REALISM IN HAMLIN GARLAND'S PROSE

FICTION OF MIDWESTERN FARM LIFE

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CHAPTER I

GARLAND AND THE MIDDLE WEST

No artist can be set apart from the developments and problems of his day, and so it was that Hamlin Garland, literary spokesman for the Midwestern farmers of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was inevitably bound to portray his region with all of its economic, social, and political complexities. His work was destined to be influenced by the echoes of the Civil War, the immigration of both Americans and foreigners to a fertile, grain-producing country, and by all the problems of adjustment that faced this agrarian society. It is well, therefore, to obtain first a picture of the times in which our artist's impressions were to be formed.

In the years preceding the Civil War, the United States government had put surveyor-generals in charge of its vast unsettled acres of land and had made it their work to precede or, at least, keep abreast of the advancing columns of emigration, make treaties with the Indian tribes, move the Indian reservations out of the path of progress, divide the country into townships, sections, half sections, and quarter sections, and erect monuments to mark their divisions. Their work was begun in Ohio, and before the Civil War they

were well beyond the Mississippi River. They had entirely completed Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan and had practically completed Iowa and Wisconsin. At the end of the war they were proceeding toward Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Hence, after the war there were almost countless acres of fertile, unsettled prairie land ready to be transferred by the government to industrious men willing to use the axe and the plow.[1]

In early years it was customary for the president of the United States to issue a proclamation offering the surveyed lands at public sale,[2] but in 1862, soon after the Republican party gained control of the national government, a homestead act was passed providing that any twenty-one-year-old person who was a United States citizen or who intended to become a United States citizen "might occupy and use a piece of surveyed land not exceeding 160 acres, and at the completion of five years' residence upon it, by the payment of $10 to meet the cost of entry, become its owner."[3] This policy was a new one, and consequently it, especially at the end of the war, encouraged migration from the East and from Europe on a large scale. Horace Greeley, editor of the

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[1] E. P. Oberholtzer, A History of the United States Since the Civil War, pp. 275-276.

[2] Ibid., p. 276.

[3] Ibid., p. 278.

New York Tribune, urged many clerks, mechanics, shopkeepers, and small farmers of the East to go into the Mississippi valley, and after the war he urged returned soldiers to take up Western homesteads.[4] Greeley, of course, was not the only one who encouraged ill-prospering Easterners to go West, but more people than we realize, perhaps, found their call in his command to "go West, young man!"

American people were migratory in habit anyway. Kirkland, for instance, points out that a typical family experience of that day often involved numerous moves into new regions.[5] Europeans, too, were migrating, and in large numbers Germans, Swedes, Czechs, Russians, and Danes came to the agricultural lands of the Northwest, for here the climate reminded them of their native lands.[6]

Before 1860 the Northwestern farmer specialized in soft winter wheat, which often froze out, especially in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The introduction of a hard, red spring wheat that thrived in the cold climate of the region, however, eliminated the problem of frozen crops and added speed to the conquest and settlement of the prairies.[7]

In 1846, the corn laws of England were repealed, and thereby the import duties on foreign grain were made so low

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[4] Ibid.

[5] E. C. Kirkland, A History of American Economic Life, p. 504.

[6] Ibid., p. 505.

[7] Ibid., p. 518.

that the English could make no profit on their own grain.[8] Thereafter the English abandoned agriculture, turned toward work in the factories, and caused the demand for imported grain in their country to increase. If Americans could only produce wheat in large quantities, therefore, they could find markets for it not only in their own industrial centers but also in industrialized England.

The Civil War, of course, caused many laborers to be withdrawn from the fields at a time when there was an increased demand for grain, but the answer to this problem was found in the application of labor-saving machinery on an unprecedented scale.[9] The increased demand, nevertheless, stimulated the price of wheat and other grains, and naturally people, once released from the bondage of war, were eager to go West, secure cheap land, raise grain, and secure good incomes by taking advantage of the demands and the prices.

As a result of these factors, the population of the Northwestern grain states increased more than forty-two per cent between 1860 and 1870 and nearly thirty-four per cent during the following decade.[10] This increase amounted to eight million people, a number of whom were foreigners.[11]

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[8] L. M. Hacker and B. B. Kendrick, The United States Since 1865, p. 165.

[9] E. L. Bogart, Economic History of the American People, p. 498.

[10] E. L. Bogart, Economic History of American Agriculture, p. 112.

[11] Bogart, Economic History of the American People, p. 498.

Nearly five million acres were added to the cultivated area between 1870 and 1900,[12] and the cereal production climbed from a billion bushels in 1860 to over two billion in 1880.[13] Undoubtedly the farmers who migrated to the Middle West in this era were industrious, willing, and filled with hope for the well-being of their families.

And when they first settled in their new land they had prospects of agreeable conditions. With government assistance the railroads began to make rapid extensions into the West; farmers could specialize in the production of grain, sell their products speedily and economically, and buy articles that they needed. So heartily, in fact, did the farmers approve of the government's granting land to the railroads that they themselves often bought railroad bonds to help increase the transportation facilities of their region.

In the early seventies, iron and porcelain rollers replaced the old millstones used in flour milling, and a superior grade of flour was produced from the hard spring wheat that was then being cultivated.[14] Extensive improvement of farm machinery in the post-war years also "facilitated

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[12]Bogart, Economic History of American Agriculture, p. 112.

[13]E. F. Humphrey, An Economic History of the United States, p. 321.

[14]Bogart, Economic History of American Agriculture, p. 112.

the rapid exploitation of the virgin soils of the West"[15] and increased farm production. As early as 1846 and 1847, Cyrus McCormick opened factories for the manufacture and sale of his reaper in Cincinnati and in Chicago. In 1878, John F. Appleby of Wisconsin invented the self-binding twine harvester which reaped, bundled, and bound the grain in one operation. Appleby's invention permitted one man to do as much as eight men had done before; in fact, one authority has said that it, more than any other implement, enabled the country to increase its production during this period.[16] By 1885 a combined harvester and thresher had been made which, when drawn by thirty to forty horses, cut, threshed, cleaned, sacked, and weighed the grain without the intervention of human hands.[17] Still other improvements were made in this era through the invention of such implements as plows, harrows, planters, weeders, cultivators, shelling machines, grinders, and manure spreaders.

As helpful as the improved implements and the extended railroads may have seemed, however, the farmers of the post-war era were not to exist long without their problems. Says Buck:

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[15]Hacker and Kendrick, op. cit., p. 174.

[16]Bogart, Economic History of the American People, pp. 501-502.

[17]Humphrey, op. cit., p. 395.

> The demobilization of the armies, the closing of war industries, increased immigration, the homestead law, the introduction of improved machinery, and the rapid advance of the railroads . . . all combined to drive the agricultural frontier westward by leaps and bounds. . . . As crop acreage and production increased, prices went down in accordance with the law of supply and demand, and farmers all over the country found it difficult to make a living.[18]

Most of the farmers who had gone West were, in the beginning, without sufficient capital, and as a rule they had been forced to mortgage their land to buy such necessities as seed, wire, and machinery. When the Panic of 1873, which had its roots in overspeculation among the stockholders of railroads, came, creditors became insistent for payment, mortgages became almost nonrenewable, and the rate of interest soared.[19] In the meantime Congress had, since the war, "pursued a policy of currency contraction which meant a fall in prices from the dizzy heights of the war inflation."[20]

Overproduction, deflated money, and a panic, therefore, combined forces in 1873 and succeeding years to make the farmer realize that "his mortgage, as measured in terms of bushels of wheat, was growing ever larger."[21] Perhaps a slight relief came after 1875, when there were crop failures in Europe and the occurrence of the Russo-Turkish War.

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[18] S. J. Buck, The Agrarian Crusade, p. 19.

[19] Ibid., p. 21.

[20] Bogart, Economic History of the American People, p. 511.

[21] Humphrey, op. cit., p. 321.

Demands for American wheat grew for a time, but after 1885 the picture grew black again. India, Russia, and Australia entered the wheat markets of the world, and, says one authority, about the same time tariff walls against American wheat were raised by France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.[22] Buck in reference to this era has said that

> whether or not the American farmer realized that the nineteenth century had seen a total change in the economic relations of the world, he did perceive clearly that something was wrong in his own case. . . . From 1883 to 1889 inclusive the average price of wheat was seventy-three cents a bushel, of corn thirty-six cents, of oats twenty-eight cents.[23]

Because crops were poor in 1890 there came a slight advance in prices, but in 1891 there were again bumper crops of grain and a decline in prices. By 1892 there was a normal production of wheat throughout the world, and by 1894 the average price of wheat was forty-nine cents per bushel.[24] The prices of other grains followed a similar pattern until finally, says one author, it became cheaper to burn corn than to cart it to town.[25] During all of this time, the interest rate on mortgages remained the same, and each year saw more mortgages being foreclosed and former owners taking their places on the farms as tenants. As an illustration of the financial plight, Buck says that in 1888,

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[22]Hacker and Kendrick, op. cit., p. 169.

[23]Buck, op. cit., p. 102.

[24]Ibid., pp. 102-103.

[25]Ibid., p. 103.

174 bushels of wheat would pay the interest at eight per cent on $2000, whereas in 1894 or 1895, 320 bushels were required to pay the same interest.[26] Manufacturers in the meantime were protected from the rivalry of foreign goods by high tariff walls, and they, therefore, did not lower the prices of articles that farmers were forced to purchase. The commission merchants to whom the farmer sold his produce and the retail dealers from whom he bought his supplies also demanded their share or more of profit and thus added handicaps to his already desperate plight. With the middlemen to whom the farmer sold his produce, in fact, there originated a gambling scheme that was almost disastrous. Early in this era the farmers themselves constructed grain elevators by the railroad siding, and later when capital was not available locally, the building was assumed by the railroads. In the eighties, however, these elevators were often leased or sold to companies wanting to make a profit through grain buying. The companies, in turn, gave farmers the lowest prices possible, and before long the farmers saw that the final sales of grain in Liverpool, England, for instance, brought considerably more than they themselves had received. The truth was that elevator owners in a vicinity had learned to make agreements among themselves that prevented farmers from receiving the highest prices for their grain. "If

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[26] Ibid.

interlopers came in, the united elevators raised prices to kill them off";[27] otherwise, the farmer was paid a materially low return, and if prices soared after the contracts were made, the elevator concerns received the profit. So disastrous to the farmer did this plan of profiteering prove that the president of one farmers' society said: "Gambling in farm products has done more real harm to the farmer than all the droughts, pests, and disease with which he has had to contend on his farm!"[28] And when farmers needed even short loans to provide for them until their crops matured and they could sell to the elevator companies, they were often forced to borrow from local merchants at the rate of fifteen or twenty per cent.[29] Later, Western investment companies, insurance companies, and state banking systems met the financial needs of the farmers, but their loan and mortgage rates, too, were unfair. In the meantime the farmer had to pay higher taxes in accordance with his ability to pay than business men did. No tax deductions were made on his mortgage; neither was any relief, Buck reports, given him in his payment of federal taxes on the commodities he bought.[30] Finally, railroads are not to be overlooked, for they also were giving their share of trouble. At first, of course,

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[27]Kirkland, op. cit., p. 546. [28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., p. 550. [30]Buck, op. cit., p. 106.

the farmers thought of the railroads as a blessing -- a way to send their crops to market -- and they bought shares of railroad stock. But they later learned that often when railroads were merged and reorganized the shares held by farmers were decreased. Too, they learned, it has been pointed out, that railroad stock was often "watered" to such an extent that high freight rates were charged in order to permit the payment of dividends.[31] In fact, say Hacker and Kendrick:

> After the first enthusiasm for railroad building had spent itself, the farmers of the West began to regard the railroad managers as their arch foes. High rates, pooling devices, rebates, discriminations between long and short hauls, incivility, bribery, dishonesty -- these were some of the practices whose weight the farmers of the nation began to feel. . . .[32]

The farmers did not wait long, though, before they made efforts to better their situation. Once they sought political remedies for their economic ills, however, they discovered that they had little representation or influence in either the national or the state legislatures:

> Political power was concentrated in the East and in the urban sections of the West. Members of Congress were increasingly likely to be from the manufacturing classes or from the legal profession, which sympathized with these classes rather than with the agriculturists. Only about 7 per cent of the members of Congress were farmers; yet in 1870,

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[31] Ibid., p. 22.

[32] Hacker and Kendrick, op. cit., p. 182.

> 47 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture. The only remedy for the farmers was to organize themselves as a class in order to promote their common welfare.[33]

Their first organization, the Patrons of Husbandry, or the Grange, had its beginning in 1866 when President Andrew Johnson authorized his Commissioner of Agriculture to send a clerk from his bureau on a trip through the Southern states to secure information about agriculture. Oliver Hudson Kelley, a man born in Boston of a Yankee family, was sent. After Kelley discovered the practice of antiquated agrarian methods and the lack of social opportunities existent in the South, he believed that a national secret order of farmers would bind farmers together for purposes of social and intellectual advancement. When he returned to Boston, he discussed the plans with his niece, Carrie Hall, and she successfully argued that women as well as men should be admitted into full membership. In 1867, Kelley interested some of his associates in his scheme, and as a result, seven men -- one fruit grower and six government clerks, including Kelley -- became the founders of the Grange. These founders, who looked for advantages to come to the farmers through intellectual and social intercourse and not through political action, had at each meeting a lecture aside from their prescribed ritual. Kelley, despite the shortage of money in

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[33]Buck, op. cit., p. 24.

the club treasury, went west, vigorously advertised his organization, and "in May, 1868, came the first fruits of all this correspondence and advertisement -- the establishment of a Grange at Newton, Iowa."[34] Colonel D. A. Robertson then assisted in establishing the first permanent grange in Minnesota and began to advertise the order as offering a means of protection against corporations and opportunities for co-operative buying and selling.

During the first four years of its existence, the Grange took root chiefly in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, and numerous lodges were organized. At the 1874 Grange convention, the aims of the organization were finally made clear:

> As to business, the Patrons declared themselves enemies not of capital but of the tyranny of monopolies, not of railroads but of their high freight tariffs and monopoly of transportation. In politics . . . the Grange was not to be a political . . . organization, but its members were to perform their political duties as individual citizens.[35]

Hence, when the Grangers began to speak of their task in terms of business and political co-operation, they found opposition, especially from business men. And when farmers realized that business interests were opposed to the Grangers, they were easily convinced of the merits of the organization;

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[34] Ibid., p. 8.

[35] Ibid., p. 29.

about twenty thousand Grange lodges were, therefore, in existence in 1874, the peak year of the movement.

One of the most beneficial accomplishments of the Grange was the passage in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota of the Grange laws -- laws which "were intended to establish uniform and reasonable rates for transporting and warehousing grain and other products and to require the publication of rate schedules."[36] In spite of the fact that the railroads at first refused to obey these laws, in 1875 in the case of Munn vs. Illinois, the federal Supreme Court upheld their constitutionality and "the power of the state to regulate the charges made by a common carrier."[37] The Grange is responsible for the state regulation of railroads down to the present day.[38]

Another important benefit of the Grange was the provision by some of its members of capital for farm co-operatives, stores that the farmers organized so that they could get farm machinery and other supplies at the lowest possible cost. It is true that competition from other merchants often followed in the path of these co-operatives and "froze" them out and that farmers seldom had the spirit to buy at the Grange stores if they found better prices elsewhere;

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[36]Bogart, Economic History of the American People, p. 512.

[37]Ibid. [38]Buck, op. cit., p. 59.

nevertheless, the co-operative creameries and elevators in several states saved farmers thousands of dollars during the short period that they did function.[39]

The Midwestern Grange, backed by the National Grange, also attempted to manufacture farm implements. Grange members went about the country "buying patents for all sorts of farm implements, but not always making sure of the worth of the machinery or the validity of the patents."[40] Consequently this adventure also failed.

The decline of the Grange movement was felt soon after 1874, and by 1880 there were only about four thousand lodges left. Buck attributes its failure to its rapid growth in the beginning, its admission to membership of some people who wanted to make a profit from the farmer rather than from the farm, and its failure to control the profits of the middlemen -- the buyers and the retailers.[41]

Although the Grange did not survive the tests and problems of its day, it was, Buck says, useful while it lasted in the following ways: it effected a considerable saving for the farmer through the regulation of railroad rates; it caused farmers to realize that the manufacturers and retailers had more complex affairs than they had ever imagined; it caused manufacturers and retailers to learn that the

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[39] Ibid., p. 67. [40] Ibid., p. 70. [41] Ibid., p. 60.

farmers were not entirely helpless and that it was better to have their good will than to force them into competition; and it gave the farmers social and intellectual stimulus.[42] The last benefit may be underestimated by anyone who has never lived in the atmosphere that surrounded the farmers of post-Civil-War days. Buck has described the period and the role of the Grange as follows:

> Especially in the West, where farms were large, opportunities for social intercourse were few, and weeks might pass without the farmer seeing any but his nearest neighbors. For his wife existence was even more drear. She went to the market town less often than he and the routine of her life on the farm kept her close to the farmhouse and prevented visits even to her neighbors' dwellings. The difficulty of getting domestic servants made the work of the farmer's wife extremely laborious; and at that time there were none of the modern conveniences which lighten work such as power churns, cream separators, and washing machines. Even more than the husband, the wife was likely to degenerate into a drudge without the hope -- and eventually without the desire -- of anything better. The church formed, to be sure, a means of social intercourse; but according to prevailing religious notions the churchyard was not the place nor the Sabbath the time for that healthy but unrestrained hilarity which is essential to the well-being of man.
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> Into lives thus circumscribed the Grange came as a liberalizing and uplifting influence. Its admission of women into the order on the same terms as men made it a real community servant and gave both women and men a new sense of the dignity of woman. . . .
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> Not only in Grange meetings, which came at least once a month and often more frequently, but also in Grange picnics and festivals the farmers and their wives and children came together for

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[42] Ibid., pp. 70-72.

