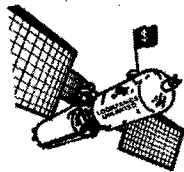


**SELECTIONS FROM
FREE AMERICA
AND OTHER WORKS**

Bolton Hall



**Loompanics Unlimited
Port Townsend, Washington**

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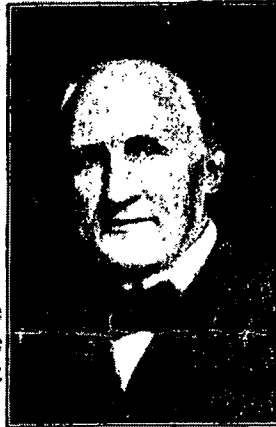
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BOLTON HALL & THE "THIRD TRADITION"

by Mark Sullivan

Bolton Hall was a pioneer of what we may call "alternative economics" — what E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* popularized as "Economics as if People Mattered" and "Buddhist Economics" (what Buddhists themselves refer to as "right livelihood") Like one of his forebears, the early American advocate of "equitable commerce," Josiah Warren, he sought to realize *individual* sovereignty through the vehicle of the intentional *community*. He was perhaps the flip-side of Scott Nearing, the socialist who dropped out of society to live a rural, individualist life. Undoubtedly the two major influences on Hall's life and writings were Henry George and Leo Tolstoy — the single-taxer and the pacifist-anarchist.



Bolton Hall

Bolton Hall appears to embrace contradictory tendencies — which is what makes him so interesting. For Hall belongs, with Schumacher, Warren, Nearing, George and Tolstoy, to that both old and new Middle Way that synthesizes or transcends the pairs of opposites: individual/society, humanity/nature, violence/conformity, capitalism/communism. This Middle Way is what Theodore Roszak in *Person/Planet* (another pair of opposites) identifies himself with and calls

...a third tradition that makes me part of an odd and exotic political ancestry. Most directly it links me with that rich vein of mystical anarchism — Tolstoy and Buber, Whitman and Thoreau, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, Gustav Landauer and Paul

Goodman... with those towering spirits whom Nietzsche taught us to think of as supermen... men of rugged and world-beating grandeur: tyrant artists and stormy prophets. ...Nietzsche and Tolstoi, the herald of the superman and the prophet of peasant millions. Can one tradition hold them both? It can — and must, if it is to be a tradition of the person. Because to speak of personality... is to speak of the natural aristocracy that is the unrealized promise of every human being.²

Bolton Hall was a natural aristocrat who sought to realize this promise. His Nietzschean leanings mixed well with his Tolstoyan ones. When called by a friend "Tolstoy without a beard," he replied, "And without a conscience."³ Though Hall's keen sense of justice and fairness seems to contradict his remark, his self-liberation from the fetters of Victorian morality does indeed confirm it.

Bolton Hall was born August 5, 1854 in Ireland. He came to America in 1867 with his parents when his father had been chosen pastor of the 5th Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York. He graduated from Princeton in 1875; and after a brief career in the import business he took up the study of law, and founded the American Longshoremen's Union.

By his 33rd year Hall was an active social reformer and described as "a tall well-built athletic man with an aquiline scholar's face, expressing himself well in conversation, though with a touch of the brogue..."⁴ A prominent figure in New York radical circles, his methods were more "evolutionary" than "revolutionary" — at least insofar as these terms are generally used. With Tolstoy he rejected violence and embraced Henry George's Single Tax reform. While Tolstoy popularized George's ideas in his writings (notably in the novel *Resurrection*), Hall both wrote *and* organized (e.g., he helped George found the Manhattan Single Tax Club in 1887, which remained active for half a century).

Hall saw the single-tax proposal — "to abolish all taxation save that upon land values"⁵ — as the clearest path toward society without government or class repression. One of his articles on the single-tax is entitled "Not A Fiscal Reform But A Social Revolution" — and it was but one of many he wrote for

The Single Tax Review,⁶ the leading organ of the movement during the first quarter of the 20th century. In Russia, where many were inspired by the Tolstoyan/Georgian "social revolution," it nevertheless did not prevail against the repressive state-religion of Bolshevism. In the United States, forces were also arrayed against meaningful social change, favoring instead the income tax, the Federal Reserve, the draft, Prohibition, and the Red Scare. In fact, what emerged victorious from the carnage and ruins of World War I was not Wilson's "democracy," but "The State" — as Bolton Hall, Randolph Bourne and a few others knew it would.

