Memories of Henry George

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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More than forty years have passed since I first took up the little paper-bound edition of "Progress and Poverty." I am one of the veterans of the Anti-Poverty War. I was living in Boston when I first gave an open allegiance to the cause. Although I had been converted to the theories of "the prophet of San Francisco" while living in Dakota, I had said little about it. It wasn't as easy to be a "George man" in those days as it is now, not even in Boston where radicals abounded. I had been several years in the East before my conversion from a passive disciple to an active advocate came about. My change of attitude was due to hearing the Prophet himself.

As this was one of his first appearances in Boston, and for the further reason that it took place in a most historic spot, I must describe it in detail. It was, as I remember it, a dark rainy autumn day, and the place was Faneuil Hall, cradle of liberty, and as I entered it, I recalled one by one, the splendid warriors for the rights of man, whose voices had echoed from its walls. I thought of Wendell Phillips, of Ralph Waldo Emerson, of William Garrison, of Theodore Parker, and many other of New England's militant liberty-loving citizens.

From my seat in the narrow gallery, I looked down on the broad central floor of the Hall (in which no seats were allowed) paved with a closely packed mosaic of derby hats and rough coats of all shades of black and tan. It was evident even to my inexperienced eyes, that this was a crowd of working men, to whom the name of Henry George was at once a challenge and a hope. Many of them were Irish, for George had already served sentence in an English prison for speaking his mind about the private ownership of the earth, and all of us knew that whoever else this man might be, he was not a self-seeker, and this belief in his sincerity rendered us keenly eager to see and hear him.

My brother was beside me, and together we hung over the rail with such intensity of impatience as only Edwin Booth could call from us. I had a dim feeling that the moment was historic. At last, a bustle at the back of the platform announced the coming of the speaker. A little group of men entered from the back and took their seats on the platform. Among them was a short red-bearded man of dignified demeanor and keen glance. The noble lines of his head distinguished him. With a pale face, lips tense with emotion, he waited through his introduction. He was as eager to speak as we were to hear him.

At last the presiding officer finished, and the man of the hour stepped forward and the old Cradle of Liberty rocked with the applause of men who had caught, vaguely at least, the far-reaching importance of this man's presence. As we cheered, he began walking up and down the stage, his eyes blazing with the mounting emotion of the orator, the line of his lips, the clench of his hands predicting storm.

He was in the prime of his life at this time, alert to every remotest brain-cell, with all his marvelous store of experience and reading and deduction at his tongue's end. He expected opposition. He was used to it. He confronted an audience as a trained gladiator enters the ring, knowing well that ruthless opponents awaited him.

His first words profoundly moved me. Coming after the applause, following the tense tiger-like movement of a moment before, they were surprisingly calm, cold, material and direct. Action had condensed into speech.

"This man has himself in hand after all," I thought. "His heat is transformed into light."

His words were as orderly as those of a man writing with a pen. They had precision and grace as well as power. He spoke as gifted men write, with style and arrangement. His address could have been printed word for word as it fell from his lips. This self-mastery, this graceful lucidity of utterance combined with a personal presence distinctive and dignified, reduced even his enemies to respectful silence. As for me, I forgot everything, forgot where I stood, in my devouring interest.

His gestures were few and constrained, but his voice was resonant, penetrating, and flexible, and did not tire the ear. Its cadences were colloquial and pleasantly dramatic. He was an orator and a great orator though not as other men are orators. He had neither the legal swagger, nor clerical cadence; he was vivid, individual and above all in deadly earnest. He was an orator by the splendor of his aspirations, by his logical sequence and climax, by the purity and heat of his flaming zeal. I count that speech among the greatest influences of my life. I left that hall a disciple.

The following night as he stood on the platform in the Globe Theatre facing two thousand people, I heard him to still better advantage. His lecture was called "Moses and the Land Question," and again I acknowledged the far-reaching power of his logic. He was more of the scholar than the orator in this address, but when, occasionally, he put down his manuscript and addressed us directly, pacing back and forth along the footlights, I rose on a wave such as no other speaker had ever roused in me. He filled my mind with pictures of a land of peace and plenty toward which we were marching. His utterance and his manner so impressed me I said, "Here is a man who by all the laws of thought and sincerity may be called a poet."