> joyous human intercourse. . . . It was reported that in many communities the advent of the Grange created a marked improvement in the dress and manners of the members. Crabbed men came out of their shells and grew genial; disheartened women became cheerful; repressed children delighted in the chance to play with other boys and girls of their own age.[43]

Grange members, too, says Buck, did some works of charity. They often helped sick brothers harvest their crops; they rebuilt houses destroyed by fire; they gave donations in times of drought or plague.[44]

Also, the Grange was responsible for the increase in the number and circulation of agricultural journals, for as Grange papers were passed from hand to hand and discussed, farmers acquired the habit of reading. If the Grange movement, comments Buck, had done no other good, it would have been worth-while.[45]

Farmers did not in the 1870's, however, put all of their organized strength into the Grange. They thought of help that might come through increasing the amount of money in circulation; the prices of their products might be increased and the appreciation of their debts checked. The demand for currency inflation did not, of course, originate with the Western farmers; it had been popular in America in times of depression, especially, since colonial days. Now

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[43] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[44] Ibid., p. 74.

[45] Ibid., p. 75.

in the 1870's, especially after the Panic of 1873, there was a move abroad in America to inflate currency. The laboring men of the East were behind this idea but not as strongly as the farmers of the Middle West. In fact, the forces of agrarian discontent attained the status of a national political organization for the first time in the Greenback party,[46] which was begun about 1875 and which stood for direct issuance by the government of legal paper tender. This party never managed to make headway in any of the national presidential elections, but several of its members were elected to Congress. A temporary prosperity came to the farmers about 1880, and after this time the Greenbackers, says Buck, rapidly disintegrated.[47] The general habit of voting for the Republicans or the Democrats -- a habit established by the Civil War and by Reconstruction -- was evidently too strong to be lightly broken. Hence the Greenback movement, like the Granger movement, failed to solve the problem of agricultural depression; it, too, passed away. But "the greater farmers' movement of which both were a part went on."[48]

The farmers' desire to present a united front to their enemies and to work for the eradication of their social, economic, and political ills did not die out with the decline

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[46] Ibid., p. 77.

[47] Ibid., p. 95.

[48] Ibid., p. 98.

of the Grangers and the Greenbackers. Farmers, on the other hand, wished to organize again and to avoid their first mistakes. Their next movement, unlike their others, though, was not deliberately planned: it sprang from their needs.[49] As early as 1874 or '75, a local farmers' club was organized in Lampasas County, Texas, for mutual protection against horse thieves. Alliances for other protective reasons then spread through the Southern states, and shortly before 1880 the Northwestern Alliance started, its constitution declaring that its objects were to unite the farmers of the United States for their protection against concentrated capital, to oppose candidates not in sympathy with the farmers' interests, and to obtain equal taxation of all property, including the deduction of the amount of mortgages from assessments of mortgaged property.[50]

This alliance established co-operative creameries and grain elevators in the Northwest, but its main activity was in the field of politics. It sought "'to correct the evils of misgovernment through the ballot-box,'"[51] and its local branches were urged as a unit to vote against any candidates who were not pledged to the platform of the organization. Among other issues, it favored the free coinage of silver, the issuance of "'all paper money direct to the people,'"[52]

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[49] Ibid., p. 108.

[50] Ibid., p. 118.

[51] Ibid., p. 120.

[52] Ibid., p. 121.

and the government ownership and operation of one or more transcontinental railroad lines.

In 1889 and 1890 an attempt was made to unite the Northwestern and Southern alliances, but this union was not made because of differences in political policies and because of a survival of sectional feeling.[53] At the end of 1890 the Southern organization was disbanded, and, although the Northwestern one continued for a few years, the force of these alliances was spent. There had come a shift "from social to political organizations -- from Alliances to Populism."[54]

As the decade of the eighties had progressed and the unrest of the agricultural class had become greater, there had slowly begun to develop the feeling of the necessity for a new political party to remedy the ills of the farmer. Reform continued, however, chiefly through the medium of the alliances until the Populists or People's party was organized in Omaha, Nebraska, in July, 1892. The platform of this party included approximately the same planks that the alliances had been built upon: government ownership and control of railroads, telegraphs, and telephones; opposition to alien ownership of land; demand for corporations to return land held in excess of their actual needs; increase in the amount of money in circulation; and governmental farm

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., p. 124.

loans with reasonable interest. Obtaining twenty-two electoral votes in 1892, the Populists met with temporary success, but by 1896 they, too, began to disintegrate.

Other agricultural groups of consequence did not form, and on the whole farmers' organizations appear not to have succeeded or endured, but they, nevertheless, observes Buck, were efforts toward progress in the fields of social politics and social justice.[55] They were the voice of the inevitable protest that came from the agrarian class in its determination to better its lot during the rapid growth and painful readjustment that characterized the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century -- a time when there was "nothing . . . to bring the great outside world to the doorstep of the farmer"[56] and nothing to take the farmer's problems to the attention of Congress or the public.

With the coming of the middle nineties, imperialism instead of economic and domestic reform became the issue of the day, and attention was turned toward the Spanish-American and Philippine wars, the discovery of new gold fields, the inflation of the dollar, and the welfare of industrialists. One author, in fact, says that

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[55] Ibid., p. 200.

[56] Hacker and Kendrick, op. cit., p. 182.

> the middle nineties, whether considered from the viewpoint of factual history, or that of the leadership of public opinion, or that of belles-lettres, were a time when certain powerful forces, which had come to focus within the two preceding decades, were rapidly disintegrating. The culture of antebellum, agrarian America . . . had lived its active life and was ready for whatever doubtful immortality might bring to an influence and a heritage.[57]

The Midwestern farming region, nevertheless, possessed in the history of its settlement and in the nature of its economic, political, and social life a unity, interdependence, and consequently a local color that have permitted its picturesque portrayal by literary artists, chief of whom is Hamlin Garland.

Garland, "the first dirt farmer in American literature,"[58] was born near West Salem, Wisconsin, on September 16, 1860. By the time he was seven, he had regular duties, one of which was helping his sister Harriet carry "stwitchel" to the men in the hay fields; at eight he was guiding the lead horse on the McCormick reaper. The haying season in the Wisconsin coulee was not, however, without its delights for him, for later he recalled the clusters of strawberries tossed up by the scythes of the men and the atmosphere of festivity around the feast board when the neighbors came to help with threshing and haying. The "unremitting severity"[59] of plowing

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[57]W. F. Taylor, The Economic Novel in America, p. 175.

[58]J. T. Flanagan, America Is West, p. 265.

[59]Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 42.

among stumps and luring tales of a rich wheat country to the west finally brought dissatisfaction to his father, Richard Garland, and in 1869 the family moved to Hesper, Iowa; in 1870 they moved on to Mitchell County, Iowa, and settled on a quarter section of land near the town of Osage. The succeeding ten years were impressive for young Hamlin: he trudged weary miles behind the plow and the harrow; attended the community school; wore cheap and ill-fitting clothes; observed the landscape, the notes of birds, the play of animals; dug postholes, built fences, stacked grain, and husked corn; read during his leisure the magical print of a few books and farm journals; milked cows that stood in crowded malodorous stalls; planted corn and herded cattle; saw "waves of dusk and green and gold circle across the ripening barley";[60] attended Grange picnics and county fairs; and heard the "steady clang"[61] of cowbells and the "shrill, myriad-voiced choir of leaping insects."[62]

In 1879 Garland's father permitted him to leave the labor of the harvest temporarily to attend the Cedar Valley Seminary at Osage, and while young Garland spent two years of carefree life at the Seminary, crop failures "profoundly affected the county, producing a feeling of unrest and bitterness in the farmers."[63] These failures, which were brought

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[60] Ibid., p. 137.

[61] Ibid., p. 172.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., p. 228.

about by the destructive onslaughts of chinch bugs, added to the disappointment that had already come as a result of low prices, and consequently Richard Garland sold his share in the Grange elevator he had been helping operate for the last five years. The Garlands then, together with other wheat raisers, joined the march westward. They staked their claim to land in Brown County, South Dakota, near the town of Ordway, but Hamlin soon left them and for the next two years went tramping in Wisconsin, Illinois, and even the New England states. When he returned to the Border in the spring of 1883 to find himself "in the midst of a jocund rush of land-seekers,"[64] he deplored the advance of the plow accompanied by the destruction of wild life, but, nevertheless, he staked his own claim to a quarter section of land near Ordway, and during the year that followed he saw hot dry winds bake the grass, women complain of loneliness, and starvation lurk at the doors of the settlers. He viewed, in fact, the same situation that Turner describes when he says:

> Deceived by rainy seasons and the railroad advertisements, and recklessly optimistic, hosts of settlers poured out into the plains beyond the region of sufficient rainfall for successful agriculture without irrigation. Dry seasons starved them back; but a repetition of good rainfalls again aroused the determination to occupy the western plains. Boom towns flourished like prairie weeds; . . . farmers . . . mortgaged their possessions. . . . The wave of settlement dashed itself in vain against the conditions of the Great Plains.[65]

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[64] Ibid., p. 301.

[65] F. J. Turner, The Frontier in American History, p. 301.

During the winter months of '83 Garland happened to read a copy of Henry George's Progress and Poverty. Before this time he had never read a book that questioned the fairness of our land system, and he had never doubted that the makers of our constitution had great wisdom. But now he agreed with George: unrestricted individual ownership of the earth should be championed and poverty abated.

At the same time, too, his inborn hunger for beauty, learning, and leisure was spurring him; his instincts, thinks Van Doren, were clashing with those of his migratory father;[66] civilization was luring him. And one Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1884 came his call. He and his parents were sitting in their Ordway home when a Methodist minister named Bashford came to chat with them and, without knowing it, to persuade young Garland to take letters of introduction to Boston University.[67] Soon thereafter Hamlin sold his land claim for less than two hundred dollars, and in October he set out for Boston with "ludicrously vague"[68] plans but an enthusiastic heart. He was on his way to become a literary artist but not to forget the Middle West.

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[66]Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, p. 39.

[67]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 1.

[68]Ibid., p. 3.

CHAPTER II

GARLAND AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS THEORY OF REALISM

In Boston, Garland soon found that his letters of introduction aroused no interest in him, but he was not to turn back. He rented a "sunless, narrow hall bedroom"[1] near the public library, arranged to live meagerly on five dollars a week, and during the winter of 1884-1885 spent eight to fourteen hours daily in reading. Often, too, he attended free lectures, but the following spring he was about to give up his study and turn to shingling for subsistence when one of his new acquaintances, Professor Moses True Brown, principal of the Boston School of Oratory, invited him to stay and conduct a class in American literature. Garland's success was assured, for his meeting with Brown then led to his acquaintance with a Mrs. Payson, a devoted student who attended his lectures and who invited him to make a series of talks in her home. There he in turn formed other valuable friendships; he met Charles Hurd, literary editor of the Boston Transcript; through Hurd he met Clement, editor-in-chief of the Transcript; and from Clement he received a letter of introduction to William Dean

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[1]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 8.

Howells, the leading realist of the time.

Actually he did not meet Howells until about two years later, but many of his experiences in those intervening months developed his philosophy and richly prepared him for the time when he was to meet the chief contemporary figure in American literature. At Mrs. Payson's, for instance, he met John Enneking, a landscape painter, and became interested in the conflict over the drab pictures of the old "bitumen school" and the brilliantly-hued work of the young impressionists. Enneking, not believing that either school was an accurate portrayer of life, took a midway position, and Garland believed him to be the soundest artist that he met.[2] As a result of reading Eugene Véron's Esthetics and Max Nordau's Conventional Lies, Garland adapted "Veritism" as the name for his theory of realism in American fiction.[3] With Edgar Chamberlin, another friend whom he met through Hurd, he attended a performance of Henrik Ibsen's drama "The Doll's House" and was converted to Ibsenism with its strong revelation of naturalness and truth.[4] He read Herbert Spencer and joined in the belief that the evolutionary process extends to human society and that the success of the future, therefore, is rooted in the realities of the present.[5] Walt Whitman's Democratic Vistas helped him

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[2] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[3] Ibid., p. 32.

[4] Ibid., p. 65.

[5] Taylor, op. cit., p. 151.

perceive, too, that true writing about life in one province is essential to good understanding in another,[6] and a visit with Whitman strengthened his belief in the common man.[7]

On an autumn day in the late eighties, finally, after Garland had reviewed Howells' The Minister's Charge for the Boston Transcript and been kindled to a passion for realism by other of Howells' writings, he took Clement's letter of introduction and went to near-by Auburndale to meet Howells, to stand awed in his presence, and to tell him of his theory that "'American literature, in order to be great, must be national, and in order to be national, must deal with conditions peculiar to our own land and climate.'"[8] Too, he asserted, "'Every genuinely American writer must deal with the life he knows best and for which he cares the most.'"[9] Howells complimented the young professor on the correlation of local-color groups he had made in his lectures and essays and encouraged him to continue a valuable work. Inspired and confident as never before, Garland thus began a close and profitable friendship with the leading realist of the day. In meeting Howells he had in a large measure found himself, and though the two men did not agree on theories of economics,

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[6]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 127.

[7]Ibid., p. 137.

[8]Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 387.

[9]Ibid.

both felt that the place of the common man in society must be elevated before society itself could progress. Howells believed that the elevation could come most easily through socialistic reform; Garland, who meanwhile had become steadfastly devoted to Henry George, was certain that "land monopoly was the fundamental cause of poverty and must be destroyed first of all."[10] Later, in reference to their meeting, Howells said:

> He was a realist to the point of idealism, and he was perhaps none the less, but much the more, realist because he had not yet had time to show his faith by his works. . . . There were as yet only a few years between him and the Wisconsin farm which grew him as genuinely as if he had been a product of its soil. He was as poor as he was young, but he was so rich in purposes of high economic and social import that he did not know he was poor. . . . As to his present, he was such an ardent believer in Henry George's plan for abolishing poverty that with his heart and hopes fixed on a glorious morrow for all men he took no thought of his own narrow day.
>
> He seems at that time to have gone about preaching Georgism equally with veritism in the same generous self-forgetfulness. . . .[11]

And so it was that since Garland had read Progress and Poverty in the winter of 1883, he had made George's theory a part of his own. In the decade of the eighties, George moved across the continent with an argument and a program for new battles against privilege. In the autumn of 1887,

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[10]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 64.

[11]W. D. Howells, "Mr. Garland's Books," The North American Review, CXCVI (October, 1912), 523-524.

Garland heard him speak in old Faneuil Hall, Boston, and if he was not already a disciple, he indeed went away from George that day swayed by "his altruism, his sincere pity and his hatred of injustice."[12] He thereafter joined the "Anti-Poverty Society," an organization of George's followers, and spoke before several audiences in behalf of the plan for a single land tax. He did not forsake his literature classes or his writing to take part in the economic battle, but he did give much of his time to George's plan, for he wanted every writer not tied to the past but free to deal with the present. He himself said:

> . . . this is why I am deep in the great land reform called the single tax. I believe it will free art as well as labor -- for freeing labor will free everything. I love the cause of labor because of the value of freedom to the laborer, but I love and fight for this freedom because it is the whole battle that frees art, literature, and science. In the fate of the wage earner is the fate of all.[13]

Garland thus believed that if the standard of art in America were to be raised the standard of living must be raised first, for, he reasoned, tired, hungry men care little for beauty. According to George, all the wealth of the world was divided among wages, capital, and land. Capital, contrary to the belief of many, was not the wealth of greed

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[12]Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 379.

[13]"Art and the Single Tax," The Review of Reviews, IX (February, 1894), 214. Reference is made to Garland's article "The Land Question and Its Relation to Art and Literature," which appeared in the Arena in January, 1894.

but merely a source of assistance to production and hence to wages. The three forms of wealth, he believed, were evenly divided in a new country in which a few men had not gained a monopoly of land, but as a region became settled and land owners gained power, less and less wealth was left for wage earners and for capital. George therefore suggested that if a single high tax were placed on land, the power of a few owners to control wealth would be undermined, a just amount of money would be left for labor and capital, and the standard of living would be raised. Under his plan Garland saw that the laborer would have no tax upon his industry or upon any improvements that he placed on his land, his reasonable wants would be satisfied, his desire for overproduction would be withdrawn, and his buoyancy, hope, and appreciation would consequently turn him to art and literature.[14]

In the summer of 1887, Garland had visited his parents in South Dakota, and though it is not possible chronologically to label his conception of realism, it is fairly accurate to say that it was during this trip west that his ideas began to take form, his philosophy to crystallize, and his pen to record realism with a vengeance. In Chicago on his way west, he stopped to meet Joseph Kirkland, author of Zury, a Western novel that he had recently reviewed for the Transcript, and

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[14] Ibid.

