten acres of oats, ten of hay and ten of wheat with a little

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[11] Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 8.

[12] Ibid., p. 396.

> primitive, untended pasture land on the side, but a businessman, a specialist and something of a scientist . . . .
>
> All these things and many more have, I think, made the old-fashioned, overdiversified farm as obsolete as the wooden plow.[13]

Besides being interested in these social and economic ideas, many readers and visitors wanted to know how such revolutionary ideas worked out in a practical way at Malabar Farm. One whole chapter in Pleasant Valley is dedicated to these philosophies, which, briefly, are as follows:

1. The farm was to be operated on the principle of self-sufficiency.
2. It was to be managed without dispossessing families.
3. All employees were to be paid wages above the average, and each employee was to share in the total farm profits.
4. Every family, including the Bromfields, would have a house rent free, with light and heat, bathrooms and plumbing, all its living save only coffee, spices, and sugar.
5. Bromfield was to receive five per cent profit on his initial investment and then an equal

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[13] Ibid., pp. 45-6.

share with the other employees of any remaining profit.[14]

After these principles had been in operation at Malabar for ten years, Bromfield reported on them in detail. The "self-sufficiency" program had been altered in line with good management. The employees no longer tried to produce poultry, eggs, fruit, or potatoes, finding that it was more practical and economical to buy these commodities from other farmers who specialized in them. At Malabar, in the meantime, labor was concentrated on vegetables, milk and milk products, cattle, and hogs. Bromfield and his co-workers regarded their revised objectives as a specialized self-sufficiency.

Instead of dispossessing families, Malabar Farm sustained five families continuously with additional help during the busy seasons. It supported on an average of forty men, women, and children--more than the land had ever sustained in the pioneer days of one family farms.

As to the third principle, there had been no labor trouble. The men, except in the most urgent harvest seasons, worked labor union hours at union wages. The wage earners and their families seemed to be immensely happy. Good profits were divided at the end of each year, although for

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[14]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 25.

the first two years those incomes had not been so large as they were in latter years, after the Malabar programs had become thoroughly established.

Each family had enjoyed a good modern home, with electricity, running water, and modern appliances; and each had taken pride in making it neat and attractive with a well-groomed lawn and planned landscaping. Individual families had an acre of ground to grow what they wanted. Bromfield had always insisted on the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of the home.[15]

As planned, Bromfield had received the five per cent on his original investment, plus handsome profit dividends. Besides he gained that which was of more value to him--the respect, admiration, and interest of a great following of people who also loved the soil and all types of life.[16]

The success of Malabar Farm as it actually worked out is practical proof for much of Bromfield's attitudes towards the immediate social and political aspects of farm problems. At the conclusion of his chapter, "The Passing of a Pattern," he sums up this success in these words:

> The better, the more productive and well-planned the farm, the less is the drudgery. It is much more a question of information, intelligence, and experience.

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[15] Bromfield, Malabar Farm, pp. 107-8.

[16] Ibid., pp. 112-3.

> All of these things add up to abundance, to lower prices for food to the city dweller, and higher profits and a more solid economic base for the farmer.[17]

There is an interesting sidelight to the political aspect of Bromfield's interest in and knowledge of agriculture. Although politically he had always been a Democrat, he was an ardent admirer and supporter of his fellow Ohian, Robert Taft. Toward the close of the Roosevelt-Truman administration, Bromfield expressed the wish that he would like to become Secretary of Agriculture under the next administration.[18] It was quite possible that he would have been if either Robert Taft or Thomas Dewey had been elected.

Thus, Bromfield's attitude towards immediate social and political problems can be contributed to his great powers of observation and intellectual curiosity. He was alert and, because he was energetic and enthusiastic, had the power to stir things up, attract attention, and set off sparks of ardor to hundreds of thousands of farmers, researchers, gardeners, and just common people. Not only agriculture but also the whole world was the sounder because of him.

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[17] Ibid., p. 62.

[18] Harrison Smith, "Mr. Bromfield Comes Back," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 31, October 23, 1948, p. 14.

