

# THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform  
Throughout the World.

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HAMLIN GARLAND.

AN APPRECIATION.

*(Expressly for the Review.)*

BY GRACE ISABEL COLBRON.

Literary Single Taxers can be classified in two groups, those who are Single Taxers first and literary afterwards; and those who are literary first and Single Taxers afterwards. In other words, the first group are such writers as use their literary gifts for propaganda only, and the second are those professional writers, who as such, have found and welcomed the new belief and made it their own. In this second group Hamlin Garland holds a leading place, and as Hamlin Garland also holds a leading place in American literature, his complete and entire embracing of the doctrine of Henry George, his understanding of its fundamental usefulness to mankind, make him a fighter for the cause whose value cannot be overestimated. The power of the poet and the novelist, to spread the knowledge of a new belief is greater than that of the political pamphleteer, although it may not be so immediate. The results are slower, in that his methods are not so direct, but he reaches an immensely larger audience and he instils the medicine so gently that the antagonism, even of the otherwise-minded, is not awakened. The winning of any writer of talent to our cause means more than the gaining of one new recruit, it means the addition to our ranks of a warrior with a weapon that carries farther than all the boasted Krupps and Maxims of the military power.

Hamlin Garland's literary success has not been characterized by any of that sudden leaping into immediate fame and Sunday-Supplement popularity, which more often unmakes, than makes a writer. It has been a steady line of progression, a gradual winning of recognition and a wider circle of readers with every book, and it has been in steady line also with the poet's own mental development. Hamlin Garland is the most thoroughly American, in the best sense, of any of our American writers. Some years back a Danish poet of international fame asked the writer of these lines where he could find a truly national American writer. "I find academic correctness which has nothing American about it," he said, "I find local coloring in many promising works of the younger school, but local coloring is not national spirit. This national spirit, with the breadth of view it commands, I do not find anywhere. With all the mingling bloods of your American race, is American literature always to be servile to English models?" The only answer to this sadly just criticism was that the seeker study the works of Hamlin Garland, and meet the man himself. The result was satisfactory, and Holger Drachman, one of the most

versatile thinkers and truest lyric poets that ever lived, seemed to find in some of the writings of this farmer's son of the great Middle West, glimmerings of that national quality so superbly represented in the literature of his own country, and for which he had hitherto sought in vain in America. This is not by any means claiming for Hamlin Garland that he is, as yet, our greatest American writer. It is simply a statement in proof of this certain quality in his thought which makes him our most truly national poet. He has himself explained it in some of the essays in the volume "Crumbling Idols," without, of course, any reference to himself. He speaks of the academic narrowness and servility to England that bind and restrict the literary production of the East, where undoubtedly the highest culture can be found. He contrasts this restrained culture with the crude strength of the West, which is truly American in that the bonds of English thought are broken there, and the influence of all the various races making up the American more noticeable. The American, as Hamlin Garland understands him, is not merely the modified Englishman he is apparently thought to be in the Eastern States. He is a composite photograph of English, German, Scandinavian, French, with a dash of the other Latin bloods—the best qualities of the race modified to suit conditions of life in a new world. In this American, Anglo-Saxon commercialism and pedantry of artistic thought will be softened by the greater artistic freedom of the other leading races, and from this American, and his life as he shall fashion it, Garland expects to see arise an art which in all its branches of literature, painting, sculpture and the drama, shall be truly and widely American. And from this American, Garland also hopes for an understanding and a refashioning of political and economic conditions which shall make his country truly the leader in the vanguard of modern thought and progress. It is this wide hopefulness of outlook that gives Garland his truly American quality, and gives to his works that something of his own personality which holds the thoughtful reader after the immediate interest in the portrayed scene has passed away.

The keynote of Garland's literary character is sincerity, sincerity absolute and crystal clear, even naive in its frank exposing of the writer's limitations. A less sincere and more calculating nature would carefully avoid touching any field wherein the writer is not thoroughly at home. Garland shows his limitations and his lacking so candidly, with such ingenuous honesty, that it adds weight to his voice in the domain where he is truly at home. His ardor carries with it the conviction of perfect Truth, of unflinching sincerity—and this is a power too often neglected and underrated in art as well as in politics, although both art and politics are full of glaring examples of what it can do. Some of Garland's works may disappoint the reader where others may charm and enthrall him, but in them all there is not one note of insincerity, not one touch of self-seeking, or of a subservience to anything but the writer's own ideals of Truth.

While the line of Hamlin Garland's growing popularity has been steadily upward, the line of his mental development has been apparently a progression of ups and downs. And yet in truth it was but a progress all the time, in spite of what appeared to be a slackening of literary power while he was making his first steps in new fields with which he was not familiar. These explorations in unknown fields were not made with any desire to follow fads or fashions, but with the understanding of the true artist of life's breadth and depth, actuated by a dislike of that insincerity which hides itself in constant repetition of some lucky hit for the sakes of royalties.

Garland's first success was made with the charming stories of "Main Travelled Roads," stories of farmer life in the Middle West. If Garland had not been the supremely sincere artist that he is, he could have gone on grinding out farmer stories of the Middle West until the public tired and his coffers filled.