Kirkland, knowing of some local-color articles that Garland had written for the New American Magazine, challenged him with the statement that Iowa had no writer but him (Garland) and with the question, "'Why shouldn't our prairie country have its novelists as well as England or France or Norway?'"[15] The question rang in Garland's mind, and he recalled that by the time he reached home, his "mind was in a tumult of readjustment."[16] Says Taylor in reference to that trip:

> Garland's experiences on the remainder of that westward journey were the final factor which precipitated his stories of the Middle Border. Day after day, studying the land, he brooded over the contrasts between the prodigal beauty of Nature and the gracelessness of human life. For the first time, he could observe the Western farmer not only with the sympathetic understanding of a native, but also with the perspective of an Easterner. The poverty of large numbers of the people, the sordidness of their lives, the ugliness of their homes, the attrition of the beauty and the freshness of youth, the hopeless treadmill of toil walked by the average farmer, and the futility of the life led by the average farm woman -- all this he observed as if for the first time. Moreover, the decline of his own mother, who was beginning to break after a lifetime of toil, gave the depressing picture a final touch of poignancy. Always intensely susceptible to the most personal motives, Garland responded with a profound, smouldering indignation, with a determination to portray in fiction these stern and even repellent factors which the more idyllic storytellers had neglected.[17]

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[15]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 111.

[16]Ibid., p. 113.

[17]Taylor, op. cit., p. 158. Reference is made to Hamlin Garland's A Son of the Middle Border, pp. 356-358.

Even before Garland returned to Boston in the fall of 1887, therefore, he began his writing, and once he was back in the city he, undisturbed and still supported by his teaching salary, "sat down in an independence that he later looked back to with envy, to render his materials into fiction with the finest art he could command, uninfluenced by the needs of the literary market or the demands of any editor."[18] During the next two or three years his literary efforts to incorporate his sociology into his aesthetics in order to further the cause of justice were prolific, especially in the field of the short story. Further crystallization of his ideas about writing occurred, too, and later he recorded them in his Crumbling Idols, a series of essays published in 1894. Howells criticized Garland's early works because, he said, they were written more to reform than to exemplify, but perhaps this criticism would have applied to any writer fired as Garland was with a zeal for social justice. Garland, nevertheless, believed in definite purposes for artists, and before further study is made of his work, it will be helpful to examine Crumbling Idols.

In these twelve essays dealing with literature, drama, and art, zealous young Garland recited his creed to whoever would listen. In his preface he gives the keynote to his evaluation of the present when he says:

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[18] Ibid., p. 159.

> Youth should study the past, not to get away from the present, but to understand the present and to anticipate the future. I believe in the mighty pivotal present. I believe in the living, not the dead. The men and women around me interest me more than the saints and heroes of other centuries.[19]

As he proceeds thence to give suggestions about art in the America of his day, he reminds us that before the Civil War, our nation had broken away from England in government and politics, but native utterance in affairs of art "had been overawed and silenced by academic English judgments."[20] The Civil War, he believes, was "an immense factor in building up freedom from old-world models, and in developing native literature,"[21] but while this emancipation was taking place, there came, he states, to the Eastern cities "the spirit of a central academy that was to stand in precisely the same relation to the interior of America that London formerly occupied with regard to the whole country."[22]

In the West, the province in which he was especially interested, he points out that the conventional literature prized by the East was most widely discussed. "The books it [the West] reads," he says, "the pictures it buys, are nearly all of the conventional sort, or, worse yet, imitations of the conventional."[23] The great body of school-bred

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[19]According to Hamlin Garland in his preface to Crumbling Idols, p. viii.

[20]Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 5. [21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., p. 6. [23]Ibid., p. 7.

Westerners were "taught to believe that Shakespeare ended the drama, that Scott . . . closed the novel, that the English language is the greatest in the world, and that all other literatures are curious, but not at all to be ranked in power and humanity with the English literature."[24] Yet for forty years, he points out, an infinite drama had been "going on in those wide spaces of the West,"[25] and a life certainly colorful enough to embody in writing had been evolving from "the mixture of races; the coming in of the German, the Scandinavian; the marked yet subtle changes in their character; . . . the building of railroads, with all their trickery and false promises and worthless bonds; the rise of millionnaires; the deepening of social contrasts."[26] The West, however, had remained "undelineated in the novel, the drama, and the poem"[27] because of lack of a market and lack of perception. This lack of perception, he believes, was due to hard work that had "calloused the perceiving mind"[28] of Westerners and to instructors and critics who had repressed young minds by teaching them to imitate rather than to create.[29]

He looked forward to the time when the veritist, whose

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[24] Ibid., p. 9.
[25] Ibid., p. 14.
[26] Ibid., p. 15.
[27] Ibid., p. 16.
[28] Ibid., p. 17.
[29] Ibid.

theory was "a statement of his passion for truth and for individual expression,"[30] would record in writing the life of each section of America, for, he observes, "the sun of truth strikes each part of the earth at a little different angle; [and] it is this angle which gives life and infinite variety to literature."[31] Some Western artists, however, were still writing blank-verse tragedies of the Middle Ages and "had not risen to the perception of the significant and beautiful in their own environment."[32] These writers should have been moved by something higher than money or hope of praise; they needed, Garland believes, to have a sleepless love in their hearts urging them to recreate in the image the life they knew and loved.[33] In fact, every novelist that Garland knew who had risen distinctively out of the mass of story writers in America had represented "some special local life or some special social phase,"[34] had been a creator rather than an imitator.

Many literary artists of the past -- of the age of Pope, for instance -- were unaware, though, of the value of creativeness, for they lived in "blessed ignorance of the future."[35] Gradually somehow a few great minds caught glimpses of a changing future and ceased to worship the past.[36] Spencer

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[30] Ibid., p. 21. [31] Ibid., p. 22. [32] Ibid., p. 26.
[33] Ibid., pp. 26-27. [34] Ibid., p. 33.
[35] Ibid., pp. 39-42. [36] Ibid., p. 42.

and Darwin brought "the splendid light of the development theory,"[37] and the study of evolution made "the present the most critical and self-analytical of all ages known . . . [and] liberated the thought of the individual as never before."[38] The novel, which was the chief fictional medium of expressing the newly liberated thought,[39] came then, according to Garland, "to deal more and more with men and less with abstractions,"[40] for after fictionists visualized a more beautiful and peaceful social and literary life, they were "encouraged to deal truthfully and at close grapple" with the facts of the immediate present.[41] In other words, Garland says that the best fictionist, the realist or veritist,

> is really an optimist, a dreamer. He sees life in terms of what it might be, as well as in terms of what it is; but he writes of what is, and, at his best, suggests what is to be, by contrast.[42]

Garland thus encouraged writing that reflects the present, anticipates the future, and contains only the essential difference of local color -- "that quality of texture and back-ground" that indicates "it could not have been written in any other place or by any one else than a native."[43] And he believed that in time the novel, the most promising of

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., p. 43.
[39] Ibid., p. 44.
[40] Ibid., p. 49.
[41] Ibid., p. 51.
[42] Ibid., p. 52.
[43] Ibid., p. 64.

all present literary attempts,[44] would "delineate the intimate life and speech of every section of our enormous and widely scattered republic . . . ," would "catch and fix in charcoal the changing, assimilating races," and would "redeem American literature . . . from its conventional and highly wrought romanticism."[45]

He also believed that American drama and painting would eventually join the novel in this delineation of present local conditions. Drama, "from the earliest time of its entry into the colonies, . . . intensified and carried to the farthest absurdity the principle of dependence upon other times and countries for models,"[46] and while the novel tended to grow "steadily more truthful and wholesome, the drama, with several notable exceptions, . . . kept the low level of imitative English sensationalism and sterile French sexualism."[47] The "tyranny of the classic" held forth in painting until the late eighties, but finally impressionism helped transform painting, and veritism began to act upon the drama.

Henrik Ibsen, the great Norwegian poet and dramatist, became the realistic leader in the drama after his plays dealing impressively with the actualities of his land and time were shown, and America, tending already in literature toward

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[44] Ibid., p. 69.

[45] Ibid., p. 71.

[46] Ibid., p. 83.

[47] Ibid., p. 86.

a war on conventionalism, was greatly influenced by him and his effort to put truth on the stage. Garland, of course, was grateful for Ibsen's loyalty to facts and for his influence on American thought, but he advised that America not let his plays be models, for she always has drama of her own, rich in local color and ready to be depicted.

At the Chicago Exposition of 1893 "every competent observer who passed through the art palace . . . was probably made aware of the immense growth of impressionistic or open-air painting," says Garland, for in most of the paintings there was "the prevalence of blue or purple shadows, and . . . the abundance of dazzling sun-light effects."[48] Impressionism had begun among the French and Spanish in an effort to truly represent the impression that colors in nature make upon the eye. Painters in this school, aware that light and shadows are constantly changing effects in nature, believed that there was always something different for them to sketch, and hence Garland saw them as artists who dealt with the present as well as the local.[49] Their work did not embody sunlight and shadows as he saw them, and they, unlike Enneking, did not paint native scenes,[50] but their efforts to paint their own conceptions were, nevertheless, valuable to him, for he says:

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[48] Ibid., p. 121.

[49] Ibid., p. 131.

[50] Ibid., pp. 135-136.

> Let the critic who thinks this a vogue or fad, this impressionistic view of nature, beware. It is a discovery, born of clearer vision and more careful study, -- a perception which was denied the early painters, precisely as the force we call electricity was an ungovernable power a generation ago.[51]

Thus, believing wholeheartedly in the fruition of an American art, a literature in particular, that would grow as naturally out of America as corn grows out of soil, Garland in the last chapters of Crumbling Idols prophesied that it would be hard for New York to maintain supremacy as the center of art and literature, that the rise of Chicago and other cities all over the nation as literary centers was only a question of time, that the literature of the great interior spaces of the country would be a literature, not of books and idols, but of life, and that material for literary publications would eventually be chosen by Western and Southern editors as well as by Eastern masters. He concluded on a high plane of conquest, for he states that "old idols are crumbling in literature and painting as in religion,"[52] and "there is coming in this land the mightiest assertion in art of the rights of man and the glory of the physical universe ever made in the world."[53]

In 1930, almost forty years after the completion of Crumbling Idols, Garland, who had become somewhat conservative,

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[51] Ibid., p. 140.

[52] Ibid., p. 187.

[53] Ibid., p. 189.

wrote that this publication containing much of his argument for veritism had, happily, been forgotten.[54] He, no longer a youth eager to break "from the grim hand of the past,"[55] had become an oppressor in his own right, but still he was proud of his work, for he said, "As I take up this small volume after thirty-six years have wrought their changes in me as well as in the world I inhabit, I find it logical for the most part and singularly prophetic."[56] He further admitted that "the book raised an acrid dust of controversy, and drew the fire of the classicists (for the moment) from Howells," but it won for him "the support of certain undesirable radicals who confused freedom with license and forced" him to repeat his "articles of faith."[57]

Garland, as early as 1905, a year when Henry James visited in America and lectured in Chicago, began to depart from the radicalism of Crumbling Idols, for he admitted then that the West was lacking in a richness that could be supplied only through contact with the past. James, he said,

> had not expected to find painters and sculptors in Chicago, but when they were presented to him he did his kindliest to believe in them. To him we

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[54]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 256.

[55]Hamlin Garland, Crumbling Idols, p. 191.

[56]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, pp. 257-258.

[57]Ibid., p. 266.

> were all worthy folk, rude pioneers on the border of the artistic and literary New World, workers to be encouraged and rewarded.[58]

After James left Chicago, Garland, in discussion with the author Henry Fuller, said:

> It all comes back to Herbert Spencer's concept. Culture is the possession of comparative ideas. What we lack is a standard by which to measure ourselves. You and I get something of it by reading and by visits to the Old World, but most of our fellow citizens know only Chicago and the small towns from which they came. Our successful artists and writers are only a little more cosmopolitan. Henry James has done us good. He has led some of us to reconstruct our estimate of American art. At present Chicago is flimsy and crude and bloodlessly derivative. Some day we may develop into a literary center. We can't logically claim to have it now.[59]

Garland, as he grew older, lost some of his passion for truth, too, because certain factors were destined to influence him. An unnamed reviewer of Roadside Meetings who wrote in American Literature in the early 1930's clearly expresses the change that enveloped Garland as he said:

> Garland was simply one more victim of the American curse, gentility. Obscurely he knew that gentility is not a value but a convention. He could not escape it, however, nor could he escape that other trap eternally set for the American writer: money. . . . Garland got it to his detriment.[60]

And in Roadside Meetings Garland himself confesses his fault

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[58]Hamlin Garland, Companions on the Trail, p. 261.

[59]Ibid., p. 263.

[60]American Literature, III (March, 1931-January, 1932), 226.

in his discussion of magazines of the nineties. Referring to Richard Gilder's and Henry Alden's magazines of aristocracy and to Edward Bok's and Sam McClure's popular journals designed for the millions, he says:

> As a lover of literature I leaned to the side of Gilder and Alden, but I sold most of my stories to Bok and McClure. . . . I had the wish to be a kind of social historian and in the end fell, inevitably, between two stools. I failed as a reporter, and only half succeeded as a novelist.[61]

Garland's personality was thus split somewhat, and "his best work was not done . . . when he was at the height of his career, but in the beginning when he was an outsider and at the end when he thought over his younger days and his family history."[62]

His theory of realism was, nevertheless, keenly developed by the end of the 1880's, and if there was doubt that he was influenced by Howells in its development, one should read Howells' Criticism and Fiction, which was published the year before Crumbling Idols, and thereafter he cannot fail to see the accord of the two authors in their opinions of realism. Howells did not, like his disciple, call Shakespeare a "crumbling idol" or overlook the value of universality, but he did advise artists to hold their ears close

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[61]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, pp. 342-343.

[62]American Literature, III (March, 1931-January, 1932), 226.

to Nature's lips and catch her very accents instead of copying each other.[63] He strongly maintained that good art was never anything but the reflection of life[64] and that Americans who wrote about the condition of a neighborhood or a class had done something that could not in any bad sense be called narrow, for they had merely breathed vertically instead of laterally.[65]

Actually, then, Garland, after assimilating the potent influence of his masters, chief of whom were Howells and George, embarked in 1887 upon a period of realistic writing with a Midwestern farming country in his background, a theory of realism in his mind, a mission for social justice in his heart, and the salary of a professor in his pocket. What application of his theory was he to make? What success was he to encounter?

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[63] W. D. Howells, Criticism and Fiction, p. 14.

[64] Ibid., p. 23.

[65] Ibid., p. 142.

CHAPTER III

GARLAND AND HIS SHORT STORIES

Three volumes, Main Travelled Roads, published in 1891, Prairie Folks, 1892, and Wayside Courtships, 1897, contain most of Garland's stories. In 1910, Prairie Folks and Wayside Courtships were combined "with some judicious omissions"[1] and two additions as Other Main Travelled Roads, all the stories in the latter book being composed during the period of 1887 to 1890, the time perhaps when Garland was at the height of his enthusiasm over realism and certainly over reform. Despite the dates of composition, though, there are stories in each volume that clearly illustrate the author's theory of realism, and among all of these narratives there are some that deal more directly with the Midwestern farm region than others. Since it is with Garland's interest in his locality that we are chiefly concerned, we shall therefore devote most of our discussion to his stories that portray the farming class. His portrayal, it seems, has been made for the most part through presentation of situations that illustrate some economic principle or problem, through descriptive delineation, and through insertion of home-spun conversations.

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[1] A. H. Quinn, American Fiction -- an Historical and Critical Survey, p. 454.

In "Under the Lion's Paw," one of the most admirably executed of all the stories,[2] perhaps, Garland shows the effect of land monopoly on Farmer Haskins, who, when he bought the place he had worked as a tenant, was compelled to pay for the improvements he had made by his own grinding toil and to accept terms that made of him an economic slave. As he pictures Haskins, "a tall man with a thin, gloomy face," he tells us that "his hair was a reddish brown, like his coat, and seemed equally faded by the wind and sun, and his sallow face, though hard and set, was pathetic somehow."[3] And he reveals the barrenness of Haskins' past by having him tell his new friend, Stephen Counsil, about the destruction of the grasshoppers on the Kansas prairie in these grim words:

> Eat! They wiped us out. They chawed everything that was green. They jest set around waitin' f'r us to die t' eat us, too.[4]

At the opening of the story, Haskins had returned from Kansas to Cedar County, a location perhaps in Iowa; and since land was too high for him to buy, he rented a farm from a speculator, Jim Butler. Still his family knew no luxury, for Garland says:

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[2]Taylor, op. cit., p. 161.

[3]Hamlin Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 133.

[4]Ibid., p. 134.