Hall advocated the Single Tax as part of a larger agenda of reforms, and in many ways he can be considered a "Fabian Anarchist."⁷ He took part in other movements tending in anarchist or libertarian directions: free speech, birth control, free trade, rural and urban homesteading, and so on.

Moving among these various radical circles, Bolton Hall, it is no surprise, eventually met Emma Goldman. Despite their differences on how best to realize a free society, they became friends and mutual supporters through thick and thin, sometimes sharing the platform for their common causes. For example, Alice Wexler writes:

On March 1 (1916), a mass meeting in Carnegie Hall heard John Reed, Bolton Hall, Theodore Schroeder, and Goldman discuss all aspects of birth control...⁸

Wexler also reports that Hall and Gilbert Roe, another Single Tax lawyer, donated legal services and money to Goldman on many occasions. Hall even purchased a small farm for Emma in Ossining, New York as a weekend and summer retreat.⁹ Committees, like the Free Speech League, were often organized by Hall and other civil libertarians to defend Emma's right to offend established interests and attitudes, and to rescue her from the clutches of legal authority. Hall's friendship for "E.G.," transcending class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, was that of one natural aristocrat for another, and was reciprocated by Goldman, who writes:

Bolton Hall... was one of the most charming and gracious personalities it has been my good fortune to know. An unconditional libertarian and single-taxer,

he had entirely emancipated himself from his highly respectable background except for his conventional dress. His frock-coat, high silk hat, gloves, and cane made him a conspicuous figure in our ranks.¹⁰

His defense of his attire, as Goldman goes on to record, reveals a Wizard-of-Ozian humor and insight: "Don't you see it is my silk hat that gives my speech importance." Natural aristocrats like his contemporary Oscar Wilde, and ours, Quentin Crisp, would likely agree.

Bolton Hall was the "complete fellow-traveller." He associated alike with socialists and businessmen, individualist and communist anarchists. He contributed writings both to Goldman's *Mother Earth* and to Benjamin R. Tucker's *Liberty* which, he wrote, "shows us the profit of Anarchy, and is the prophet of Anarchy."¹¹ (He did not, of course, become involved in Tucker's rivalry with Goldman or Henry George.)

World War I was to end all this inter-radical cooperation. Both society at large as well as the ranks of the reformers were split in two over supporting or opposing US entry into battle. Hall, being a pacifist, sided with Goldman, Alexander Berkman, John Reed, Eugene Debs and others opposed to US involvement. (A few notable anarchists such as Kropotkin and Tucker, now living in France, sided with the French against the Germans.)

The single-taxers were also divided, especially since some of them had accepted posts in the liberal administration of Woodrow Wilson (believing with the late Henry George in the redeemability of the US political system). So when Louis F. Post, a leading single-taxer, civil libertarian, and Assistant Secretary of Labor, had the duty of prosecuting the deportation of alien radicals during the Red Scare that followed in the wake of the War and the Russian Revolution, Goldman was shocked. One of her earlier defenders of her right to free speech was now authorizing her deportation back to Russia! Post, she was to write, betrayed his integrity and "should have resigned when Wilson forced the country into war." (Goldman did not know about the many persons Post *saved* from deportation, nor that he saw to it that she was deported to "Red" Russia, rather than "White" Russia where she would likely not have survived — out of a sense of his own integrity.)¹²

I sought comfort (she continues) in the thought that there were still some single-taxers of integrity and moral strength. Bolton Hall... and scores of others had stood their ground — against the war and the new despotism.¹³

This significant episode in Emma Goldman's life highlights the complexity that was Bolton Hall: an advocate of *reforming* the system as the best way *out* of the system. In "new age" parlance, he was for neither saving the old system, nor its sudden or violent destruction, but rather its *transformation* into something completely different. Hall's vision of transformation permeates his published writings — in *Liberty, Mother Earth, The Single Tax Review*, and his books on economics, homesteading, and Tolstoyan wisdom: *Three Acres and Liberty, Even as You and I, The Game of Life, Thrift, Things as They Are, A Little Land and a Living, Life and Love and Peace*, and others, including, of course, *Free America*, published in 1904.