CHAPTER VII

SYMPATHY TOWARD PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE

One of the best known and most appreciated American legends is that of Johnny Appleseed. As a child growing up in that North-Central Ohio farm country near Mansfield, Bromfield's Aunt Mattie actually talked to and loved the real Johnny Appleseed. She describes him vividly:

> a small man with a shriveled, weather-beaten face, framed by long ragged gray hair. His eyes were a very bright blue surrounded by fine little lines which came of always living in the open. He went barefoot winter and summer and for clothing wore strange garments fashioned out of a kind of sackcloth or of leather or skins given him by the Indians. His only baggage was a metal cooking pot with a handle, which did not encumber his movements since when traveling he wore it as a hat with the handle at the back. He always carried a "poke" swung over his shoulder in which he carried seeds and plants.[1]

Aunt Mattie, Bromfield continues to record, states that Johnny Appleseed would sometimes "preach a kind of a sermon upon love of mankind and all Nature." The children loved to hear him, and Johnny's visits to that frontier country took the place of our modern theaters, movies, and TV programs. Appleseed's enchanting stories about wild things--the opossum, the raccoon, the bear, the blue jay--all came to have distinct personalities and a sense of reality which most people never understand.

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[1]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 28.

Bromfield's story about "Johnny Appleseed and Aunt Mattie" comes very early in his first farm book, Pleasant Valley,[2] and the incidents related must have strongly influenced his whole life.[3] Interspersed throughout his writings are these same "Johnny Appleseed" ideas toward all life, and all are brought to final focus in the clearly stated philosophy of his later years, "Reverence for Life." Always there are the intensely human and humane comments about everything that grows or walks, or flies or swims or crawls. Sometimes he waxes eloquent, sometimes he writes in every-day common place language, and sometimes he glorifies these stories as in his accounts of Phoebe Wise, his Boxer dogs, and the family's pet mongoose.

As has already been indicated, Bromfield's father, Charles Bromfield, and his Grandfather Coulter were "teched" with Johnny Appleseed's love for all growing things. Louis must have inherited these traits both by blood and by association, because Phoebe Wise once exclaimed to Louis's father, when she saw a white colt playfully splashing water over Louis, then a ten-year-old boy sailing play boats in a small pond, "Do you know that boy is 'teched' just like you and

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[2]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 26.

[3]Louis Bromfield, "Johnny Appleseed and the Lost Dauphin," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 28, January 6, 1945, pp. 14-16.

I?"[4] Phoebe Wise's great heart for nature is faithfully described by Bromfield in his remarkable short story "Up Ma Ferguson Way." Great Aunt Mattie was the woman who, although she was totally blind for the last fifty years of her life, literally walked and talked with the birds and animals as she made her way around over her farm for all those long dark years. When he was twelve years old, he discovered her "still sitting against a tree where she had died while still talking to her birds." Bromfield records that he had no fear of death on this occasion, but simply wanted to report that "Now Aunt Mattie has gone to join Johnny Appleseed."

This "love of life" manifested itself naturally all through his career. When the Bromfields lived in France, it was revealed when he introduced American vegetables and flowers to French gardeners. Joining the Workingmen's Gardens Association of France, he was awarded a medal and a diploma for his practical work in growing vegetables and flowers. Bromfield prized this award as one of the greatest accomplishments of his life. Senlis, the Bromfields' home in France, had been neglected when they rented it; but, with the help of a French worker, Bromfield renovated the beautiful old house and landscaped the yards until it was a place of

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[4]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 88.

beauty and joy. Strangers as well as friends were attracted to Senlis because of the quiet beauty of the place, and there were sometimes as many as eighty visitors on a Sunday afternoon.[5]

Perhaps the most distinctive personal characteristic of Bromfield was his great love of his pets. This sincere devotion was clearly expressed in his writings while the family lived in Senlis. A friend gave them their first boxer dog, Rex, "a king among dogs," the patriarch of a long line of boxer dogs that the Bromfields were to raise. A second dog that Bromfield depicted was "a grizzled, tough old Scotty called Dash," who was "both a tramp and a Don Juan." The third member of Bromfield's Senlis pets to be immortalized was a pet mongoose, Rikky, named after the mongoose in Kipling's famous story of the fight between a mongoose and the deadly cobra.

Good literature should do four things: reflect the life of the author, bring pleasure to the reader, give accurate information, and inspire. Bromfield's stories about pets and living things accomplish all four of these objectives, as the following samples will illustrate.