> Haskins worked like a fiend, and his wife, like the heroic woman that she was, bore also uncomplainingly the most terrible burdens. They rose early and toiled without intermission till the darkness fell on the plain, then tumbled into bed, every bone and muscle aching with fatigue, to rise with the sun next morning to the same round of the same ferocity of labor.[5]

And the grinding effect of work is further shown when Garland tells that at the end of day Haskins "sank into his bed with a deep groan of relief, too tired to change his grimy, dripping clothing . . ."[6] After Haskins had spent three years improving his rented land and had been told by Butler that the sale price had doubled, he sank for a moment into despair and thought only of the merciless toil he had just gone through. Says Garland:

> He was walking again in the rain and the mud behind his plough; he felt the dust and dirt of the threshing. The ferocious husking-time, with its cutting wind and biting, clinging snows, lay hard upon him.[7]

Finally, though, he forgot himself as he thought of his family, and in a fit of anger provoked by the injustice of his situation, he called Butler "a black-hearted houn'"[8] and demanded that he deed him the land, take a mortgage on it, and leave. Butler's murder by Haskins was only narrowly averted. The economic situation of this story is, of course, straight from Progress and Poverty, and Garland merely works from an individual case of oppression to the indictment of a

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[5] Ibid., p. 138.

[6] Ibid., p. 140.

[7] Ibid., p. 143.

[8] Ibid., p. 144.

system. While he is indicting a system, though, he, to be sure, writes in a manner that makes us see all the stern causes for reform.

In "Up the Coolly" Garland again presents a situation in which economic ills wear clothes and dispositions threadbare. Howard McLane, older of two brothers, had become successful in New York in theatrical business and had neglected Grant and his mother, who had become the victims of a mortgage on their Wisconsin farm and had been forced to move up the coolly to rent. The moment that Howard arrived home for his first visit in ten years, he observed the farm scene in all its sordidness, dullness, triviality, and endless drudgery, and the joy of home-coming left him. As he first met his brother, he sensed something of the hard, bitter feeling that came into his heart, "as he [Grant] stood there, ragged, ankle-deep in muck, his sleeves rolled up, a shapeless straw hat on his head."[9] Soon they went into the kitchen for supper, but there again "every detail . . . the heat, the flies buzzing aloft, the poor furniture, the dress of the people -- all smote him like the lash of a wire whip."[10] Soon Grant's feelings were expressed in his own words as he told of the hardships the family had endured without help. Howard asked why they had sold the old farm, and in bitterness Grant answered:

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[9] Ibid., p. 52.

[10] Ibid., p. 54.

> We had something on it that didn't leave anything to sell. You probably don't remember anything about it, but there was a mortgage on it that eat us up in just four years by the almanac. 'Most killed mother to leave it. We wrote to you for money, but I don't suppose you remember that.[11]

Howard admitted his negligence and sought his brother's forgiveness, but bitterness born of hardship had already eaten too far into Grant's heart.

A surprise party of welcome was given for Howard one evening by the neighbors, and in the conversation between Grant and one of the guests, one can easily detect the desperateness of the farmers: "'Plenty o' land to rent,' suggested some one."[12] And Grant replied:

> Yes, in terms that skin a man alive. More than that, farmin' ain't so free a life as it used to be. . . . I'd like to know what a man's life is worth who lives as we do? How much higher is it than the lives the niggers used to live?[13]

The destructive effects of toil and poverty could be seen in the lives of the women, too, for Laura, Grant's wife, had begun to lose spirit:

> "I hate farm-life," she went on with a bitter inflection. "It's nothing but fret, fret, and work the whole time, never going any place, never seeing anybody but a lot of neighbors just as big fools as you are. I spend my time fighting flies and washing dishes and churning. I'm sick of it all."[14]

There were few newspapers and no books or music in the

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[11] Ibid., p. 56.

[12] Ibid., p. 75.

[13] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[14] Ibid., p. 79.

McLane home to brighten the hours, and consequently Howard grew more hopeless the longer he stayed. With sympathy and humility in his heart, he sought Grant's forgiveness and offered to purchase the old home place, but it was too late. Poverty and bitterness had imprisoned Grant; he lacked spirit to begin anew, for he said:

> "I mean life ain't worth very much to me. I'm too old to take a new start. I'm a dead failure. I've come to the conclusion that life's a failure for ninety-nine per cent of us. You can't help me now. It's too late."[15]

And in a melodramatic conclusion contrasting two ways of life, Garland says:

> The two men stood there face to face, hands clasped, the one fair-skinned, full-lipped, handsome in his neat suit; the other tragic, sombre in his softened mood, his large, long, rugged Scotch face bronzed with sun and scarred with wrinkles that had histories, like sabre-cuts on a veteran, the record of his battles.[16]

"Up the Coolly" is another attempt, of course, to uphold the economic theory of George, to show the disaster of the high rent and low wages that are in a land system improperly managed, but more important still, it "is the best example of unflinching realism produced in its decade."[17]

In "Lucretia Burns," "A Day's Pleasure," "Mrs. Ripley's Trip," "A Branch Road," "Among the Corn Rows," and "Before

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[15] Ibid., p. 87. [16] Ibid.

[17] B. C. Williams, Our Short Story Writers, p. 191.

the Low Green Door," Garland has not forgotten George's economics, but his aim apparently is not so much to directly present an economic problem as it is to illustrate the harsh effects of poverty and toil on the lives of people, notably women.

"Lucretia Burns" is the story of a farm woman, cowed, broken, and cast to despair by the harshness of Sim Burns, her husband, and the ugly toil of her daily routine. Through years of work, Sim already had paid for his farm,but "it was this suffering and toiling . . . that made him sour and irritable."[18] Land speculators had more than their share of the wealth, corn and wheat were getting cheaper, and taxes were going up. In the midst of discouragement and weariness from endless work, therefore, Sim told middle-aged, distorted Lucretia one evening: "I'll be damned if I milk a cow to-night. I don't see why you play out jest the nights I need ye most."[19] Lucretia was not prepared for these hot-tempered words. Her face told her story:

> It was a pitifully worn, almost tragic face -- long, thin, sallow, hollow-eyed. The mouth had long since lost the power to shape itself into a kiss, and had a droop at the corners which seemed to announce a breaking-down at any moment into a despairing wail.[20]

Lucretia sobbed for a long time and vaguely considered

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[18]Hamlin Garland, Other Main Travelled Roads, p. 99.

[19]Ibid., p. 84.

[20]Ibid., p. 82.

suicide, but then she thought of her children and gained some courage. She stopped associating with Sim, though, until Lily, the community schoolteacher, finally helped them make peace.

While the two were angry, Garland gives his readers keen insight into their monotonous lives. Of Sim he says:

> He chewed tobacco and toiled on from year to year without any very clearly defined idea of the future. His life was mainly regulated from without.
>
> He was tall, dark, and strong in a flat-chested, slouching sort of way, and had grown neglectful of even decency in his dress. He wore the American farmer's customary outfit of rough brown pants, hickory shirt, and greasy wool hat. It differed from his neighbors' mainly in being a little dirtier and more ragged.[21]

Lucretia's sister-in-law talked with Sim about the misunderstanding, and when he told her he did not know why his wife was angry, she relayed the news to Lucretia, whose blunt answer was:

> "He don't know why! Well, then, you just tell him what I say. I've lived in hell long enough. I'm done. I've slaved here day in and day out f'r twelve years without pay, -- not even a decent word. I've worked like no nigger ever worked 'r could work and live. I've given him all I had, 'r ever expect to have. I'm wore out. My strength is gone, my patience is gone. I'm done with it, -- that's part of what's the matter."[22]

One evening later Douglas Radbourn, a young scholar from a near-by village, was driving Lily to her school when he became the mouthpiece of Garland the reformer:

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[21] Ibid., p. 88.

[22] Ibid., p. 96.

> "Yes, it's a matter of statistics," went on Radbourn, pitilessly, "that the wives of the American farmers fill our insane asylums. See what a life they lead, most of them; no music, no books. Seventeen hours a day in a couple of small rooms -- dens. Now there is Sim Burns! What a travesty of a home! Yet there are a dozen just as bad in sight. He works like a fiend -- so does his wife -- and what is their reward? Simply a hole to hibernate in and to sleep and eat in in summer. A dreary present and a well-nigh hopeless future. No, they have a future, if they knew it, and we must tell them."[23]

Radbourn then outlined his plan to Lily in which he recommended the abolition of all indirect taxes, the destruction of all speculative holdings of the earth, and the appropriation of all ground rents to the use of the state.[24] Lily was attentive to Radbourn, and hence she, too, began to see the farmers' problems. Later when little Sadie Burns told Lily that her mother and father had had "an awful row," she went with understanding to the Burns' home, caused Sim to admit that he was partly to blame for the trouble, and explained Sim's situation to Lucretia when she said:

> "You must remember that such toil brutalizes a man; it makes him callous, selfish, unfeeling, necessarily. A fine nature must either adapt itself to its hardsurroundings or die. Men who toil terribly in filthy garments day after day and year after year cannot easily keep gentle; the frost and grime, the heat and cold, will soon or late enter into their souls. The case is not all in favor of the suffering wives and against the brutal husbands. If the farmer's wife is dulled and crazed by her routine, the farmer himself is degraded and brutalized."[25]

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[23] Ibid., p. 102.

[24] Ibid., pp. 104-105.

[25] Ibid., pp. 112-113.

As the story was concluded, Lucretia, Garland says, became "a wife and mother again,"[26] but in what spirit he is unable to say, for the life of the region had already cut its lines on the souls of both her and her husband. And Garland in truthfully picturing these marred souls no doubt contributed to the solving of a serious problem.

"A Day's Pleasure" gains the reader's sympathy chiefly for the farmer's wife. Delia Markham, who had not been away from the ceaseless toil of home for six months, trembled with fatigue as she worked far into the night holding sacks for her husband, Sam, to sack wheat in order that she might ride with him to a lone little prairie town the next morning. She was almost too tired to begin the trip when the time came, but "then the thought of the long, long day, and the sickening sameness of her life, swept over her again, and she rose and prepared the baby for the journey."[27]

In town she had about three dollars to buy coffee, thread, and some flannel to make underclothes for her children. Bitterly she reasoned that she herself did not need a new dress, for she never went anywhere. After sitting in the grocery store while she ate the lunch which she had brought with her, "she walked up and down the street, desolately homeless. She did not know what to do with herself."[28]

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[26] Ibid., p. 115.

[27] Hamlin Garland, Main Travelled Roads, p. 164.

[28] Ibid., p. 166.

She heard her husband laugh and saw him having a good time with some men over by the blacksmith shop, but she had been forgotten. Finally a clergyman, who was visiting Lawyer Hall, saw Delia wander aimlessly down the street, and he described her plight to the Halls when he said:

> "That woman came to town to-day to get a change, to have a little play-spell, and she's wandering around like a starved and weary cat. I wonder if there is a woman in this town with sympathy enough and courage enough to go out and help that woman? The saloon-keepers, the politicians, and the grocers make it pleasant for the man -- so pleasant that he forgets his wife. But the wife is left without a word."[29]

Thereupon Mrs. Hall was moved to invite Delia into her cozy parlor, have her Swedish maid take care of the baby, and brighten her afternoon by playing the piano and talking with her about books and pictures, subjects scarcely related to farm life.

When Sam finally called for his wife that afternoon, Delia left with gratitude in her heart and a temporarily brighter spirit. The incident is simple, but Garland gives such a graphic description of Delia's social life that the reader cannot fail to hear the echoes of a barren, monotonous existence.

In "Mrs. Ripley's Trip," Garland introduces Jane and Ethan Ripley, two of the most kindly and cheerful characters that are met in any of his stories. They are past middle age

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[29] Ibid., p. 168.

and have been tempered by experience, but still to see the imprint of struggle and poverty on their natures moves one to sympathy.

As the story opens, Garland takes us to "a home where poverty was a never-absent guest,"[30] and there we see the old lady who "looked pathetically little, weazened, and hopeless in her ill-fitting garments (whose original color had long since vanished), intent . . . on the stocking in her knotted, stiffened fingers."[31] Jane Ripley broke the news to her husband that she was going back to New York for a visit and that he would have to do his own cooking for awhile. Ethan did not oppose her going, but "of course in his case, as in all others, the money consideration was uppermost."[32] Jane maintained, though, that she was going and replied:

> "I'm sixty years old . . . an' I've never had a day to myself, not even Fourth of July. If I've went-a-vistin' 'r to a picnic, I've had to come home an' milk 'n' get supper for you men folks. I ain't been away t' stay overnight for thirteen years in this house, 'n' it was just so in Davis County for ten more. For twenty-three years, Ethan Ripley, I've stuck right to the stove an' churn without a day or a night off."[33]

Ethan remained puzzled as to how Jane would get money, and the problem stayed with him as he went about his work. That he was a poor man can be seen through Garland's

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[30] Ibid., p. 171.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 172.

description of him as he worked in the field. Says Garland:

> The old man was husking all alone in the field, his spare form rigged out in two or three ragged coats, his hands inserted in a pair of gloves minus nearly all the fingers, his thumbs done up in "stalls," and his feet thrust into huge coarse boots. The "down ears" wet and chapped his hands, already worn to the quick.[34]

Some kindness remained with him, though, for Garland observes that

> Life had laid hard lines on his brown skin, but it had not entirely soured a naturally kind and simple nature. It had made him penurious and dull and iron-muscled; had stifled all the slender flowers of his nature; yet there was warm soil somewhere hid in his heart.[35]

Ripley finally decided to sell two shoats, part of his winter meat supply, and buy his wife a ticket to New York. A little comedy and even some pathos come into the story when he presented the ticket: Jane had in an old yarn mitten seventy-five dollars and thirty cents which she had saved -- a dime at a time -- during her long years on the farm. She could not make use of her independence now, though, for her ticket was already bought. Straightway she gave Ethan certain domestic regulations to follow, and she left for New York. When she returned almost two months later, she was so happy to see her husband and Tewksbury, her young grandson, that one cannot fail to recognize that her heart, too, had a great capacity for love. As she turned again

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[34] Ibid., p. 176.

[35] Ibid., p. 177.

toward her work, the tone of Garland's words lets the reader see that still one bit of diversion was not enough to make even a great soul happy in a monotonous existence. He says:

> Her trip was a fact now; no chance could rob her of it. She had looked forward twenty-three years toward it, and now she could look back at it accomplished. She took up her burden again, never more thinking to lay it down.[36]

In "A Branch Road," Garland's heroine, Agnes, is much younger than Jane Ripley, and Agnes, unlike Jane, chooses the wrong partner in marriage. Nevertheless, the dreariness of farm life is again a considerable factor in warping a woman's life. Young Will Hannan left Agnes for a fancied slight, and when he returned to his prairie home land seven years later, he found Agnes unhappily married to his rival, Ed Kinney, who ill-treated her. Agnes, Ed, and Ed's parents were living in Will's boyhood home, a place that the elder Kinney had taken from Widow Hannan by foreclosing a mortgage. Ed himself, who was "clothed in greasy overalls and a hickory shirt,"[37] had been scarred by hard work, but the effects on Agnes, of course, were more important to Will, who had returned to offer his apology. Agnes was

> worn and wasted incredibly. The blue of her eyes seemed dimmed and faded by weeping, and the old-time scarlet of her lips had been washed away. The sinews of her neck showed painfully when she turned her head, and her trembling hands were worn, discolored, and lumpy at the joints.[38]

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[36] Ibid., p. 183.

[37] Ibid., p. 34.

[38] Ibid., p. 32.

The impoverished surroundings of the Kinney home, too, probably added dismal color to Agnes' outlook. In describing the dining room, for instance, Garland says, "The room was small and very hot; the table was warped so badly that the dishes had a tendency to slide to the centre; the walls were bare plaster, grayed with time; the food was poor and scant, and the flies absolutely swarmed upon everything, like bees."[39] Agnes, in fact, was so miserable in her existence that she "lost the threads of right and wrong,"[40] took her baby, and escaped with Will, who promised her some of the dainties and luxuries to which every gentlewoman is entitled.

In this story, Garland, in addition to describing the effect of a monotonous farm life on a woman, gives also a vivid picture of some aspects -- both bright and somber -- of the harvest season. At the beginning he takes us to a harvest scene on the farm of Agnes' father and says of it:

> This scene, one of the jolliest and most sociable of the Western farm, had a charm quite aside from human companionship. The beautiful yellow straw entering the cylinder; the clear yellow-brown wheat pulsing out at the side; the broken straw, chaff, and dust puffing out on the great stacker; the cheery whistling and calling of the driver; the keen, crisp air, and the bright sun somehow weirdly suggestive of the passage of time.[41]

He reminds us, too, of the appetites of harvesters and of the great trial that threshing time was to the housewife,

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[39] Ibid., p. 35.

[40] Ibid., p. 43.

