Mark Jefferson was one of the unusual personalities of American geography. His influence on the development of this professional field in the first half of the present century was critical. Yet it is not easy to fit Jefferson into a category. He was a school-master, devoted to his students and highly effective in stimulating them to their best efforts; but at the same time he was a major contributor of research studies. Between 1909 and 1941 he published 31 professional articles in the Geographical Review and its predecessor, the Bulletin of the American Geographical Society—more articles than were published by any other geographer in these periodicals during that period. These were the most prestigious of the professional journals, and Jefferson’s record is not made up of trivial pieces of writing. Each article was fresh and exciting, filled with new ideas and new ways of looking at old ones.

In his classes at Ypsilanti, Jefferson attracted the bright students, leaving the dull ones to take courses elsewhere. His mathematical precision and his insistence on strict logic transformed geography into an exciting intellectual challenge. The list of outstanding American geographers who were first turned toward a career in geography by Mark Jefferson is amazing.

When I went to the University of Michigan as a new instructor in 1923, Jefferson, in nearby Ypsilanti, was already a legend. He was known to every graduate student as a result of his many important articles. His service as chief cartographer on the American Peace Commission in Paris in 1919 placed him in a select group of leading geographers of that time. The members of the Michigan department—all under 28 years of age—paid Jefferson a visit. He gave us a whole afternoon discussing geography and listening to our still half-formed notions, and the advice he gave us about how to build a new department was invaluable.

Geoffrey Martin has captured the spirit of this remarkable man. He has made skillful use of the many letters and other documents made available to him by the Jefferson family. He has traced the career of one of the most influential of the members of the profession. For any one who would understand the source of many of the currents of geographic thought in America this book is indispensable.

Preston E. James
Syracuse University