

Bolton Hall

THE Old Guard Passeth! Again we have to record the death of an old comrade, a faithful disciple of Henry George. Bolton Hall passed away on December 10, last, in Thomasville, Ga., whither he had gone in search of health. He was eighty-four years old, and a goodly portion of those years had been spent in preaching and teaching the gospel of Henry George. From his college years Bolton Hall had espoused the cause of the under-dog, the oppressed, the needy. But being a true individualist by nature, a tendency aided perhaps by the fact that he himself had always had enough of the world's goods and had grown up in a cultural background, Bolton Hall was not carried away by Marxism or any form of collectivist philosophy. He found what he sought in the doctrines propounded by Henry George, an understanding of the fact that the only legitimate function of government is to prevent us from invading the rights of others. And having found it, he spent his life in the endeavor to enlighten others.

Not merely by preaching. Bolton Hall founded the American Longshoreman's Union and was instrumental in getting that interesting Scotch-Irish Longshoreman's leader, Edward McHugh—also known as the Savior of Skye—to come to this country. Some of us are old enough to remember the amusingly ironic episode of McHugh's arrest in a longshoreman's strike, and then his release with apologies. But he had been kept locked up long enough to break the strike! Bolton Hall had made that episode known to many who might not otherwise have heard of it.

Bolton Hall is also widely known as the founder of the Single Tax Colony of Free Acres, the "Father of Free Acres" we called him. He gave the seventy-five or eighty acres to the colony under a deed of gift by which the land could never be bought, sold or speculated in, but was to be given in lease, for shorter or longer term as desired by the lessee. Mr. Hall had a little house there himself, was present at the Town Meetings by which the affairs of the colony were regulated. He loved that beautiful little spot at the foot of the Watchung Hills. All those of us who ever lived there remember the tall figure in a blue peasant blouse—his customary Free Acres garb. But in spite of his desires to be taken for a real "worker," Bolton Hall could not hide the fine intellectuality of his aquiline face, the quiet good-breeding of his manner. "Tolstoy without a beard," I called him. "And without a conscience" was his answer. But he did himself wrong there, for Bolton Hall possessed in high measure that social conscience which all great reformers and their true disciples possess. He lived in a world of theory, some might have said, but he tried always to put his theory into practice. He loved working with tools. If one asked what he was doing when he was up the roof of his little house, hammering away at a loose shingle, or dig-

ging in his garden, he would answer; "I'm trying to *earn* a living." This by contrast with his legal work and particularly with his real estate business, which he called "making a living without earning it."

That will always be my pleasantest memory of my good friend, Bolton Hall; his delightful quiet humor, his philosophic attitude which seemed to take so little account of practical things, but yet was founded on a clear understanding of economic truth. Bolton Hall had never known poverty himself, but he realized to the full that poverty is the crime of our age, when mechanical invention should make life easier for all of us, whereas, in spite of it, man's inhumanity to man continues. He saw just where, and *only* where, man could be inhuman to his fellowmen.

Bolton Hall's father was a famous preacher in the New York of many decades back. There are still folk who remember the name of Dr. John Hall of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. And when Bolton Hall began to talk Henry George and take up his "reforming" activities, doubtless many of those old New Yorkers shrugged tolerantly and murmured something about "ministers' sons." But Bolton Hall—who, by the way, was born in Ireland although most of his life has been spent as a citizen of New York,—Bolton Hall went on teaching and preaching Henry George's doctrines with tongue and pen regardless of the amused tolerance of the circle in which he belonged by birth.

In the January issue of the *Freeman*, Frederic Cyrus Leubuscher tells an incident in Bolton Hall's life that is known to very few. In 1900, it seems, the Democratic leaders offered him the nomination for Governor of New York. They saw an opportunity in his popularity with the working-class. But with their offer went the demand that they be allowed to dictate his policy and appointments, and Bolton Hall promptly refused. He preferred his freedom.

He wrote many books, short and longer essays showing in all of them an inborn knowledge of the true essence of freedom.

Many articles in our daily papers have catalogued his books, the best known of which are possibly, "A Little Land and a Living" and "Three Acres and Liberty." There is one little book that has not been mentioned, a clever thing in its way and unusual, "The Love Letters of St. John."

There are many of us to whom Bolton Hall's memory will be very dear, to whom his steadfastness will still be, as it has always been, inspiration and encouragement.

GRACE ISABEL COLBRON.

THOSE who make private property of the gift of God pretend in vain to be innocent. For in thus retaining the subsistence of the poor they are the murderers of those who die every day for want of it.

POPE GREGORY THE GREAT in "Cura Pastoralis."