[41] Ibid., p. 8.

for he says of Mrs. Dingman and her daughter, Agnes:

> To have a dozen men with the appetites of dragons to cook for, in addition to their other everyday duties, was no small task for a couple of women. Preparations usually began the night before with a raid on a hen-roost, for "biled chickun" formed the "pièce de resistance" of the dinner. The table, enlarged by boards, filled the sitting room. Extra seats were made out of planks placed on chairs, and dishes were borrowed from neighbors, who came for such aid in their turn.[42]

And realistically speaking of the hungry harvesters when they came to eat, he says:

> Potatoes were seized, cut in halves, sopped in gravy, and taken "one, two"! Corn cakes went into great jaws like coal into a steam-engine. Knives in the right hand cut meat and scooped gravy up. Great, muscular, grimy, but wholesome fellows they were, feeding like ancient Norse, and capable of working like demons.[43]

But when the end of the day came, even these strong, good-spirited men were partly conquered, Garland plainly states:

> As night drew on the men worked with a steadier, more mechanical action. No one spoke now. Each man was intent on his work. No one had any strength or breath to waste. The driver . . . changed his weight on weary feet and whistled and sang at the tired horses. The feeder, his face gray with dust, rolled the grain into the cylinder. . . .[44]

"Among the Corn Rows," another realistic portrayal of Midwestern womanhood, introduces the reader to Julia Peterson, a daughter of Norwegian farm folk, and describes her life of bitter toil. Bob Rodemaker, a former resident of the Wisconsin community where the Petersons lived, had

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[42] Ibid., p. 10.

[43] Ibid., p. 11.

[44] Ibid., p. 16.

established a claim on the Dakota prairie. He had left Waupac County, for, he said:

> "Land that was good was so blamed high you couldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole from a balloon. Rent was high, if you wanted t' rent, an' so a feller like me had t' get out. . . ."[45]

Bob, like Henry George, realized that in a newly settled region "the cussed . . . aristocracy hadn't got a holt on the people,"[46] and hence he had gone to Dakota with an optimistic outlook. It was true that he saw himself "'goin' around all summer wearin' the same shirt without washin', an' wipin' on the same towel four straight weeks, . . . an' eatin' musty gingersnaps, mouldy bacon, an' canned Boston beans . . . ,'"[47] but still he was young, cheery, confident and "full of plans for the future."[48] He felt the need for companionship, though, and it was to satisfy that need that he returned to Wisconsin and thence to the farm of the Petersons'. He found Julia working among the corn rows, while "her heart was full of bitterness, her face flushed with heat, and her muscles aching with fatigue."[49] Further insight into Julia's life is given when Garland says:

> Across the field, in another patch of corn, she could see her father -- a big, gruff-voiced, wide-bearded Norwegian -- at work also with a plough. The corn must be ploughed, and so she toiled on, the tears dropping from the shadow of the ugly sun-bonnet she wore. Her shoes, coarse

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[45] Ibid., p. 92. [46] Ibid. [47] Ibid., p. 93.

[48] Ibid., pp. 90-91. [49] Ibid., p. 97.

> and square-toed, chafed her feet; her hands, large and strong, were browned, or, more properly, "burnt," on the backs by the sun.[50]

Bob accompanied Julia home for lunch, and there as the reader meets Mrs. Peterson, he sees that she, too, had been stamped with the barrenness of poverty and drudgery; she looked as shapeless as a sack of wool and was wearing a drab-colored dress she had worn for years. Later Julia, in referring to her own life and the disposition of her father, said:

> "I c'd stand the churnin' and housework, but when it comes t' workin' outdoors in the dirt an' hot sun, gettin' all sunburned and chapped up, it's another thing. An' then it seems as if he gets stingier 'n' stingier every year. I ain't had a new dress in ----- I d'-know-how-long. . . ."[51]

Bob persuaded Julia to escape with him that night to the parson's house, be married, and go with him back to Dakota. Even before night came Julia began to dream of a "free life in a far-off, wonderful country."[52] Hence Garland ends this story with brighter prospects than those found in most of his stories, but what assurance he had that the same conditions of labor and economy would not in time overtake Bob and Julia in Dakota we cannot say.

Any effect of cheer that Garland gives through the tones of his realism in "Among the Corn Rows," though, is counterbalanced by the hopelessness that pervades "Below the Low Green Door." Matilda Bent in the latter story had

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[50] Ibid., p. 98.

[51] Ibid., p. 104.

[52] Ibid., p. 109.

toiled ceaselessly on a Midwestern farm for thirty years and lived in the meantime with a husband whom she did not respect. Hence Matilda's problems, as those of Agnes in "A Branch Road," were not entirely rooted in toil, but labor doubtlessly added weight to her grief.

At the beginning of the story a gruff old country physician had just discovered that Matilda had cancer and could not live long. Martha Ridings, a close friend, came to stay with Matilda, and as she sat by the bedside, Garland gives an idea of the life that was about to end by saying:

> Tears fell from Martha's eyes upon the cold and nerveless hands of her friend -- poor, faithful hands hacked and knotted and worn by thirty years of ceaseless daily toil. They lay there motionless upon the coverlet, pathetic protest for all the world to see.[53]

Matilda's life, in fact, had been so tiring that she told Martha she could see no bright future for her children. "They'll haf to grow old jest as I have -- git bent and gray, an' die,"[54] she said. Matilda was not enthusiastic either about a life in another world, for, as she said: "I don't know nawthin' about over there; I'm talkin' about here. I ain't had no chance here, Marthy."[55]

Within a few hours Matilda died, and the most soothing words that Garland finds to describe her passing do not let

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[53]Hamlin Garland, Other Main Travelled Roads, p. 295.

[54]Ibid., p. 297.

[55]Ibid., p. 296.

one forget her imprisonment by toil and poverty. He says: "The poor, tortured, restless brain slowly stopped its grinding whirl, and the thin limbs, heavy with years of hopeless toil, straightened out in an endless sleep."[56]

In all of the stories discussed thus far, Garland seems to have kept in mind the idea that economic conditions were at the root of unsatisfactory circumstances. As Taylor has said, in fact, the theme of his stories on economy is "that because of economic injustice rural life is now barren and intolerably painful; that such suffering must be relieved and such barrenness enriched; and that these gains may be had by the one thoroughgoing act of destroying all monopolistic holdings in land. . . ."[57]

But stories springing directly from poverty and all the weariness that may accompany it are not the only ones in which Garland uses his realism to show the aspects of Midwestern farm life, for in two of his tales, at least, he stresses religious outlooks, and in two others he primarily describes social activities. These four stories, "Elder Pill, Preacher," "A Day of Grace," "The Sociable at Dudley's," and "Saturday Night on the Farm," are nevertheless indirectly based on economics, as is much of the religion and society of the whole world.

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[56] *Ibid.*, p. 301.

[57] Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

"Elder Pill, Preacher" is a graphically treated account of a revivalist capable of a deeper understanding than he had when he told his rural congregation of a great judgment angel that would seize poor, damned, struggling souls by their necks and hold them over the flaming forge of hell until their bones melted like wax. William Bacon, an individualist, arose in the midst of Pill's sermon and said, "'I ain't bitin' that kind of a hook,'"[58] and Radbourn, a seminary student, added in a voice of reproach, "' . . . all that he preaches in the name of Him who came bringing peace and good-will to men.'"[59] Pill left the community after church that night, began to think, had a conversation about religion with Radbourn, and concluded finally that instead of hell fire such qualities as honesty and justice were the heart of religion.

When he returned to the community to pay his debts and tell the congregation of his change of thought, he found that Elder Wheat had taken his pulpit and was continuing before an interested congregation with the same lurid descriptions of torment that he himself had once believed in. In other words, Garland tells his readers that the starved minds of the rural folk found comfort in a faith that the hereafter would bring just rewards and that, therefore, the preaching of the doctrine of retribution was the demand of

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[58]Hamlin Garland, Other Main Travelled Roads, p. 47.

[59]Ibid.

the times.

Too, he reminds us that the entertainment on the lonely prairie was insufficient and that the church service in a limited way supplied social intercourse for its attendants. After Elder Pill's last sermon at the schoolhouse, for instance, Garland says:

> The news grotesquely exaggerated flew about the next day, and at night, though it was very cold and windy, the house was jammed to suffocation. . . . The protracted meeting was the only recreation for many of them. The gossip before and after service was a delight not to be lost, and this last sensation was dramatic enough to bring out old men and women who had not dared to go to church in winter for ten years.[60]

And describing the farm people's conversation in a more specific way, he says:

> The older men sat immediately between the youths and boys, talking in hoarse whispers across the aisles about the state of the crops and the county ticket, while the women in much the same way conversed about the children and raising onions and strawberries. It was their main recreation, this Sunday meeting.[61]

In "A Day of Grace," Garland takes us to a revival that instead of attracting all the community had attracted chiefly a low class of rural people. There was, of course, as he says, a certain recognizably crude class the world over that was at one time subject to the low forms of religious excitement prevailing at the meeting he described, but still

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[60] Ibid., p. 50.

[61] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

he manifests a keen sympathy for those who are so lacking in strength and security that they fall under the persuasive powers of furious, ranting, foaming-at-the-mouth preachers. The dark background of the story is somewhat brightened, though, as Ben Griswold, a farm hand who had gone to the meeting in the spirit of a circus enthusiast, rescued his sweetheart from the influence of an elder who had moved down the aisle to "save" people and help them see the "light." Describing Grace's predicament, Garland says:

> The elder's hand hovered over her head, on her face a deadly pallor had settled, her eyes were cast down, she breathed painfully and trembled from head to foot. She was about to fall, when Ben set his eyes upon her.[62]

And as the two young people left the meeting, Garland reminds us that "at the mourners' bench were six victims in all stages of induced catalepsy,"[63] and throughout the congregation, exhorters had caused people to fall stupefied on the ground. The realism in which the whole scene is written moves one indeed to pity.

"The Sociable at Dudley's" is woven primarily around the uncertainties of Bettie Moss and Ed Blackler's romance, but through its setting at the donation party given for Elder Wheat, Garland shows us the merriment that farm folk obtained from simple pleasures. While supper was served in the schoolhouse across the road from the Dudley home, Garland says that

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[62] Ibid., p. 76.

[63] Ibid., p. 77.

"the oysters steamed; the heels of the boys' boots thumped in wild delight; the women bustled about; the girls giggled, and the men roared with laughter."[64] After the meal, the young people went to Dudley's, where they "bowed and balanced and swung"[65] in rhythm to "Weevily Wheat," a charming old-fashioned dance that dated back to dances on the green in England or Norway. Vocal music was used for the dance, since it would have been wicked to have fiddle music.[66] Meanwhile, "the men of elderly blood" stayed in the schoolhouse "to talk on the Grange and the uselessness of the middlemen."[67] The high excitement of the evening was the fight between Bill Yohe, a stranger who had come to the neighborhood with the wave of harvest help from the South, and Ed Blackler over the love of Bettie. Both Bill and his brother, Joe, were forced away from the scene by muscular Lime Gilman, and the sociable ended in triumph as Bettie realized how much Ed cared for her. And no part of the story from John Jennings' generous donation to the Wheats to the sleigh rides of the young people is, perhaps, untrue to Midwestern farm life.

In "Saturday Night on the Farm," Garland again, as in "A Day of Grace," deals with a low class of people; in this story, however, he is concerned chiefly with social instead of religious life. Traditionally underpaid farm hands have

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[64] Hamlin Garland, Prairie Folks, p. 242.

[65] Ibid., p. 245.

[66] Ibid., pp. 244-245.

[67] Ibid., p. 244.

often escaped from the country on Saturday nights to low kinds of amusement, and in this account a group of workers headed by Al Crandall invited Lime, Farmer Graham's hand, and the two young Graham boys, John and Frank, to go with them to the county town to see Wilkie Collins' play New Magdalene. Johnny Graham especially was fascinated by the adventure, for Garland says "to go to town was an event, but to go with the men at night, and to a show, was something to remember a lifetime."[68] Johnny and Frank, too, were appreciative of the gracious blonde heroine in the play and also of "the wonderful old lady in the cap and spectacles,"[69] but the farm hands, of course, were disappointed because they saw a serious drama instead of a comedy or farce. Their desire for excitement was yet to be fulfilled, and hence on their way home they stopped at a brewery where a group of hands headed by Steve Nagle was engaged in an evening of crude jokes and strong drinks. Finally the purpose of the parties was achieved when a fight between Steve and Lime was precipitated. Lime, who had refrained from drinking and who naturally was the hero of Johnny and Frank, won the bout, and Garland expresses the worth of the whole evening in his final paragraph in which he describes Johnny's homeward trip that night. He says:

> As for John, he lay with his head in Lime's lap, looking up at the glory of the starlit night, and with a confused mingling of the play, of the voice

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[68] Ibid., p. 147.

[69] Ibid., p. 149.

> of the lovely woman, of the shouts and blows at the brewery in his mind, and with the murmur of the river and the roll and rumble of the wagon blending in his ears, he fell into a sleep which the rhythmic beat of the horses' hoofs did not interrupt.[70]

Such entertainment was the best that most of the low class of drifting, poorly paid hands desired, and the author tells us this fact in the undertones of the whole story.

Garland, to be sure, wrote other realistic stories of Midwestern farm life, but they, though interesting, probably do not contain any interpretations different from those available in the stories we have just discussed.[71] Judging from the twelve stories mentioned in this writing, therefore,

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[70] Ibid., p. 166.

[71] For our discussion of Garland's short stories about Midwestern farm life, we have chosen only those stories which seem to be the author's most graphic and aesthetic expressions of a people and their problems. The stories from his four volumes, Main Travelled Roads, Prairie Folks, Wayside Courtships, and Other Main Travelled Roads, that we have omitted from consideration may be, we believe, divided into three groups. First are those which, though realistically descriptive of farm characters and situations, do not, to us, as clearly represent the Midwest as the ones we have chosen for our limited discussion. In this group we place "William Bacon's Hired Man," "Uncle Ethan's Speculation," "Old Daddy Deering," "A Preacher's Love Story," "The Owner of the Mill Farm," "The Creamery Man," and "A Division in the Coolly." Second are those in which Garland used realism in some interesting delineation of experiences away from the heart of the farming country. Included in this group are "The Return of a Private," "A Good Fellow's Wife," "Village Cronies," "Drifting Crane," "A Meeting in the Foothills," "The Prisoned Soul," "A Sheltered One," "An Alien in the Pines," "A Stop-over at Tyre," and "A Fair Exile." And the third group, which contains only "God's Ravens," "The Passing Stranger," and "Upon Impulse," is concerned with emotional problems far removed from the farm and treated in an idyllic and fanciful manner.

we may believe that Garland for the most part interpreted prairie life in all its unrelieved ugliness. As Webb has imagined, his short stories say to the reader:

> "I, Hamlin Garland, do not propose to let you forget the drudgery and the misery of my people of the prairie farms. You may have escaped to the city, as most of you who read this have, but I will carry you back to the land from whence you came. . . . As you read these stories I want to bring a lump to your throat and an unwilling tear to your eye, and I will only relieve the strain of reality and desolation by revealing occasionally a glimpse of love's fleeting wing across the toiler's murky hell of endless, cheerless journeying."[72]

Yes, while writing these stories, Garland believed that the heat, dirt, drudgery, and poverty of farm life should be portrayed so that man would be inspired to improve conditions for which he himself was responsible; at the same time, however, he discovered from the criticism of Howells and others that to do his best writing he must balance Significance and Beauty.[73] Hence, it is noteworthy that many times in the midst of his writing of betrayers of mankind who had "turned tiger or dog or jackal"[74] and snatched what was precious for themselves while their brothers starved, he turns his attention to nature and all of its prodigal beauty. After toil-worn Lucretia Burns, for instance, had become angry

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[72]W. P. Webb, The Great Plains, pp. 471-472.

[73]Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 418.

[74]Carl Van Doren, "Contemporary American Novelists," The Nation, CXIII (November 23, 1921), 596.

with her husband, she went out into her garden, and there, observes Garland:

> The wind sang in her ears; the great clouds, beautiful as heavenly ships, floated far above in the vast, dazzling deeps of blue sky; the birds rustled and chirped around her; leaping insects buzzed and clattered in the grass and in the vines and bushes. The goodness and glory of God was in the very air, the bitterness and oppression of man in every line of her face.[75]

One critic, nevertheless, has failed to see in Garland's stories anything but monotonous descriptions of the same uninviting interiors, the same birds and insects, and the same corn rows and wheat fields;[76] another has failed to see that his writing is interesting, that it has a purpose of art, and that it permits the reader to see into the hearts of the prairie folk.[77] Carl Van Doren probably comes nearer to a sound evaluation of the author's stories than either of these critics when he says:

> Insoluble as are the dilemmas he propounded and tense and unrelieved as his accusations were, he stood in his methods nearer, say, to the humane Millet than to the angry Zola. There is a clear, high splendor about his landscapes; youth and love on his desolate plains, as well as elsewhere, can find glory in the most difficult existence; he might strip particular lives relentlessly bare, but he no less relentlessly clung to the conviction that human life

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[75] Hamlin Garland, Other Main Travelled Roads, p. 95.

[76] The Nation, LIII (August 13, 1891), 125.

[77] The Nation, LVI (June 1, 1893), 408.

> has an inalienable dignity which is deeper than any glamor goes.[78]

Garland's stories indeed are evidence that he believed in writing of things as they were. With what other belief can a true artist begin?