The mystical side of Hall's anarchism, his Tolstoyan side, puts him clearly in the "third tradition" of Roszak and "Buddhist economics." Many of the passages from his philosophical books read like the vow of the Bodhisattva to enlighten and liberate all sentient beings from suffering before entering nirvana:

Happiness is to be found in the service of our fellow creatures, through which we come to be one with the mind of the Universe. It does not depend upon what success we may see in this service. The effort to remove the causes of the sufferings of others and especially to enable them to think rightly, so that they may themselves avoid evil, is in itself a joy.¹⁴

"I, Buddha, that wept with all men's tears, Whose heart was broken in the whole world's woes. Such is our Oneness that none of us can enter heaven while even the least of humanity is on the road of experience. Not that an archangel prevents us entering the Gate — but we prevent ourselves; we would not if we could. Voluntarily and with joy we refuse to enter heaven until all men enter in."¹⁵

It is this brotherliness with every living thing that prevents so many from eating meat, or killing for ornament, or for "sport," that grows until our hearts reach out to every living thing to become a sharer in our joy. It is this brotherliness that makes men and women devote their lives to economic freedom.¹⁶

Hall's vision of economic freedom encompassed not only basic tax reform, the abolition of all taxes upon labor, but the abolition of all special privileges whereby one person or group is able to profit at the expense of others. As he points out often in his writings, landowners profit at the expense of most other taxpayers who are forced to pay to protect and service the sites that landowners hold title to. This subsidy is compounded when landowners pocket most of the landrent paid by their tenants (or purchase price if the land is sold) — rent paid for access to services and benefits provided not by the landowner, but by the community — by the tenants themselves as taxpayers!

Landowners, whose title to collect rent is sanctioned by the community, can be fairly called upon to pay rent themselves to the community: in exchange for the protection and access to other community services that give value to the landowner's title. (In fact, it is the title — a *social* creation — that is really owned, not the land.) Tenants would now only pay rent to landowners for benefits received, and the landowners would in turn pay rent to the community for benefits received. Taxes would be abolished altogether. As Hall writes in a short leaflet "Abolish Taxes:"

(Land) value does not reside in the land. It arises from the presence of the people, goes with the people, belongs to the people. The land of a permanently abandoned city or farm would have no value. The community alone creates this value, and morally and even legally owns it, so that the collection of land value by the community is not in the nature of taxation.

Hall goes on to point out that this would restore equality of opportunity between landowners and landusers (redressing the inequitable distribution of wealth).

Hall's vision of total tax abolition aligns him with two other George-inspired practical visionaries, Ebenezer Howard and

Spencer Heath, who proposed the direct financing of community services out of rent. Howard's "Garden Cities" and Heath's "proprietary communities" represent decentralist and libertarian alternatives to current patterns of tax-generated land-waste.¹⁷

Bolton Hall's pioneer contribution to the rent-funded voluntary community was not just his advocacy of the idea — it was his *practice* of it: the Free Acres Association in New Jersey. Though a "mystical anarchist," Hall was equally a down-to-earth one, quite literally. And though a "Fabian anarchist," he was not content to lobby and wait for laws to change. Instead he took action — *direct* action — to realize his ideals.

Hall was not alone among single-taxers in taking the direct action of starting experimental communities. As early as 1894 a single-tax colony was initiated on Mobile Bay, in Fairhope, Alabama. Though George himself was not enthusiastic, the idea of "single-tax enclaves" spread. By 1921 there were six such enclaves (five in the US and one in Andorra).¹⁸ By 1934 there were 15, plus Canberra, Australia's capital, a model-city designed by Walter Burley Griffin, a Chicago Georgist.¹⁹

What these communities have in common is their land-tenure system. The land is owned by the community as a corporate body, not to be sold, but leased to occupants based on the value of the land alone. The rent thus collected is used to finance community services (and pay taxes levied against the community). Having to adjust to whatever local tax system was in force often compromised the purity of the single-tax model. Still, a few enclaves survive, including Arden (Delaware), Fairhope, and Free Acres.