"The thing that is most endearing about dogs . . . is that each one has his own personality and that they are so

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[5]Mary Bromfield, "The Writer I Live With," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 186, August, 1950, pp. 76-78.

profoundly like children,"[6] writes Bromfield. The statement could have been made with equal justice about any of the pets and animals that he describes; and a reader soon feels that he knows each pet intimately. Rex, the first of the Senlis pets, came to the Bromfields a full-grown dog, a gift of a friend. Rex was depicted as "a personality with great dignity who expected no nonsense and no familiarity." He cautiously studied and scrutinized the whole family for the first three days. Then

> . . . resting his head on their knees, suddenly he wagged his stump of a tail. He was telling us that he had accepted us after looking us over for three days. From that moment on there was never a more devoted dog. He took over the whole family. He watched the house. He was happy really only when the whole family was at home and together.[7]

Dash was the brave, ferocious Scotty that came to the Bromfields as a tramp. He was a bossy, scrappy fellow that whipped every dog in the community, including those many times larger than he was. He loved to puncture the pride of any pampered and over-coddled dog and on one occasion nearly destroyed the famous handsome white poodle, Basquette, belonging to Gertrude Stein. Basquette was a big pink and white dog, trimmed and tonsured always by the best dog dressers in Paris. Dash apparently thought that such a

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[6]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 186.

[7]Bromfield, Pleasant Valley, p. 201.

monstrosity needed to be exterminated. A neighbor couple, Monsieur and Madame Bigué, had a small, pocket-sized dog named Frow-Frow of whom they were very jealous. Dash resented their possessiveness and took his resentment out one day without warning by tearing the seat of the trousers from Monsieur Bigué.

Bromfield's description of the first meeting between Dash and Rex is a splendid piece of reporting:

> On the first morning after Rex's arrival, the two dogs encountered one another in the garden. They did not growl. They did not sniff at each other. As for Rex, he walked past Dash with perfect dignity, ignoring him. For once in his life Dash did not attack on sight. His tail went straight into the air and twice he walked the length of the garden on his toes, very stiff legged, every hair on end. . . .
>
> Relations between the dogs never improved.[8]

The other pet at Senlis was the strangest of the three, an animal no larger than Rex's paw. This, of course, was Rikky, the mongoose. She weighed less than a pound, had gray and black hairy fur, a tiny pointed head with a delicate, pink nose and brown shoe button eyes. She was "a curiously sociable animal and liked to live with people." She played havoc with the many rats that had accumulated at Senlis. Although she never would eat them, she would often

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[8] Ibid., p. 206.

kill a whole litter of rats and lay them out in a neat row along a garden path for the family to see.[9]

The story of Rikky cannot be retold. One simply has to read the remarkable episodes as Bromfield relates them so vividly. She deliberately tantalized people whom she knew to be afraid of her, she learned to undo latches with amazing dexterity and to break the eggs she was fed by passing them between her legs like a football until they hit some object to break them. One of her favorite tricks was to climb inside Bromfield's shirt, go down the sleeve, and peek out at the cuff to see what was going on. Often she would reverse the process, and many of Bromfield's guests were dumbfounded to see a brown head with a pair of beady black eyes suddenly pop out of his shirt collar, reach up, and playfully nibble at the lobe of his ear.[10]

When the Bromfields left France to return to an Ohio farm, they took Rex with them. Just as they were boarding the train, a French friend rushed up to shove a small Boxer puppy into their arms. She was to be a mate for Rex and was promptly named Regina; the two dogs became the pioneers of the many and varied boxers that Bromfield characterizes in subsequent stories. One of the most pathetic of these

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[9]Ibid., p. 211.

[10]Ibid., pp. 208-210.

accounts is "Good-by to a Friend."[11] After a three-day fishing trip among the islands of Lake Erie, Bromfield had returned home to discover that Prince, the son of Rex, had suddenly sickened and died. The loss seemed irreparable since

> Prince had slept on the foot of my bed since he was a fat puppy. Never once in the eight years of his life was he absent from his accustomed place. He spent twenty-four hours a day with me. If I moved across a room to another chair, he moved with me and lay down at my feet. People came to say that I did not own Prince: he owned me.[12]

It seems that any person who understands pets is inclined to be a sentimentalist; nevertheless, this story is very touching. There were other dogs to be depicted, each in its own way. The reader will remember Baby, "always a clown and a ham actor"; Border Collie, the cattle dog scared of cows; Folly and Susie, boxer watchdogs and excellent stock dogs; and Gina, Dusky, Patsy, and Midge.

The story of Bromfield's parrot, Thomas, is hilarious. This parrot could talk and imitate almost any noise that it ever heard. He had a large vocabulary of profanity and used it unrestrainably whenever he was irritated. He particularly held an incurable antipathy toward men and boys. As

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[11]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, pp. 173-4.