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[78]Van Doren, "Contemporary American Novelists," The Nation, CXIII (November 23, 1921), 596-597.

CHAPTER IV

GARLAND AND HIS NOVELS

Garland's three earliest novels, Jason Edwards, A Member of the Third House, and A Spoil of Office, were published in 1892 and written while the author was vitally interested in social reform. Jason Edwards, first completed in 1888 as Under the Wheel, is the sketchy result of a play transformed into a novel, and though it presents a dire need for Henry George's single land tax, it is not representative of the author's realism at its best. A Member of the Third House, also transformed from a drama, deals merely with the improbable success of a righteous state legislator in bringing judgment against a "political trickster" who worked in behalf of a railroad monopoly. It is concerned, to be sure, with a greedy interest that helped sap the strength of the Midwestern farmer, but both it and Jason Edwards are too theatrical -- at times too artificial -- to be genuine in their portrayal of the average farmer's problems and hence to be especially pertinent to our discussion. The dramas from which they were taken were in the first place conceived only to please James and Katharine Hearn, struggling Bostonian actors and lovers of drama, and hence their foundation

alone is not as true to the soil as A Spoil of Office, which was written later with a slightly different philosophy and purpose.

A Spoil of Office, Garland's first published attempt to translate his economic materials directly into a full-length novel, deals with the "rebellion of the agrarian and debtor West against the dominance of the commercial and creditor East."[1] This rebellion is one that lasted chiefly during the decades of the seventies and eighties and was the result of a bitter discontent which gripped the West as the prices of farm products declined, as discriminating railroads corrupted Western politics, as numerous farm mortgages were foreclosed, and as the value of the dollar constantly appreciated. A mild expression of discontent developed in the seventies and eighties in the social and co-operative Grange, and more aggressive expressions appeared in the late eighties and early nineties in the Farmers' Alliance and in the Populist party, which included in its platform the demands of the farmers.

As a reformer -- a believer in Henry George's thesis concerning the abolition of monopoly -- and as a son of the middle border, Garland naturally was interested in the agrarian revolt. When he returned to Boston in the fall of 1889 from a trip among the despondent farmers of Iowa and Dakota,

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[1]Taylor, op. cit., p. 167.

he welcomed, therefore, the opportunity that B. O. Flower, editor of the Arena, extended him to become a part of the farmers' movement. On Flower's commission he went in 1891 to Washington to write an article on the Farmers' Alliance bloc in Congress, and from Washington he toured the South and West to observe the agrarian revolt at first hand. On his tour, he met and talked with Western farmers and Populist leaders and for six weeks gave a series of talks for the State Central Committee of the Populist party in Iowa.

At this time Garland had already written part of a novel dealing with the Grange, and his work for the Arena was to complete this manuscript and bring it down to date as a novel of the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist party. A Spoil of Office, of course, is the narrative he completed, and though it is not written in a realism altogether indicative of the author's first-hand experiences with the soil, it, to be sure, is "an accurate picture of the rise of the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance"[2] -- two efforts bound inevitably with the passionate uprisings of pioneer Midwestern farmers. It also is an exposure of the corruption and imbecility that often overtook legislators elected to represent agrarian interests.

The long story revolves somewhat loosely about Bradley Talcott's love for Ida Wilbur, a traveling orator who, Garland

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[2]Arthur Hobson Quinn, American Fiction -- an Historical and Critical Survey, p. 455.

himself later admitted, was "in advance of her time."[3] In the beginning Bradley, a young farm hand, heard Ida lecture at a Grange picnic on the work of the Grangers in bringing together lonely farm families of the seventies, and he heard her dream of the future as she said:

> I see a time when the farmer will not need to live in a cabin on a lonely farm. I see the farmers coming together in groups. I see them with time to read and time to visit with their fellows. . . . I see cities rising near them with schools, and churches, and concert halls, and theatres. I see a day when the farmer will no longer be a drudge and his wife a bond slave, but happy men and women will go singing to their pleasant tasks upon their fruitful farms.[4]

Garland's description of a contrasting future indeed helps the reader to see the drab present the farmers faced.

When the speeches of the day were over, dinner was served, and the author, again in graphic language, lets the reader know the day was an eventful one in the dreary life of the farmer, for he says:

> The dinner made a beautiful scene, the most idyllic in the farmer's life. The sun, now high noon, fell through the leaves in patches of quivering light upon the white table-cloth, spread out upon the planks, and it fell upon the fair hair of the girls, and upon the hard knotted fingers of men and women grown old in toil. The rattle of dishes, the harsh-keyed, unwonted laughter of the women, and the sounding invitations to dinner given and taken filled the air. The long plank seats placed together made capital tables. . . . The crude abundance of the

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[3]Hamlin Garland, Roadside Meetings, p. 186.

[4]Hamlin Garland, A Spoil of Office, p. 15.

> Iowa farm had been brought out to make it a great dinner. The boys could hardly be restrained from clutching at each new delicacy.[5]

During the feast each Granger inquired "after the health of the other grangers of the county,"[6] and afterward the conversation turned to the good accomplished by the organization. Said one of the farmers: "'Now, it seems to me that we're going on all right. . . . We're getting our goods cheap and we're cuttin' off the middleman.'"[7] "'And we're getting hold of the railways,'"[8] said a second one, while another replied: "'Yes, but it don't amount to nothin' compared to what ought to be done. We ought 'o oust them infernal blood-suckers that's in our courthouse, and we want to do it as a grange.'"[9] "'What we want,' a fourth man added, 'is a party, a ticket of our own, then we can . . .'"[10] He was interrupted by another, who said: "'No, we can't do that. It won't be right to do that. We must stand by the party that has given us our railway legislation.'"[11] And so the opinions of the Grangers differed. In fact, three or four years later when Bradley and Ida met in Iowa City where the former was attending law school, Ida admitted that the Grangers as a whole were failing, for there was the force of

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[5] Ibid., p. 17.

[6] Ibid., p. 22.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 23.

[11] Ibid.

land monopoly operating to destroy the Grange and all other similar movements. "'The big land owners,'" she said, were "'swallowing up the small farmers, . . . turning them into renters or laborers,'"[12] and causing them to enviously compare their mortgaged farms with bankers' mansions instead of working in earnest for the good of their own group. True it was, the Grange had brought the farmers of some localities -- of Bradley's home county, for instance -- together in a revolt that defeated the Republican candidates and placed the Independent party, the farmer's friends, in offices; and true it was, the Grange had helped make the farmers acquainted with their own leaders; but also noteworthy was the fact that farmers never felt the kinship necessary to make them stand consistently by each other. The Grange, therefore, succeeded in alleviating the loneliness of some of its members, but it never became appreciably helpful in the reform of politics or in the improvement of economics.

The group to succeed the Grange, the Farmers' Alliance, rose to its height in the late eighties and early nineties, but before Garland proceeds to discuss this movement, he takes us with Bradley to see the corruption amid the agrarian interests in both the Des Moines and Washington legislatures. Bradley, pure of heart and encouraged by Ida to stand

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[12] Ibid., p. 152.

unrelentingly for fair railroad rates, low tariff, the abolition of all monopolies, and the interest of the farmer, was markedly disillusioned soon after he reached Des Moines as an Independent representative from Rock County. Said one legislator to him on the day of his arrival:

> "Before you have been here a week, some of these railroads will send for you, and tell you they've heard of you as a prominent young lawyer of the State. Oh, they've heard of you, we've all heard of your canvass; and as they are in need of an attorney in your county, they'd like very much to have you take charge, etc., of any legislation that may arise there, and so on. There may not be a week's work during the year, and there may be a great deal, etc., but they will be glad to pay you six hundred dollars or eight hundred dollars, if you will take the position.
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> "Well, we'll suppose you take it. You go back to Rock, there is very little business for the railroad, but your salary comes in regularly. You say to yourself that, in case any work comes in which is dishonorable, you'll refuse to take hold of it. But that money comes in nicely. You marry on the expectations of its continuance. You get to depending upnn it. You live up to it. You don't find anything which they demand of you really dishonest, and you keep on; but really cases of the railroad against the people do come up, and your sense of justice isn't so acute as it used to be. You manage to argue yourself into doing it. If you don't do it, somebody else will, etc., and so you keep on. . . . Suddenly the war of the corporation against the people is on us, and you find you are the paid tool of the corporation, and that the people are distrustful of you, and that you are practically helpless.
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> " . . . That's a part of their plan. The proof of it will be the offer which they'll make to you in less than ten days."[13]

Bradley was merely astounded at first, but as he constantly saw that legislators -- those beings capable of bringing

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[13] Ibid., pp. 208-210.

relief to the poverty-stricken farmers -- became "more earnest in maintaining the hold of their parties upon the offices than principles of legislation,"[14] worked underhandedly for corporations, and considered it a virtue to break into the government treasury, he grew disgusted.

At the end of his term he was elected to the national Congress, but there again he met with practices too crude for democracy. He found the whole power of the representatives locked in the hands of a few, and he saw valuable hours wasted in bitter partisan wrangling. Political honors still, however, did not tempt him as he listened intently to Ida's interest in the Alliance, a new farmers' movement that was struggling forward and embodying the spirit of the Grange. He made a serious study of economic problems and social changes, but eventually there came days of discouragement. Ida declined his marriage proposal, and he, being left to turn unconsciously to his congressional post for satisfaction, hurried home only to conduct a losing campaign and to despair of aiding the farmer.

And his despair was not relieved until after he heard Ida speak in Chiquita, Kansas, in behalf of the revolting farmers who, through the Alliance, were beginning to seek equal rights by supporting the Populist party. Before her talk he watched a long procession of farmers go down the

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[14] Ibid., p. 213.

street with no bands to lead them, and he saw that

> here was an army of veterans, men grown old in the ferocious struggle against injustice and the apparent niggardliness of nature, -- a grim and terrible battle-line. . . . There was nothing of lovely girlhood or elastic, smiling boyhood; not a touch of color or grace in the whole line of march. It was sombre, silent, ominous, and resolute. . . . It was the Grange movement broadened, deepened. . . .[15]

His faith in relief for these grim veterans remained weak through a sense of futility, though, until the following evening when he heard Ida insist to a group gathered in a country schoolhouse that reform could be accomplished as long as leaders did not become spoils of office. A feeling of guilt descended on him -- a feeling which he repelled only by saying to the same group:

> "My people for generations have been tillers of the soil. They have always been poor. . . . It seems a hopeless thing to fight the old organizations, with all their power and money. It can be done, but it can be done only by union among the poor of every class. Since coming to your State, since day before yesterday, my mind has been changed. I suppose (to be perfectly candid) that my defeat for renomination had something to do with liberalizing me. . . . But no matter! Now I'm with you from this time forward."[16]

With Bradley's support of the farmers thus renewed and later strengthened through his marriage with Ida, Garland completes the story on a note of high faith in victory for the agrarian West. And even this imagined victory is not clothed in superficiality. It is merely a vision of

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[15] Ibid., p. 340.

[16] Ibid., pp. 372-373.

the success that might have resulted if the farmers in browns, grays, drabs -- farmers whose fingers "were worn to the quick with husking"[17] -- farmers with mortgaged land and bare homes -- had had additional unity and strength in their struggle against monopoly. The truth is, there were not enough workers like Ida, who, after attending a play in Washington, said to Bradley:

> "I am cursed. I can't enjoy this life any more, because I can't forget those poor souls on the lonely farm grinding out their lives in gloomy toil; I must go back and help them; I feel like a thief to be enjoying this beautiful room, and these plays and concerts, when they are shut out from them.
> " . . . I've got to go right into your district and pave the way for your re-election by the people's party. . . . "[18]

In the novel as a whole Garland maintains a true-to-life picture of the inadequate efforts of agrarian forces, lays bare a present filled with legislative corruption, and hopes for a future beset with social justice. He wrote the story hurriedly, and though he himself later realized he had lacked artistry, had included unnecessary political arguments, and had stripped bare Bradley's and Ida's personalities, he believed the work to be faithful in representing the hardships of many thousands of common folk. Most of his readers probably join him in the latter belief, for indeed his realism is valuable in describing the affairs of the Grange and the Alliance and in presenting the state of political

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[17] Ibid., p. 369.

[18] Ibid., p. 384.

corruption that was everywhere present in the legislatures of the post-Civil-War era.

Garland's remaining novelistic accounts of the Mid-western farmers are primarily works of the artist -- not of the reformer; they include Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, published in 1895, and two novelettes, A Little Norsk, 1893, and The Moccasin Ranch, 1909.

Written in Chicago and Boston in 1892 and 1893 and recognized as one of the books that helped establish its author firmly in literature,[19] Rose of Dutcher's Coolly is "a real portrait of a Wisconsin girl who, revolting against the ceaseless toil and hopeless monotony of the life of a farm, studies at the University of Wisconsin and goes to Chicago, trying to write."[20] It apparently does not have as its object the rendering of local color or the illustration of social injustice but rather the revelation of a strong character. Local color, nevertheless, adds interest to the book, and Garland himself said if it did not succeed as the "picture of an ambitious and self-reliant girl" in the early expansion of American womanhood, perhaps it would be "worth preserving, as Henry James declared it to be, on the basis of its truth to the life of the Middle Border in the late

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[19]Flanagan, op. cit., p. 265.

[20]Quinn, op. cit., p. 456.

'eighties and the early 'nineties."[21] Here again Garland is a realist, and his realism is evident in not only his descriptions of Rose's childhood on the farm and of her whole-souled and simple father, John Dutcher, but also in his portrayal of Rose's life at the university and in his description of the tumult and barrenness of Chicago.

Rose was only five when her mother died, and after the burial she turned more hungrily than ever before to the companionship of her father, an industrious and fairly prosperous farmer who was the original settler in a small coolly near the La Crosse River in western Wisconsin. She rode in the wheat fields with him, talked sagely about the crops and the weather, and asked innumerable questions about the ways of nature. Her life was lonely, but still, says Garland, she

> lived the life of the farm-girls in the seven great Middle-West States. In summer she patted away to school, clad only in a gingham dress, white, untrimmed cotton pantalets, and a straw hat that was made feminine by a band of gay ribbon. . . . She went bare-footed and bare-headed at will, and she was part of all the sports. . . . Her face was brown and red as leather, and her stout little hands were always covered with warts and good brown earth. . . .[22]

She learned early how to curry the plough horses, how to measure their oats, and how to stack their hay.

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[21]According to Garland in his preface to Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, pp. ix-x.

[22]Hamlin Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, pp. 12-13.

When a circus was announced for the nearest town, she and all of her friends thrilled at the prospect of a mighty contrast to their slow and lonely lives. Says Garland:

> From the dust and drudgery of their farms the farm boys dreamed and dreamed of the power and splendor of the pageantry. They talked of it each Sunday night as they sat up with their sweethearts. The girls planned their dresses and hats, and the lunch they were to take. Everything was arranged weeks ahead.[23]

The day of celebration finally arrived, and at the circus Rose saw great tigers, lions, and elephants; she moved past "shrieking tropical birds," "grunting, wallowing beasts," and "chattering crowds of people."[24] But one William De Lisle, a world-famous leader in ground and lofty tumbling, caught her dreamy eyes and became her ideal of manhood for years to come. This ideal, in fact, believes Garland,

> came in her romantic and perfervid period, and it did her immeasurable good. It enabled her to escape the clutch of mere brute passion which seizes so many girls at that age. It lifted her and developed her.[25]

Not long thereafter as Rose sat in the squalid little schoolhouse in Dutcher's coolly, Dr. Thatcher, a physician from Madison and a former coolly resident, came for a visit, and as Garland lets the reader follow him into the school, he gives a down-to-earth description of the Midwestern community center of education. "The curtains, of a characterless shade," he says,

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[23] Ibid., p. 36.

[24] Ibid., p. 44.

[25] Ibid., p. 52.

> the battered maps, the scarred and scratched blackboards, the patched, precarious plastering, the worn floor on which the nails and knots stood like miniature mountains, the lopsided seats, the master's hacked, unpainted pine desk, dark with dirt and polished with dirty hands, all seemed as familiar as his own face.[26]

As Dr. Thatcher sat and visited, he caught Rose looking at him, and when recess came, he listened to her timid inquiry about the difficulty of getting into the university at Madison. Straightway he was impressed, and before he left the coolly, he visited John Dutcher to tell him it was "a strong point" in his daughter's favor to want to attend the university. Dutcher, who, as well as Rose, had a quick imagination, "felt already the loss of his girl, his daily companion," and recalled that she "'used to sit and follow out lines on the maps when she wasn't knee-high to a 'tater.'"[27]

Rose soon made plans to attend the near-by preparatory school at Siding, and her father promised they would see about going to the university when the time came. "Thenceforward," Garland points out,

> the world began to open to Rose. Every sign of spring was doubly significant; the warm sun, the passing of wild fowl, the first robin, the green grass, the fall of the frost, all appealed to her with a power which transcended words. All she did during these days was preparation for her great career beyond the Ridge.[28]

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[26] Ibid., p. 56.

[27] Ibid., p. 68.

[28] Ibid., pp. 68-69.

