

Bolton Hall

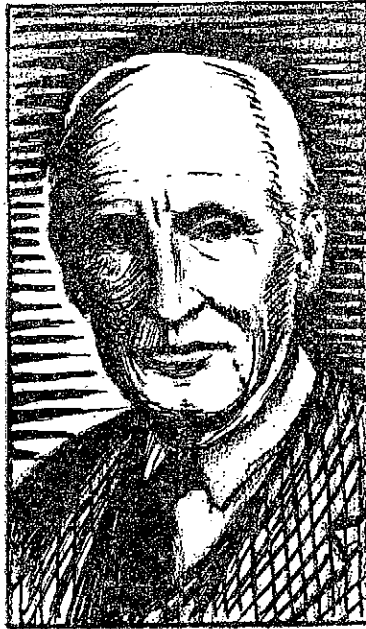
By Frederic Cyrus Leubuscher

I first met Bolton Hall at one of Henry George's Sunday afternoon receptions. He was then thirty-three years of age, a tall well-built athletic man. He had been a member of the Princeton crew. An aquiline scholar's face, expressing himself well in conversation, though with a touch of the brogue, for he was born in Ireland and was almost a young man when he came to New York with his father, who had been chosen pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church.

His pleasant brogue first attracted me to him. Then I became interested in his intensely individualistic philosophy. A believer in Henry George's solution of social and economic problems, he felt that the adoption of the Single Tax would ultimately lead to the philosophic anarchist's ideal of a government limited to police powers. The only legitimate function of government was to prevent invasion of each other's rights and all other functions were an impertinence and led to such invasions. He spoke of Proudhon who propounded this philosophy in the eighteenth century, and of Benjamin R. Tucker, the nineteenth century representative of that philosophy, whom he knew very well. However, he never took part in the propaganda of anarchism. He said that pure anarchism could subsist only among a race of angels and that it might be thousands of years after the adoption of the Single Tax before human beings became fit for anarchism. Because of his intense aversion to Marxism he agreed with Herbert Spencer, who called it "the coming slavery."

Bolton Hall died in Thomasville, Georgia, on December 10, 1938, in his eighty-fifth year. The next day all the New York newspapers had long obituaries. From these I borrow the following data, having eliminated statements of which I am doubtful.

"Bolton Hall was convinced that the only salvation of the average



American lay in an intelligent back-to-land movement, and he had spent much of his money and passed the greater part of his time supporting this theory. It was his contention that a man could support himself and five others on one acre of land.

"The basic investment is land," Mr. Hall wrote in 'The New Thrift' published in 1916. 'For man is a land animal. On the land he lives and the produce he eats. Away from the land he cannot live at all.'

"After a number of smaller experiments, Mr. Hall succeeded in establishing, in 1910, a working model of Henry George's ideal community at Scotch Plains, New Jersey, called Free Acres. It still continues to operate. Situated in the woods of the Watchung Hills, the farm accommodates approximately two hundred colonists on seventy-five acres.

"The colony land is not for sale, but is leased to sixty-nine families at an average charge of \$45 a year, plus water tax of \$15. The rent is the same for all, regardless of the type of dwelling each colonist has.

"From 1897 to 1928 Mr. Hall published seventeen books. Most of them were full of practical advice and of observations with a humor-

ous twist. In addition to 'The New Thrift,' his publications included 'Things As They Are,' 1899; 'Money Making in America,' 1903; 'A little Land and a Living,' 1908; 'What Tolstoy Thought,' 1911, and 'The Gift of Sleep,' 1911. Two of his volumes, 'The Halo of Grief,' 1919, and 'The Living Bible,' 1928, dealt with religious subjects.

"Mr. Hall was born August 5, 1854, in Ireland, and came to this country with his parents in 1867. He was graduated from Princeton in 1875, and three years later received his Master's degree. After a brief venture in the importing business, he took up the study of law. In 1884 he was married to Miss Susan Hurlbut Scott, of New York, in Trinity Church."

That Bolton Hall founded the American Longshoremen's Union is well known. What was not generally known, not even by me who enjoyed his friendship for over a half century, is this that I heard from his own lips last year; about 1900 the leaders of the Democratic party in New York State offered him the nomination for Governor. They told him that they believed his popularity with the workingmen would elect him. They demanded a pledge, however, that they would be allowed to dictate his policies and appointments. Bolton Hall promptly declined the nomination. He kept silent all these years about the great honor that had been done him. A smaller man would have boasted.

Soon after the Henry George School of Social Science was formed he declared that it was the greatest forward stride taken by Single Taxers since the death of Henry George, and he contributed to it generously.

Bolton Hall is survived by his widow, and by his daughter, Lois, wife of Gerald Herrick, New York.

Farewell, my friend. I shall miss your words of advice and your dry humour, uttered even when you were in pain. Individualistic to the last you could not make so solemn a thing as your last will without embodying a joke in it.