[12]Ibid., p. 175.

long as he was kept in the part of the house occupied by Mary Bromfield, the three daughters, and their maid, the parrot was sweet-tempered and soft-spoken. When the three daughters, however, reached the age for entertaining boy friends, Bromfield states, "To put it mildly and in an unrefined way, all hell broke loose," and Thomas would "on occasion shriek in an unmistakably feminine voice, 'Shut up! Damn you! Shut up!'"

Equally ridiculous and as well told are the incidents relating to Sylvester, the huge Guernsey bull. The climax of these tales records how Sylvester got his head fastened in an empty oil drum. Blind and helpless from it, "he grew madder and madder, and the madder he got, the more he bawled, with variations basso profundo, tenor and even coloratura." After he was finally freed, he gave his rescuers a most baleful look, cowered with confusion, grumbled once or twice, went into his stall, and sulked the rest of the day.[13] As Bromfield insists in his chapter "Some More Animals," they just act like human beings.[14]

The longer the Bromfields lived at Malabar Farm, the more of such stories appeared. Among his bovine friends

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[13] Ibid., p. 159.

[14] Louis Bromfield, "Sylvester the Bull," Atlantic Monthly, Vol. 181, April, 1948, pp. 45-47.

were Blondy, Dessi, Fanny, Eileen, and many others; and it was both interesting and amusing to know how and why they received their names. A cow with a cold, haughty, detached "personality" might have the name of some overweight, proud, bejewelled Metropolitan Opera patron currently in the news.

Tony, Hope's pony, was a clown who knew many tricks, both well-mannered and ill-tempered ones--he would shake hands with a person one minute, and butt him in the back the next. Red was a pony who would actually glance back to see that the small children who rode him were secure and firm in the saddle. Tex was the queen of the horses who was "imperious and conscious of her beauty," but who led and cared for Sylvia, the blind Percheron mare, with the tender care of a nurse.

And there were many other stories about pets, such as the ones about Rachel, the Poland China sow; Gilbert, the violent and frustrated turkey gobbler; Donald, the misplaced duck; Haile Selassie, the imperial karakul ram; and Hector, the big Nubian he-goat, who "when courting, was the perfect picture of a lecherous bearded old reprobate" as he pranced about on his hind legs.

These stories were related by Bromfield in Pleasant Valley and Malabar Farm and finally gathered together in his last publication Animals and Other People. Some of them

were also published in contemporary magazines as they were written.[15]

Along with land itself, pets and animals were with Bromfield obsessions which resulted in definitely stated principles that reappear many times in his comments. They are stated tersely in these words:

> There are no ill-treated animals at Malabar, for the first consideration of employment in connection with any livestock is that the man must be able to imagine himself a cow, a pig or a chicken and so be able to know what would make that particular animal or bird happy and comfortable.[16]

In another comment, he praises the help at Malabar with these remarks:

> Fortunately all the people on the farm and especially the children feel much the same way, and I think the animals know it. They are good people who understand livestock and could not sleep if any animals were sick or cold or without feed or water. And the children are growing up with a feeling of sympathy and responsibility toward all dumb beasts, a feeling which can bring great

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[15] A partial list of these articles is:
"Rebirth of an American Farm," Reader's Digest, Vol. 43, August, 1943, pp. 12-14.
"Happiest Man I Have Ever Known," Reader's Digest, Vol. 44, April, 1944, pp. 12-14.
"Johnny Appleseed and the Lost Dauphin," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 28, January 6, 1945, pp. 14-16.
"My Ninety Acres," Reader's Digest, Vol. 47, November, 1945, pp. 51-4.
"Sylvester the Bull," The Atlantic, Vol. 181, April, 1948, pp. 45-47.
"I Live on the Edge of Paradise," The Saturday Evening Post, Vol. 222, March 11, 1950, pp. 22-23.

[16] Bromfield, Animals and Other People, p. 262.

> richness in life and great understanding of things which others, who do not know that sympathy and responsibility, never understand or fathom. . . . In any case, I know how much poorer life would be without animals and their trust.[17]

Bromfield's attachment to all kinds of plants and animals is manifested in other interests besides those in animals and pets. Certainly one of his most interesting stories is "The Cycle of a Farm Pond," which was published in Malabar Farm and Animals and Other People. One of the soil conservation projects at Malabar was the construction of a brand new pond. At first the pond was void of all life, plant or animal. The first signs of animal life were frogs, which multiplied rapidly and literally jumped all over the place. Moss and other water plants appeared from seed blown in by wind, carried by rain water as the pond filled, or on the feet of animals or waterfowl. Finally, some fish appeared. As no other likely explanation seemed plausible, these must have hatched from fish eggs carried there on the feet or bills of water birds. This process of addition to the pond continued until the whole "cycle" of plant and animal life was established.