Most of the girls Rose knew "were precocious in the direction of marriage,"[29] married early, and soon "degenerated into sallow and querulous wives of slovenly, careless husbands."[30] But life was to mean more to Rose, for, as Garland imagines, "her mind was like a piece of inconceivably intricate machinery, full of latent and complicated motion."[31] Despite her shyness, her determination led her to enter the great University of Wisconsin, and there

> a word, a touch, and it [her mind] set to work, and out of its working some fine inner heat and glow developed which changed the whole mental and physical equilibrium of her nature and she became something else, finer, more mysterious, and more alluring -- though this she did not realize.[32]

She acquired friends among both students and teachers, cheered with the leaders, studied hard, and finally experienced the sweet sadness of graduation.

When, therefore, she returned to her father and to the new home that he had built to surprise and attract her, she could not be content with the pettiness of coolly life. Talking with her former roommate, Josie, she said:

> "I want to know the men who think the great thoughts of the world. . . . I want to forget myself in work of some kind. . . . I can't stand these little petty things here in this valley; these women drive me crazy with their talk of butter and eggs and made-over bonnets."[33]

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[29] Ibid., p. 70.

[30] Ibid., p. 71.

[31] Ibid., p. 109.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., p. 145.

Indeed, there was no stimulus for Rose in the surroundings of the coolly or in the intellectual poverty of her father's new home. "John Dutcher read little, even of political newspapers, and magazines were quite outside his experimental knowledge,"[34] says Garland. And as for the life in the coolly:

> Here you could arise at five o'clock to cook breakfast and wash dishes, and get dinner, and sweep and mend, and get supper, and so on and on till you rotted, like a post stuck in the mud. Her soul would wither in such a life. . . . Everything was against her higher self.[35]

Facing this situation, therefore, and at the expense of almost breaking her father's heart, she went to Chicago, a city of mighty buildings, "gas-vomiting chimneys," squalid streets -- a strange place where she had to succeed. Through the help of friends there she became acquainted with a few gracious people, among whom was Warren Mason, a newspaper man -- drifting, cynical, disillusioned. She knew Mason first in the role of a critic who represented Garland as he advised her to burn the old verse and essays she had written under the direction of teachers who admired imitativeness rather than creativeness. Straightway she did throw away her old writing; she fell in love with Mason; and she lived in Chicago through a year of uncertainty. She never ceased, however, to remember her father "with eyes dimmed by the harsh winds, the dust, and the glowing sun," a kind man who

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[34] Ibid., p. 137.

[35] Ibid., p. 148.

spent "long, dull days wandering about the house and barn, going to bed early in order to rise with the sun, to begin the same grind of duties the day following."[36] In fact, one time she said to Isabel Herrick:

> "Do you know how my father earns the money which I spend for board? He gets up in the morning, before anyone else, to feed the cattle and work in the garden and take care of the horses. He wears old, faded clothes, and his hands are hard and crooked, and tremble when he raises his tea -- "[37]

Unwilling to spend more of her father's money and seeing no way to succeed in Chicago, Rose returned home again at the end of the year. This time, however, she was to see the coolly through new eyes, for Mason's advice, together with her year in the city, had changed her:

> Indeed her joy of the country seemed doubled by her winter in the city. . . . In the days which followed, rhymes formed in her mind upon subjects hitherto untouched by her literary perception. Things she had known all her life, familiar plants, flowers, trees, etc., seemed haloed all at once by a supernatural radiance. . . .
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> She traced out every path wherein her feet had trod as a child, and . . . the restless vigorous heart of the girl felt the splendid peace which comes when the artist finds at last the form of art which is verily his.[38]

In the meantime Warren Mason spent restless days considering marriage and the probability of interrupting Rose's career. He finally survived reason, however, mailed Rose a

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[36] Ibid., p. 262.

[37] Ibid., p. 282.

[38] Ibid., pp. 327-328.

generous proposal, and was joyfully accepted by her. Thereafter he visited the Dutcher home, and in one of the last farm scenes of the novel, the reader, facing reality, is moved to deep pity as Rose and Mason came across John Dutcher sitting "before his bees in the ripe bloom of the grass"[39] weeping for his lost daughter, one whom he educated out of his own sphere of life.

W. P. Trent in 1896 wrote of this novel of frank realism and drew a conclusion that, perhaps, is as accurate as any. He reviewed Garland's artistic portrayals, recalled the scene of Dutcher's weeping, and said:

> It is because Mr. Garland has drawn this character and conceived this scene, because in his descriptions he shows that he possesses the eye of a naturalist and the imagination of a poet, because he has a direct and vigorous style which is not without originality and charm, and, lastly, because he is so sincerely honest in the methods and purposes of his art that I regard this story of Western life as . . . good in itself.[40]

Probably, too, it may be seen that Garland, in lifting Rose above the masses, gives a better insight into the impoverished, monotonous life of the average Midwestern farm girl than he realized. Rose, in the first place, did not belong to a shallow-thinking class of women who inhabit both town and country; yet, whatever progress she made in both intellectual and professional development was inevitably colored

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[39] Ibid., p. 347.

[40] W. P. Trent, "Mr. Hamlin Garland's New Novel," The Bookman, II (February, 1896), 513.

by the meager finances and toilsome life of her father -- a Midwestern farmer. And this truth Garland's realism plainly conveys.

The two remaining works, The Moccasin Ranch and A Little Norsk, are both stories of the Dakota prairie in the decade before 1890 -- a time when many people migrated from the Old Northwest to the virgin soils of the prairie states; each depicts loneliness, a harsh climate, and a shanty-confined population.[41]

With its setting around Boomtown, Dakota, in 1883, The Moccasin Ranch is vividly descriptive of the prairie settlement in which "the pressure of loneliness and poverty"[42] coupled with Blanche Burke's admiration of men to result in her desertion of Willard Burke and her escape from the farm. Early in March, Bailey, manager of the "Moggason Ranch"[43]

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[41]A Little Norsk possesses characters developed with a little more finesse than those of The Moccasin Ranch, and it alone shows the problems of foreign immigrants' children left as orphans on the bleak, dry Dakota prairie. Since The Moccasin Ranch, however, gives a fuller picture of the settlement of the prairie farmer, it instead of A Little Norsk has been chosen for our detailed discussion.

[42]Hamlin Garland, The Moccasin Ranch, p. 109.

[43]Although Garland chose to use "moccasin" in the title of The Moccasin Ranch, he does not use the word in his text or give any explanation for his choice. He uses "moggason" four times in the narrative, two times with quotation marks and two times without, but he offers no meaning for it and shows no relation between it and "moccasin." Two of his references to "moggason" concern the name of the community store

store and post office, and Jim Rivers, a popular lawyer and land agent in Boomtown, accompanied the Burkes as they carried their lumber and household goods from Illinois into "the land of 'the straddle-bug' -- the squatters' watch dog -- three boards nailed together (like a stack of army muskets) to mark a claim."[44] Much of the Dakota land had not yet been reached by government surveyors, but still eager settlers pushed on, built their shanties, and planned to file their claims upon the coming of the surveyors, for, as Garland says, "the piles of yellow lumber and the straddle-bugs increased in number as they [the Burkes] left the surveyed land and emerged into the finer tract which lay as yet unmapped."[45] Burke grew anxious, however, as he drove along, for, getting "a sudden sense of the loneliness and rawness of this new land,"[46] he wondered how Blanche would be impressed.

The first night was spent at Bailey's store, where Blanche prepared the meal for her group and a few others who had come also in search of new homes. When she bid them come to supper, says Garland,

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of the Dakota settlement, and two others apparently concern a portion of the landscape: he speaks of "ducks quacking down in the 'Moggason,'" p. 16; "the 'Moggason Ranch' . . . store and shanty," p. 18; the swarming of "land-seekers about the Moggason Ranch," p. 24; and the ice breaking "up on the Moggason," p. 25.

[44] Hamlin Garland, The Moccasin Ranch, p. 5.

[45] Ibid., p. 6.

[46] Ibid., p. 10.

> the tired freighters gladly did as they were bid, and, scooping up some water from a near-by hollow on the sod, hurriedly washed their faces and sat down to a supper of chopped potatoes, bacon and eggs, and tea, . . . , in such joy as only the weary worker knows.[47]

Blanche on this night was in high spirits, for "the novelty of the trip, the rude shanty with its litter of shavings, and its boxes for chairs, the bundles of hay for beds, gave her something like the same pleasure a picnic might have done."[48] Others in the crowd, too, were happy, for, thinking of the wooded land they had cleared in the East, they now rejoiced as they entered a level land "which wouldn't take a man's lifetime to grub out and smooth down."[49]

The next day Burke and Bailey worked swiftly to build a little cabin on Burke's claim, and Garland, in describing the hurried construction of the home, points out that Blanche watched them while

> swiftly the roof closed over her head, and the floor crept under her feet. The stove came in, and the flour barrel, and the few household articles which they had brought followed, and as the sun was setting they all sat down to supper in her new home.[50]

A new state was in its raw beginning, and the reader cannot fail to sense the movement as Garland says:

> All ages and sexes came to take claims. Old men, alone and feeble, school teachers from the East, young girls from the towns of the older

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[47] Ibid., p. 12.

[48] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[49] Ibid., p. 13.

[50] Ibid., p. 22.

> counties, boys not yet of age -- everywhere incoming claimants were setting stakes upon the green and beautiful sod. . . .
>
> Everybody was in a holiday mood. Men whistled and sang and shouted and toiled. . . . They sank wells and ploughed gardens and . . . yet the whole settlement continued to present the carefree manners of a great pleasure party.[51]

Immigrants did not consist solely of Americans, either, for people from everywhere flocked in to settle: "From Alsace and Lorraine, from the North Sea, from Russia, from the Alps, they came, and their faces shone as if they had happened upon the springtime of the world. . . ."[52] They built homes as soon as they could, but at first under their hands only "straddle-bugs" appeared. These "bugs," however, "withered" in less than sixty days and were replaced by shacks -- shacks that everywhere were the symbols of poor but happy beginners. As Garland in tones of realism says:

> They were all alike, these shacks. They had roofs of one slant. They were built of rough lumber, and roofed with tarred paper, which made all food taste of tar.
>
> They were dens but little higher than a man's head, and yet they sheltered the most joyous people that ever set foot to earth. . . .[53]

They no doubt, too, were hot and crowded, but their owners lived happily, for some day they hoped to build bigger homes. Bailey's store in the meantime became the center of social life for the settlement, for there the people went each day

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[51] Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[52] Ibid., p. 28.

[53] Ibid., p. 29.

when they saw the flag hoisted to signify the arrival of the mail. Two other eventful times of the week were the days Jim Rivers brought supplies from Boomtown, thereby giving the women excuses to dress in their daintiest clothes, assume the graces of their Eastern homes, and gather en masse at the store to buy supplies. The trips to get the mail, buy groceries, and meet the other settlers, in fact, became almost a necessity for these women who, before long, grew weary in their "sun-smit" cabins.

With the coming of August the settlers began to long for rain to save their crops, but the only answer to their longing was a tornado -- a storm characteristic of the prairie country. And the author writes graphically of the approaching disaster as he says:

> Far away was heard a continuous, steady, low-keyed, advancing hum, like the rushing of wild horses, their hoof-beats lost in one mighty, throbbing, tumultuous roar; then a deeper darkness fell upon the scene, and swift as the swoop of an eagle the tornado was upon them.[54]

The lightning broke forth, the wind and thunder became deafening, and when finally the tempest was cheated, the tar paper was torn from the roofs of many cabins, while nearly all the shanties were surrounded with water.

By November "the vast, treeless level, so alluring in May and June, had become an oppressive weight to those most sensitive to the weather."[55] Winter became a dreaded enemy

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[54] Ibid., p. 57.

[55] Ibid., p. 68.

to the squatters, many of whom had by this time spent their last dollar, and depopulation soon began: "one by one the huts grew smokeless and silent . . . "; the land of the "straddle-bug" became "a menacing desert, hard as iron, pitiless as ice."[56]

Only a few families, like the Burkes, remained. And as the wind took dominion over the lonely women to wear out their souls "with its melancholy moanings and its vast and wordless sighs," Blanche spent hours by the window "gazing at the moveless sod, listening to the wind-voices."[57] She sensed that emigration had been a bitter mistake, and at the same time, she said to Burke: "'There's nothing left for us but just freeze or starve. What did we ever leave Illinois for, anyway?'"[58] Burke himself "felt the menace of the desolate, wild prairie," but having no conception of "the tumult of regret and despair which filled his wife's mind,"[59] he made no reply and hence left her bitterness to increase as she faced "a long and desolate winter" in their "squat, low hovel."[60]

December finally came, bringing winter with appalling fury, Burke's "poor old team could no longer face the cold wind without danger of freezing," the family "lived on

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[56] Ibid., p. 70.

[57] Ibid., p. 71.

[58] Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[59] Ibid., p. 78.

[60] Ibid., p. 79.

boiled potatoes and bacon, suffering like prisoners -- jailed innocently," Burke himself "hovered about the stove, feeding it twisted bundles of hay," and Blanche "cowered in her chair, petulant and ungenerous."[61] The deepening winter, the snow, and the never-resting winds at last drove Blanche to anger, and she burst out: "'Do you know we haven't got ten pounds of flour in the house? And another blizzard likely? And no butter either? What y' goin' to do? Let me starve?'"[62] Patiently Burke set out to a neighbor's house to borrow supplies, but his efforts were now in vain.

Jim Rivers, the father of Blanche's expected child, called while Burke was away, and he, realizing his land claims were no longer worth-while, escaped with Blanche into the icy, snow-filled prairie winds, planning meanwhile to care for her in more pleasant surroundings. His journey, however, was delayed a few days by the fourth blizzard of the month -- a blizzard that one almost feels as in the final chapters he reads Garland's vivid description. The two escapees found shelter in Bailey's store, which, fortunately, was strong enough to stand, and on the first night, says Garland:

> The storm steadily increased. Its lashings of sleet grew each hour more furious. . . . The icy dust came in around the stovepipe and fell in a fine shower down upon Bailey's hands, fell with a faintly stinging touch, and the circle of warmth about the fire grew less wide each hour.[63]

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[61] Ibid., p. 87.

[62] Ibid., pp. 88-89.

[63] Ibid., p. 113.

On the second day, likewise,

> the warring winds howled on. The eye could not penetrate the veils of snow which streamed through the air on level lines. The powdered ice rose from the ground in waves which buffeted one another and fell in spray, only to rise again in ceaseless, tumultuous action. There was no sky and no earth. Everything slid, sifted, drifted, or madly swirled.[64]

And even during the second night

> the implacable winds still rushed and warred, and beat and clamored, shrieking, wailing, like voices from hell. The snow dashed like surf against the walls. It seemed to cut off the little cabin from the rest of the world and to dwarf all human action like the sea.[65]

The great strength of the storm, in fact, finally helped Bailey regain his perspective, and on the third day he, seeing that lovers would be lovers, withdrew the threat of death he had held over Rivers and bid God's speed to the parting couple as the storm subsided.

The harshness of the climate and the loneliness and poverty of Blanche's life were not entirely responsible for her desertion of Burke, but they, indeed, as we sense from Garland's graphic writing of Dakota, were highly contributory. The Moccasin Ranch gives us thus not only a clear insight into some of the Midwestern farmers' social and economic problems, but it gives as well pictures of a land responsible for these problems. And the author's realism again is his most valuable instrument.

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[64] Ibid., pp. 121-122.

[65] Ibid., p. 129.

Garland's farm novels on the whole, therefore, are mainly works of realism, but only half of them were written by an artist, and consequently the entire group is not as well known or valued as it might be. A Spoil of Office was hastily written, and Jason Edwards and A Member of the Third House were hastily transferred from dramas. These three early writings, in addition, were conceived in an era in which "writers were exhorted to abandon purely aesthetic conceptions of art" in behalf of a fight for "economic emancipation of white workers," and consequently the revelation in them is largely a fight "prosecuted with much of the same type of zeal which a few decades earlier had characterized anti-slavery writers."[66] These novels were produced also in an era of scientific determinism, and hence the way was open for the author to expose the evil practices of legislators and monopolists as well as to declare war on needless poverty. The central theme of all three is shown, therefore, not in the artistic manner of a writer but in the ugly bluntness of a reformer. A Spoil of Office perhaps is the most natural in its revelations, but still it, by no means, is free of unnecessary bareness.

The other three novels of the group Garland wrote after 1890, and by this time apparently his thesis was no longer

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[66]Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel, p. 744.

one of reform. The last wave of the Populist revolt had died down, and he, the son of the older agrarian, individualistic America, had, says Parrington, already outlived his day.[67] He needed an adequate income, too, says Taylor,[68] and hence for these or other reasons Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, The Moccasin Ranch, and A Little Norsk are artistically superior and far more interesting than the first three. In them Garland is concerned chiefly with realistic descriptions and situations illustrative of social and economic problems of the Midwestern farmers. His Rose and John Dutcher and his Blanche Burke, too, are delineated with more finesse than the characters of his first novels, and thereby something invaluable is added to material otherwise important only as a sum of social and economic conditions. Perhaps Garland in these writings more than in some others has presented conditions that inevitably make interesting characters. Could he not have continued to write other novels in the same vein? If he had, perhaps more could be said in favor of Garland the novelist.