When I saw him next, some months later, he stood on a platform of Tremont Temple facing a still

larger audience. Again he was forced to wait, while the people thundered applause. Again he marshalled his facts and his figures, and drew his deductions against our feudalistic system of land-holding. Again he pled for wronged and cheated men, and on his fine forehead came the pitying lines of one who suffered as Christ suffered, for those who were hungry and oppressed. He brought a new conception into the hearts of those who listened, a disgust with things as they were, and a burning desire for the happier order which he so eloquently foretold.

He finished his main address, and before his voice had died away a dozen men were on their feet all over the hall, eager to confuse him before his converts. The chairman, powerless to manage these shrewd and disputatious opponents, shrank back appalled, but George came to the front of the stage, and in a voice clear and cutting as steel, called out "Sit down. You can't all speak at once." And then pointing to a man in the gallery he said, "Go on, Sir, what is your question?"

The question being repeated, George answered it in a sentence and levelling his finger at another opponent called out, "Now your question, Sir?" One by one his hecklers fell. If a questioner haggled or started to argue, George stopped him. "Your question, Sir!" If the man could not frame his question, George did it for him and asked, "Is that your question?" "Yes, that's it." "Very well, the answer is this." He was superbly combative, but patient of genuine doubt.

Later I came to know him in his own home in New York City; a modest home even to my inexperienced eyes, but in it every Sunday afternoon and evening, some of the best known reformers of this country and the old World assembled. No "crank" visitor from any country in those days left New York without seeing Henry George. He was one of the city's celebrities.

Fearless as a lion when combating in public, he was the gentlest of men in private life. His low voice, his cordial eyes, his smiling lips disarmed his bitterest enemies. He made little of wealth or social distinction in his callers and recognized no lines of class or creed. In the peaceful, homey atmosphere of his East Side house, it was difficult to imagine that he had been twice thrown into prison for his disturbing speeches and that he could hold an audience of five thousand people in the clutch of his small right hand. It was entirely natural that I, possessing his friendship, should become each day more profoundly committed to the great reforms which he so boldly and unselfishly embodied.

Garland, Markham: Ave et Vale

Two outstanding figures in contemporary American literature passed to their rewards early last month within a few days of each other after long and distinguished careers. They were Hamlin Garland, the novelist, and Edwin Markham, the poet.

With Herbert Quick, Brand Whitlock, Newton D. Baker, William Lloyd Garrison the younger, William Marion Reedy, Bliss Carman, Luke North, Edmund Vance Cooke and others now gone, as well as a few happily left among us, they were part of that group of men of letters and public affairs of the first decades of our century who fixed new roots in our soil for the true humanism of the Georgist philosophy.

Garland was born on a farm in a newly-settled section of Wisconsin 79 years ago and was brought up in Iowa, whither his family had moved seeking a friendlier and a more fertile soil. He abandoned a land claim in the Dakota Territory to pursue the life of an intellectual in Boston and New York; but the stories that he was to tell, while a nation listened eagerly, were not of the bohemian circle of the cities—they were sagas of the folk who knew him as "A Son of the Middle Border" when he too was eking an existence on the American frontier.

Markham, "poet laureate of labor," was born in a log cabin in Oregon 87 years ago and before he dabbled in poetry, before he etched the unforgettable figure of the "Man With the Hoe," he had been a sheep herder, farmer, blacksmith, cowboy and school teacher.

The world honors Garland as a story teller, Markham as a singer of folksong, and rightly so, for they lived in an era of a few peers. But more than a storyteller, more than a singer of songs is lost to us who seek the liberation of the free spirit of man in a free society; for in this they were our comrades. And in this by their work, by the testimony of their lives, they still fight on beside us.

The attitude of Markham, whose baccalaureate sermon at Stanford in 1897 was on "The Social Conscience" and whose recollections of his early privation aroused his keen interest in social problems yet did not embitter him, was typical of both:

"I am neither an economist nor a politician. In my writings I have only attempted to depict life as it appears to me. If they disclose there is something wrong, that is as much as can be expected of them."

To the company of the immortals, which they will grace, we yield our brothers; let Garland's memories of Henry George, our teacher, be their epitaph among us.

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