Because Bromfield considered ponds an indispensible part of the soil conservation program of the Malabar hills, several were built; and as the years went by, these were

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[17] Ibid., p. 181.

well stocked with blue gill, bass, trout, and other species of fish. He loved to fish and saw to it that the fishing was always good.[18]

Bromfield, like many literary men, knew the value of repetition and was so conscientious about conservation of wild life that he emphasizes it many times.[19] Arguing that conservation of wild life should be the constant objective of all Americans as well as land owners, he states:

> There is no greater beneficiary of good agriculture and proper land use than the sportsman. As a member of the Ohio Conservation Commission . . ., I have pushed a good wild life program at Malabar . . . .[20]

Although he was never a hunter himself, he considered wild birds and animals as benefits to the land rather than liabilities and felt that birds more than repaid the small amount of grain they ate by their destruction of insects and weed seed. Some of the practices he advocated for every operator are the planting of multiflora roses in corners and along fence rows, the creating of shelter belts of trees,

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[18]Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 15.

[19]"Happiest Man I Have Ever Known," Reader's Digest, Vol. 44, April, 1944, pp. 12-14.
"I Live on the Edge of Paradise," The Saturday Evening Post, Vol. 222, March 11, 1950, pp. 22-3+.
"My Ninety Acres," Pleasant Valley.
"Of Green Hills and Valleys," Pleasant Valley.
"Sportsmen's Paradise," Malabar Farm.

[20]Bromfield, Malabar Farm, p. 344.

the leaving of hollow trees and logs where they fell, and abandoning of down rows and corners of grain crop for the benefit of wild life.

Because of his intense love of all animal and plant life, Bromfield has frequently been criticized for his attitudes towards religion; and his beliefs are often misunderstood because his life is sometimes not understood, in the light of all the circumstances that molded it. As a boy and young man he was raised in the doctrine of a strict Protestant denomination, but in those character-forming years, he came to know of some very erratic moral and social acts of two or three ministers and high church officials.[21] The young man, generalizing from these few oddities and moral breaches, condemned all religious organizations. Throughout his fiction writings, priesthood and the ministry are held in scorn. For instance in The Rains Came the amoral Lady Esketh says in speaking of a teacher-missionary spinster, "Even my own slut's life is more normal, is better than that. Even Shiva and his dingus is better than the chastity and barrenness of the Christian Church." Then, in Mrs. Parkington there is this derogatory comment: "Gus had been right when he said that the Reverend Burchard would get along. His grandson shook hands with the same false

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[21]Brown, Louis Bromfield and His Books, p. 16.

enthusiasm, with the same show of teeth which looked false in the fierce intensity of his smile. He talked in the same mealy mouthed way."

Actually Bromfield had a deep and abiding faith. At times his writings seem to indicate an animistic faith, and once he made an almost Pythagorean comment about the nearly human intelligence of dogs. "I sometimes am almost inclined to think there is something to the idea of transmigration of the soul." He often expressed the Pantheistic philosophy about nature, however, as when he wrote:

> The man who loves Nature comes nearest, I think, to an understanding God. Even man's religion grew out of Nature itself, and the good earth and true faith have never been removed from one another. They are as near today as they were ten thousand years ago.[22]

In many different attempts, Bromfield tried to define and capture his philosophy of life and his own attitude toward religious beliefs. He indicates this struggle in these words:

> For me religion and faith have never come through churches and rarely through men. These things have welled up in me many times in contact with animals and trees and landscapes; at moments when I was certain not only the existence of God but of my own immortality as a part of a gigantic scheme of creation, of an immortality that had nothing to do with plastic saints and tawdry heavens, but with something greater and more profound and richer in dignity; the beautiful dignity of the small animals of the field, of a fern growing from

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[22]Bromfield, Animals and Other People, pp. 90-91.

> a damp crevice in the rock, or a tulip tree rising straight and clean a hundred feet in the sky.[23]

Always a great admirer of Albert Schweitzer, Bromfield's search for assolid religious philosophy found fulfillment when in reading Schweitzer's Out of My Life and Thought he came across this paragraph:

> Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforseen and unsought, the phrase "Reverence for Life." The iron door had yielded; the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the idea in which affirmation of the world and of ethics are contained side by side.[24]

In the expression "Reverence for Life" Bromfield, too, had found what he had searched for all his life. To him the thought "illuminated the darkness like the switching on of a powerful light bulb," and it was like a "rocket bursting high in the darkness of the night air." He concludes this statement of his philosophy with the same words that Schweitzer used:

> A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as well as that of his fellow men, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help.[25]

This principle, this rule of life, is known to every really good farmer and indeed to all really good and happy

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[23] Ibid., p. 64.