Free Acres Association in a 70-acre community founded in 1910 and located in Berkeley Heights and Watchung, New Jersey.

All the land belonging to the Association, except five acres acquired by purchase in 1919, was a gift from Bolton Hall, Esq. The deed of gift carried conditions that the land should not be sold but should be rented on leases and that the rental returns should be spent for local taxes and public expenses of the Association.²⁰

Founded as a summer colony, its early residents included radicals, non-conformists, nudists, spiritualists, atheists, artists and actors, including a young James Cagney. It gradually became a year-round community as water-works were installed and lease-holders erected permanent dwellings.

Eventually the devil of taxation caught up with Free Acres. By 1935 more elaborate homes had been constructed (by a dozen or so German families who found refuge there and settled down). These attracted the local tax assessors, who — ignoring the single-tax precept of exempting all improvements on the land — increased the property tax assessments and billed the Free Acres Association accordingly. The apple of discord was thrown into the works: Why should *those* members with modest dwellings pay more to cover the higher collective property assessment due to the more elaborate homes built by *other* members?!

After much debate, the pure single-tax model was altered by the Association members: the tax assessments were to be passed on by the Association to the individual home-owners, and an additional fee to cover internal expenses was to be paid to the Association. Hall — who fought to save the original design, and was denounced for it at the monthly Association meetings — left in 1936 greatly disappointed. But he took no legal action to block the changes — though he had a legal right to do so. Perhaps Bolton Hall, Anarchist, prevailed over Bolton Hall, Esquire.

Today Free Acres Association still thrives as a participatory community. Many of its services continue to be performed by voluntary action. Now a tiny haven amidst the Greater New York Metropolitan Sprawl, anarchist roots still nourish this one small tree in a huge forest of decaying redwood giants.²¹

Bolton Hall died at 84 on December 10, 1938 in Thomasville, Georgia. But the links were already forged between Hall's generation of "Single Tax Anarchists" which included *Liberty's* Fred Schulder and the Modern School's Alexis Ferm,²² with libertarians, Georgists, and decentralists such as Suzanne La Follette, Frank Chodorov, Ralph Borsodi, and Mildred J. Loomis, the future "grandmother of the counter-culture."

Borsodi and Loomis in particular inherited Hall's vision. Starting the School of Living in the 1930s, they called for a new

homestead and enclave movement to overcome the hardships of the Great Depression. Mildred Loomis, who kept the School of Living going until her death in 1985, writes of the Borsodi-Hall connection in her *Alternative Americas*:

Borsodi's political and fundamental values came from America's philosopher-economist Henry George and his followers Bolton Hall and Fiske Warren (an active single-tax enclave advocate). These men were progressive agrarians, strong in Jeffersonian defense of country life as an alternative to unemployment and other urban discomforts.²³

The eventual fruit of their toil came decades later as the Community Land Trust Movement. The Community Land Trust (CLT) is a direct descendant of the single-tax enclave: the land is owned by an association not for resale, but for leasing at below-speculation rents to occupants who own whatever they produce or build on the land. Today this movement has spread, with scores of land trusts set up across the US, and with several organizations actively promoting them, including the E.F. Schumacher Society and the Institute for Community Economics (founded by Borsodi-associates Bob Swann and Chuck Matthei, respectively). In India, where Borsodi taught in the 1950s, a similar approach to land-tenure is taken by the Sarvodaya Movement, with its roots in Gandhi (and thus Tolstoy and *his* roots, George and Thoreau) and Buddhist "right livelihood."