But Garland is a literary artist, not a literary artisan, so he went on developing, experimenting, seeking further afield for Truth and comprehension of Life, regardless of what was expected of him in the way of following up his first success. "Main Travelled Roads" contains what is, in some respect, Garland's most perfect work, which in roundness of artistic structure is not excelled and not often equalled by all he has written since. And yet Garland has by no means gone backward either as a writer, or as a personality; he has indeed steadily broadened and developed. The stories in "Main Travelled Roads" were written when the subject of them was still the most vivid picture in the writer's mind. When Garland began to think, his thoughts naturally used for a working basis those lives with which he was intimately familiar, and before the first intoxicating freshness in the joy of thinking had worn off, he wrote the stories of "Main Travelled Roads." They were powerful, striking, alive, vital in the truest sense. But the poet's growing mental vision realized that the life of farmers in the Middle West was not all there was of American life, and that a wider understanding of other phases of life might make his understanding of even this one picture clearer and truer. The son of the open country, the lover of wide spaces, of great solitudes, and unhidden stretches of sky, Garland did not take kindly to city life. The city at first seemed to him a seething hell, killing out what was good in the natural man, dwarfing individuality, leading man away from God. But he was artist enough to know that a study of man is one degree greater even than a study of nature, so, as the city represented man alone, the city must be a necessity and a factor in man's life. He set himself resolutely to study and understand the city, to be just to it, even if he could never love it, and to realize its importance and its relativeness. Garland will never be supreme as a painter of city life, his greatness lies elsewhere, but the way he has conquered his repugnance for the prison of streets and houses, and endeavored to see as clearly there as in the open, speak well for his complete sincerity and his serious devotion to his art.

Garland's chief fame as a literary artist lies in his deep love and his complete understanding of nature. He was the first, and is still the foremost, of American writers to have that scientific love and admiration for nature's beauty which is one great characteristic of Scandinavian literature, particularly of the writings of the new Danish school, founded by J. P. Jacobsen. Nature in literature remained a stranger to us, long after painting had found her heart. Our poets looked on nature as a delightful background for the human figures, but they got no nearer to her than a certain vague generalizing would allow. They were as timid of the exactness of science as ever was a dogmatic churchman. They sang of the hills and dales, of clouds, grass, mountains, rivers and the sea, but these phenomena came no nearer to us. The modern poet, like the modern landscape painter, has understood what science has done for his art. Like the modern scientist, he sees that the better we know nature, the more intimately we understand her manifestations, the deeper becomes our sense of awe and reverence, the greater our love for her beauty. The poet of what we might call the new natural history school does not believe that he loses any sense of the beauty of a flower because he can classify it in family and species; nor that his sense of reverent wonder and pleasure in the banked masses of clouds above him are lessened by his comprehension of currents in the atmosphere which are driving them along. To this school Hamlin Garland belongs, and his early love for nature, fostered by a youth spent in the fields, has been deepened and intensified by a scholarly comprehension of nature's phenomena, and an understanding of their value and their relationship one to another and to man. His wonderful descriptions of scenery, which are among the finest bits of writing he has given us, are not vague generalising, but definite with scientific exactness, and yet full of deep sense of awed reverence, a drinking in with long

breaths of nature's inexhaustible beauty. And from this quality in his character—this is the point most valuable for Single Taxers—from Garland's intense and comprehending love of Nature has grown up his understanding of what Henry George taught and lived for. The workings of it are clear for any reader of Garland's works. Because of his reverent love of Nature, because he saw God in the clouds and heard Him in the wind—not as the ignorant savage, but with the keen eye of the trained naturalist, because he realized what the earth and all her beauties and her blessings meant to man, therefore he saw more clearly than many another, that no man should have a monopoly of what was so clearly intended as common good for all God's creatures. As a true poet he was learning, thinking, seeing, he had no time to formulate such a theory for himself. But his keen eyes had seen the blur made by man on the face of the fair picture as God painted it, and his quick mind was questioning, when the answer came to him in the revelation of what another mind had seen. The clear-eyed lover of Nature saw at once the fundamental truth of the thoughts that had come to Henry George through the contrasts of life in crowded cities, and his insight at once found expression in the gift bestowed upon him. Garland's Single Tax belief springs so plainly from his love of Nature and his acquaintance with the great wide spaces of earth, that his interpretation of it must appeal to all of like temperament. It teaches other Single Taxers that they can have no better object lesson than Nature's law and Nature's logic, and gives us the hope that the scientific love of Nature which is now illumining art and teachings on every hand, will be our best and strongest means of propaganda for the spread of our faith.

The foregoing is not intended in any way as a formal literary criticism of the work of Hamlin Garland. It is merely a slight appreciation of what he stands for in American letters, and also of what his position and his influence mean to Single Taxers in his power to aid in the great work.



## REMINISCENT.

THE WAXING AND WANING OF K. OF L. ASSEMBLY NO. 3135.

BY JAMES LOVE, *Author of Japanese Notions.*

In 1880, Richard Spencer, President of the Burlington (Iowa) Gas Company, called my attention to a new book entitled "Progress and Poverty," by Henry George. He spoke very highly of it, and at his request, as he thought he could send me customers for them, I ordered three copies for my counter. Spencer occasionally spoke of the work, but without arousing my interest in what I supposed to be a dreamy socialism without "scientific" base. One morning, in the effort to arouse me to a sense of the existing wrongs, he read from it here and there several pages. I replied, I remember, "Admitting these evils to prevail, how does the author propose to reform them?" "Well," said Spencer, "it may strike you as a queer remedy, and I am not fully prepared to accept it, but he finds the trouble to lie in the private ownership of land; and no remedy will avail short of making land common property." I think that I expressed my feelings rather tartly—"I do not think you *are* fully prepared to accept it, for you know as well as I do, that upon the security of our land titles rests the security of our civilization." But a year or two later, one dull day in the store, I opened Progress and Poverty by chance at one of those eloquent passages, unsurpassed in English prose, and was so greatly impressed that I concluded to read the book at home slowly, note the sophisms concealed