[24] Bromfield, From My Experience, p. 346.

[25] Ibid., p. 347.

people. In general it includes all the intriguing, interesting, and experienced first-hand, intimate, stories that Bromfield has written about all kinds of plants and animals. They are probably the most under-read and under-rated of all of Bromfield's writings, but they are also among the most rewarding.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Louis Bromfield was a very successful man. He began his literary career as a novelist, and his works were popular with the literary critics as well as with his reading public. Even though his third novel, Early Autumn, won the Pulitzer prize, there are structural faults with his writings. He was of an intense nervous, energetic disposition. He liked friends and was always learning from them. But his restless temperament kept him on the move, and he traveled extensively. As a result his novels lack polish. There are split infinitives, dangling participles, and awkward phrase constructions that careful revision would have eliminated. It seems reasonable to assume that these faults, attributed to his desultory ways, are only manifestations of his search for that which finally became an obsession with him: his love of the soil and all growing things. It will be remembered that, when the Bromfield family was forced to leave the old Coulter farm, he was a frustrated youth, because he loved that farm. Both consciously and unconsciously, he spent his time and abilities finding out why there had been these agricultural failures. Actually, he was only writing novels as a way of making a living.

Bromfield knew his own faults. When the suggestions were made to him to rewrite, revise, and correct his manuscripts, he would laugh and joke about the matter, insisting that novels and short stories were written for reading pleasure and that people were reading his novels. Surely, he is condemning himself, as well as his readers, when he said:

> As a people we have turned perhaps from sweetness and sentiment to sensation and dirt. On the best sellers lists of today there are at least half a dozen books which by any literary standards of character, style, philosophy, historical comment or interpretation, are worthless. Their only appeal is sensationalism. . . .
>
> Our literary production, most of all in fiction, seems to be on the down grade.[1]

Even though the novels from Bromfield's pen made him independently wealthy, he only began to find his place in life in 1933 when he wrote The Farm. His real love, the ruling passion of his life, at last began to unfold. His characters came to life; he loved them and the farms they lived on.

The transition from fiction to non-fiction about agriculture did not come all at once. Pleasant Valley, the first of his five farm books, was not published until six years later. During those years he wrote The Rains Came,

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[1]Louis Bromfield, "A Case of Literary Sickness," Saturday Review of Literature, Vol. 30, September 13, 1949, pp. 7-8.

which, even with its technical faults, is indeed a great novel of purpose.

Bromfield once remarked, "I make my living with a pen, but my heart is with the spade." Actually, from the time he moved to Malabar Farm, he combined the pen and the spade. No one can read his farm books without feeling his deep love and appreciation of all those who loved the land. Aunt Mattie, Cousin Phoebe, Johnny Appleseed, and Walter Oakes are real people. So were the twenty to thirty thousand individuals who flocked to Malabar Farm every year to see how he had redeemed worn-out land and challenged other farmers to out-produce it. To him, this was the ultimate in life. This was something worth doing; this was success.

There was nothing slipshod about his farm work. If he made mistakes in managing his fields, he set diligently to work to find those errors and to correct them. He studied his land intensely until he knew what was, or should be, in "a cubic foot of soil." He knew and could explain the "cycle of all life"--birth, growth, death, decay, and rebirth.

Bromfield understood the healing powers of grass, legume crops, and chemical fertilizers. Because of the years of experience as a story writer, he knew how to write convincingly about all of these important farm facts so that other farmers could understand them and make use of them.

Because of his sincere love of the soil and all growing things, Bromfield eventually solved his quest in life with his well-expressed philosophy, Reverence for Life. To him, life meant all plant and animal life. To him, people are moral and ethical only when they have Reverence for Life--man for animals, man for plants, man for man. He makes his reader feel the cleanliness, invigoration, and wholesomeness of close association with the soil and man's dependence upon it.

It is doubtful, therefore, if any of Bromfield's novels will ever stand the test of time. He has the plots and the vocabulary; he has the power and the ability; but the quality, polish, and merit are not there. The works were written too hurriedly and too carelessly. However, his five non-fiction books about farming and farm life may become great classics of American literature. They are well written and dynamically presented; they are basically and fundamentally sound. In these farm books Bromfield's fine talents and restless abilities found peace, success, and "fertile soil."

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