This decentralist, counter-culture impulse — perhaps the clearest manifestation of Roszak's "third tradition" — may well be stronger now than in decades past. The School of Living and its journal *Green Revolution* continue, and to this we can now add the bioregional and green movements with advocates such as Kirkpatrick Sale in America and Jonathan Porritt in England, and others who endorse the economic analysis and models pioneered by Bolton Hall. To these we can add several on the fringe of the libertarian movement such as Carol Moore, publisher of *Decentralize!*, and Spencer Heath MacCallum whose *The Art of Community* is a further elucidation of his grandfather's proprietary community model. And of course, the Georgist movement itself continues as a world-wide network "To liberate production from taxation, the earth from

monopoly, and humanity from poverty" — the movement and goals which Hall made his own.²⁴

Clearly, Bolton Hall's legacy goes beyond the "third tradition" as defined by Roszak, to embrace *other* "third" traditions. This volume — but a small fraction of Hall's works — may therefore spark dialogue *among* the various alternatives that sometimes compete where they should co-operate. Indeed, this is the original intent of the writings contained herein. Loompanics Unlimited is to be congratulated for giving Bolton Hall the opportunity to address us again — and be discovered anew.

Mark Sullivan
May 1987

NOTES

1. E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful — Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). "Buddhist Economics" is specifically dealt with on pages 50-59. Also see *Right Livelihood Co-operatives — An Introduction* (London: Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, 1981).
2. Theodore Roszak, *Person/Planet — The Creative Disintegration of Industrial Society* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday), pps. 119, 122.
3. Grace Isabel Colbron, "Bolton Hall", *Land and Freedom*, (New York) January-February 1939, Vol. 39, #1 (whole #212), p. 17.
4. Frederic Cyrus Leubuscher, "Bolton Hall," *The Freeman* (New York), January 1939, Vol. 2 #3, p. 19.
5. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty — An Inquiry Into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of the Increase of Want with the Increase of Wealth... The Remedy* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1979), p. 406.
6. Bolton Hall, "Not A Fiscal Reform But A Social Revolution," *The Single Tax Review* (New York), Nov-Dec. 1922, Vol. 12 #6, (whole #115) p. 172.
7. This felicitous term was given in conversation to the author by Christopher White, sometime in the late 1970s.

8. Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman — An Intimate Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) p. 213.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
10. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, Vol. I (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931), pps. 348-349.
11. From *Benj. R. Tucker's Unique Catalogue of Advanced Literature* (New York: Tucker, 1907).
12. Louis F. Post, *The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1923).
13. Goldman, *Living My Life*, Vol. II, pp. 711-712.
14. Bolton Hall, *Life and Love and Death* (New York & London: F. Tennyson Neely, 1898), Conclusion (not paginated).
15. Bolton Hall, *Life and Love and Peace* (New York: The Arcadia Press, 1909), p. 105.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
17. Spencer H. MacCallum, "Associated Individualism: a Victorian Dream of Freedom," *Reason* (Santa Barbara), April 1972, Vol. 4 #1, pp. 17-24.
18. Charles White Huntington, *Enclaves of Single Tax*, Vol. I (Howard, Massachusetts: Fiske Warren, 1921), pps. vii-viii.
19. Huntington, *Enclaves of Single Tax*, Vol. XIV (1934), pps. vi-ix, 303.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
21. An excellent history of Free Acres is: Martin A. Bierbaum, "Free Acres: Bolton Hall's Single-Tax Experimental Community," *New Jersey History*, (Newark), Vol. 102, #1-2, Spring-Summer 1984, pps. 37-63. The author is indebted to this study.
22. Paul Avrich writes that the "Single Tax Anarchist" combination was not unique to Ferm and Schulder, who coined the label for their own social philosophy. See: Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement — Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 262. (Hall also had his ties with the Modern School, as Avrich reports.)
23. Mildred J. Loomis, *Alternative Americas* (New York: Universe Books/Free Life Editions, 1982), p. 57.

24. The School of Living, RD1 — Box 1508AA, Spring Grove, PA 17362. Kirkpatrick Sale. *Human Scale* (New York: Putnam); Jonathon Porritt *Seeing Green* (New York: Basil Blackwell); *Decentralize!*, Box 106, 632 Cloverdale, Los Angeles, CA 90036; *The Art of Community*, The Heather Foundation, Box 48, San Pedro, CA 90733; Council of Georgist Organizations, 5 East 44th St., New York, NY 10017.