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[67]Vernon Louis Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, Vol. III of Main Currents in American Thought, p. 299.

[68]Taylor, op. cit., p. 175.

CHAPTER V

GARLAND AND HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

With the defeat of William Jennings Bryan and the Populist-Democratic fusion in 1896, there was, says Parrington, direct evidence that the agrarian revolt in America had failed, and Garland, then finding himself a man without a country, "an alien in an industrializing order,"[1] an author in need of money,[2] turned primarily to the West, to Colorado, and to the Yukon territory to seek material for his writing.[3] In 1898, just before he left for a trip through British Columbia, however, he began to dictate "Grant McLane," a manuscript which was intended to be an account of the pioneer life of the Garland family in Wisconsin and Iowa, and after "his long and somewhat futile rambles"[4] through the West, he returned to the Middle Border to begin a series of autobiographies -- a writing that on the whole was to be his finest contribution to American literature.[5] His radical convictions of the late eighties and early

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[1]Parrington, op. cit., pp. 299-300.

[2]Taylor, op. cit., p. 175.

[3]Parrington, op. cit., p. 300.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

nineties, as before mentioned, had weakened, and consequently he could now sit in the subdued light of reminiscence to record accurately the social history of a generation swept across the western prairies.

Actually he completed eight volumes of autobiography,[6] but the ones that concern us primarily in this study are the four which, as Quinn says, "form an epic of migration, of struggle and discouragement, of the conquest of unfriendly nature, and of human indifference."[7] These, of course, are A Son of the Middle Border, 1917; A Daughter of the Middle Border, 1921; Trail-makers of the Middle Border, 1926; and Back-trailers from the Middle Border, 1928.

Despite the order of composition, Trail-makers of the Middle Border is the introduction to the long Garland-McClintock saga, but, as its name suggests, it is not the heart of the narrative. It carries the fictitious name of Graham for the author's father, Richard, and proceeds to tell his story from his boyhood days on a stony Maine farm, through his pioneer days in Wisconsin, until his return from the Civil War. Naturally its situations have not been experienced by the author, who shows an inability to "get inside" the characters, but it, nevertheless, is an interesting

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[6]Four of Garland's volumes of autobiography, Roadside Meetings, 1930, Companions on the Trail, 1931, My Friendly Contemporaries, 1932, and Afternoon Neighbors, 1934, concern merely his relations with authors and friends; they make almost no direct reference to the author's experience of farm life.

[7]Quinn, op. cit., p. 459.

agricultural background for the era succeeding the Civil War.

Garland, no doubt, heard his mother and father tell often of their early days in Wisconsin, and with some degree of reality he, too, has told of the farming there in the late fifties. In every climate for thousands of years, grain was beaten or trampled out of its straw, but in the late fifties, a wonderful new invention, a horsepower threshing machine, was being heralded. And speaking of the effect of the machine in Wisconsin, Garland says:

> The arrival of the machine bred a delightful bustle in every farm-house and consternation in every hen-roost, for threshers were not only welcome visitors but guests of honor. . . .
>
> The wives of the farmers enjoyed the coming of the machine even though it caused a press of work, for it brought into their lonely lives a day of social stir. Neighbors' girls came in to help, and "Thrashing" was almost as joyous as a barn-raising or a husking-bee.[8]

The horse-drawn mower was also replacing the old-fashioned reaping hook, grain on the new soil was standing "breast-high to the reapers,"[9] and Richard, in spite of long hours of labor, was feeling exultant.

He took under mortgage a quarter-section of land in Green's coolly, and spurred on by the faith of his bride, Isabel, paid off the mortgage before he went to war in 1863.

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[8]Hamlin Garland, Trail-makers of the Middle Border, pp. 202-203.

[9]Ibid., p. 204.

His fresh enthusiasm and love for his work can easily be seen as we read, for instance, Garland's description of his sowing. Says the author:

> The mechanical seeder had not yet been imagined, and Richard's skill in broadcasting seed was in high demand. To see him marching with steady stride, maintaining an unswerving course . . . was to witness a noble action. Fixing his eyes on a stake at the farther side of the field, . . . he strode erectly, the wheat falling from his hand with such fine precision that no barren streaks could afterwards develop.[10]

It was customary for the men in this new land to "change work" to get seed sown, houses built, barns raised, and grain harvested, but the women worked steadily to themselves. Their toil, nevertheless, like their husbands', was that of galley-slaves, for as Garland says of Isabel,

> as cook, tailor, spinner, knitter, and housekeeper, her days were full. She carded wool, spun yarn, knit socks, made jackets, trousers, gowns, bonnets, butter, sausage, rag carpets, quilts, candles, and sauerkraut. She churned butter, dried fruit, and picked chickens. She had no sewing-machine, no help of any kind, and though seldom called upon to milk cows, she did most of the churning and some of the gardening.[11]

Toil, however, was remunerative, for the price of wheat, in spite of the enlarged acreage, rose steadily, the Grahams' tiny cottage and land were soon free of debt, and as Richard left his family of four to join the Union army, hope abounded everywhere for the future of the wheat grower. The remainder

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[10] Ibid., p. 248.

[11] Ibid., p. 253.

of the story is to be seen in the second and most delineative volume of the epic.

Begun as "Grant McLane" in 1898 and published serially as "Sons of the Middle Border" in 1913, the second volume of Garland's autobiographical narrative was first released as A Son of the Middle Border by the Macmillan Company in 1917. This work is, in truth, the history of an American boy born in 1860 -- the author's view of himself and of the life he encountered as one era after another of American progress gave way to its successor.

Among Garland's earliest recollections is the return of his father from the army in 1865, and soon after that event, the Garland family set out to visit in Grandfather McClintock's house. In recalling the trip, the author says:

> In those days people did not "call," they went "visitin'." The women took their knitting and stayed all the afternoon and sometimes all night. No one owned a carriage. Each family journeyed in a heavy farm wagon with the father and mother riding high on the wooden spring seat while the children jounced up and down on the hay in the bottom of the box or clung desperately to the side-boards to keep from being jolted out. In such wise we started on our trip to the McClintocks'.[12]

The McClintock's, like the Garlands and their other native American neighbors, were hard-working and poor but hospitable. Their main pleasure came from competition in their work, for as Garland says, "reaping was a game, husking corn

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[12]Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, pp. 14-15.

a test of endurance and skill, threshing a 'bee.' It was a Dudley against a McClintock, a Gilfallan against a Garland. . . ."[13] At harvest time especially, as before the Civil War, "life was a feast,"[14] because then the neighbors came in to help, pleasing excitement filled the air, and compensation was found for all extra labor.

The Bible and the Farmer's Annual were about the only books in the Garland home, and in the Roche home, where the neighborhood school was held, books also were a scarcity. Education, in fact, was a premium, as Garland indicates when he says:

> All the homes of the valley were equally barren. My sister and I jointly possessed a very limp and soiled cloth edition of "Mother Goose." Our stories all came to us by way of the conversation of our elders. No one but grandmother Garland ever deliberately told us a tale -- except the hired girls, and their romances were of such dark and gruesome texture that we often went to bed shivering with fear of the dark.[15]

During the summer of his eighth year, Hamlin himself took part in haying and harvest, and afterward, he says, it seems as if he were made one of the regular hands as he "rode old Josh for the hired man to plow corn, and also guided the lead horse on the old McCormick reaper."[16]

Each year some farmers, of course, got the thresher earlier than others, but "a good part of every man's fall

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[13] Ibid., p. 21.

[14] Ibid., p. 31.

[15] Ibid., p. 68.

[16] Ibid., p. 48.

activities consisted in 'changing works' with his neighbors, thus laying up a stock of unpaid labor against the home job."[17] While Richard Garland helped his neighbors all through the autumn months, "the ceaseless ringing hum and the bow-ouw, ouw-woo, boo-oo-oom of the great balance wheels on the separator and the deep bass purr of its cylinder could be heard . . . like the droning song of some sullen and gigantic autumnal insect."[18] Finally the machine arrived at the Garland farm:

> We were awakened at dawn by the ringing beat of the iron mauls as Frank and David [McClintock] drove the stakes to hold the "power" to the ground. The rattle of trace chains, the clash of iron rods, the clang of steel bars, intermixed with the laughter of the men, came sharply through the frosty air, and the smell of sizzling sausage from the kitchen warned us that our busy mother was hurrying the breakfast forward.[19]

The machine in those days was either a "J. I. Case" or a "Buffalo Pitts," and it was moved by five pairs of horses attached to a "power" staked to the ground. The driver, who stood on a square platform above the "power," was a grand figure in the eyes of Hamlin, to whom threshing still was "all poetry." At meal time the hunger of the threshing hands was plainly evident, for Garland recalls:

> The men came in with a rush, and took seats wherever they could find them, and their attack on the boiled potatoes and chicken should have been

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[17] Ibid., p. 50.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 52.

> appalling to the women, but it was not. They enjoyed seeing them eat. Ed Green was prodigious. One cut at a big potato, followed by two stabbing motions, and it was gone. -- Two bites laid a leg of chicken as bare as a slate pencil.[20]

When the evening meals were over and the cows were milked, Hamlin's father and his uncles talked often, in 1868, of the West and of moving. They, tired of a hilly, stumpy country, had heard of a level wheat land where "'a threshing machine would pay wonderfully well,'"[21] and they were eager to go to it. In February, 1869, therefore, the Garlands did leave Wisconsin for a farm near Hesper, Iowa, and in 1870 they purchased a quarter-section of land in Mitchell County near the town of Osage. The latter site was to be their home until they joined the rush of land seekers for South Dakota in 1880, and it was during the ten-year stay on this Iowa farm that Hamlin emerged from the age of dreaming to meet the prose as well as the poetry of life.

At first the ten-year-old boy was elated over being a plowman, but before long he grew weary, as we can see when the author says:

> It was not a chore, it was a job. It meant moving to and fro hour after hour, day after day, with no one to talk to but the horses. It meant trudging eight or nine miles in the forenoon and as many more in the afternoon, with less than an hour off at noon.[22]

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[20] Ibid., p. 55.

[21] Ibid., p. 62.

[22] Ibid., p. 86.

The soil was the smooth dark sandy loam that Richard Garland had been seeking, and as Hamlin trudged on at his task, he amused himself by whistling, singing, and counting the prairie chickens that ran through the stubble in search of food. On certain days, however, nothing could amuse the youngster, for, as the author vividly recalls:

> Flurries of snow covered me with clinging flakes, and the mud "gummed" my boots and trouser legs, clogging my steps. . . . I suffered from cold and loneliness -- all sense of being a man evaporated. I was just a little boy, longing for the leisure of boyhood.[23]

The Garlands' furniture, like that of other middle border dwellers, "was of the rudest sort"; their house was a mere shanty devoid of grace; their clothing was "all cheap and ill fitting."[24] And as for education, it again, as in Wisconsin, was neglected. Only when the soil was frozen in winter did young Hamlin have time to read or play, but then, says he, "Newspapers, whether old or new, or pasted on the wall or piled up in the attic, -- anything in print was wonderful."[25] The schoolhouse was not a place to attract even Garland, for, as he says, this "barren temple" was "on the bare prairie . . . and like thousands of other similar buildings in the west, had not a leaf to shade it in summer nor a branch to break the winds of savage winter."[26] Its lack of charm, nevertheless, was the factor that turned

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[23] Ibid., p. 88.

[24] Ibid., p. 92.

[25] Ibid., p. 89.

[26] Ibid., p. 95.

Hamlin's attention to his readers and later caused him to be obligated to Professor McGuffey for the "dignity and literary grace of his selections."[27]

And the schoolhouse, too, bleak as it was, was the site of the community revivals. The first winter the Garlands were in Mitchell County, in fact, the author recalls that the revival, becoming the theater for the neighborhood, caused dancing and merrymaking to cease for the time, while "the evangelist, one of the old-fashioned shouting, hysterical, ungrammatical, gasping sort, took charge of the services,"[28] to describe lakes of burning brimstone and ages of endless torment. At times the speaker roared so loudly he could be heard for half a mile; yet night by night the Garlands and their neighbors attended, enjoyed the singing, and joined lustily in the tunes. It was all a major part of their social life -- something that partially replaced the old quilting bees and barn-raisings.

When spring came again, Hamlin was put to the wearisome task of harrowing. His sister Harriet and his brother Frank went to school, but he could not be spared. And so, lame, stiff, sore, and with the sinews of his legs shortened, he hobbled on to take charge of his team and harrow back and forth across the wide fields. Later he dug postholes, built fences, raked and burned brush, and finally the great "quarter

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[27] Ibid., p. 112.

[28] Ibid., p. 97.

section" was prepared to grow wheat.

In succeeding years Hamlin was called upon to sow the land he and his father had so carefully pulverized -- the land they had made ready for destruction by high winds. And one day, says Garland,

> just as the early sown wheat was beginning to throw a tinge of green over the brown earth, a tremendous wind arose from the southwest and blew with such devastating fury that the soil, caught up from the field, formed a cloud, hundreds of feet high,--a cloud which darkened the sky, turning noon into dusk and sending us all to shelter. . . .[29]

This storm was only part of the unpleasantness of farm life, however, for there were also "the grime . . . , the army worm, the flies, the heat, as well as the smells and drudgery of the barns."[30] There was even the toil of harvesting.

And Iowans, who then worshipped wheat in all its abundance, thought and talked little else between seeding and harvest. Reaping time generally came about the twentieth of July, "the hottest and dryest part of the summer, and was the most pressing work of the year."[31] We sympathize, to be sure, with the harvesters as Garland describes their plight:

> It [reaping] demanded early rising for the men, and it meant an all day broiling over the kitchen stove for the women. Stern, incessant toil went on inside and out from dawn till sunset, no matter how the thermometer sizzled.[32]

Stacking of the hay followed the reaping of the grain,

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[29] Ibid., p. 128.

[30] Ibid., p. 129.

[31] Ibid., p. 148.

[32] Ibid.

and, says Garland, "No sooner was the stacking ended than the dreaded task of plowing began. . . . "[33] A little later, in October, Hamlin was called to his place as corn husker, Frank took his place at the plow, and their only respite during the months of October and November was the occasional cold rain which permitted them to read or play cards in the kitchen. Husking corn was the last job of the season, and, recalls Garland:

> In '74 it lasted well into November. Beginning in the warm and golden September we kept at it (off and on) until sleety rains coated the ears with ice and the wet soil loaded our boots with huge balls of clay and grass -- till the snow came whirling by on the wings of the north wind and the last flock of belated geese went sprawling sidewise down the ragged sky. Grim business! At times our wet gloves froze on our hands.[34]

Some relief came, though, as the Garland children -- Hamlin, Frank, and Harriet -- formed parties to herd cattle, plant corn, or attend the seasonal circus. In referring to the circus, for example, Garland presents a contrast that indeed helps the reader realize the monotony of the farm. Says he:

> I here pay tribute to the men who brought these marvels to my eyes. To rob me of my memories of the circus would leave me as poor as those to whom life was a drab and hopeless round of toil. It was our brief season of imaginative life. In one day -- in a part of one day -- we gained a thousand new conceptions of the world and of human nature. . . . It furnished us with jokes. It relieved our dullness. It gave us something to talk about.[35]

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[33] Ibid., p. 153.

[34] Ibid., p. 162.

[35] Ibid., p. 137.

A few other pleasures, too, were experienced by the Garland children as swift changes took place on the Middle Border in the early seventies. The settlement of the prairie thickened day by day, and quickly meadows were fenced and pastured. Horseback riding amid the charm of the open spaces ceased, but in its place came picnics, conventions, and Fourth of July celebrations. The county fair, held late in September, became increasingly important as farming diversified, and it was a duty for the Garlands to attend, take a picnic lunch, survey the "fat sheep, broad-backed bulls, and shining colts,"[36] and go to the medicine show where a handsome vendor spoke eloquently of his magic oils and cures for all diseases. The Grange also made its contribution to farmers, and since Richard Garland was one of its early and enthusiastic members, the Garland family frequently attended its sessions. In winter the Grangers' "oyster suppers," with debates, songs, and essays, drew crowds to the community schoolhouse, and each spring on the twelfth of June, the Grange picnic became the most picturesque and delightful affair that ever rose out of the American rural life.[37] Describing the assembly in Mitchell County, Garland points out that:

> . . . early on the appointed day the various lodges of our region came together one by one at convenient places, each one moving in procession and led by

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[36] Ibid., p. 166.

[37] Ibid., p. 165.

> great banners on which the women had blazoned the motto of their home lodge. . . .
>
> It was grand, it was inspiring, to us, to see those long lines of carriages winding down the lanes, joining one to another at the cross roads till at last all the granges from the northern end of the county were united in one mighty column advancing on the picnic ground. . . . Each of these assemblies was a most grateful relief from the sordid loneliness of the farm.[38]

In 1875, the Grangers asked Richard Garland to be their official grain-buyer for Mitchell County, and he, leaving Hamlin to supervise the farm, assumed his duties in Osage in June. Hamlin and the hired hands worked steadily during the weeks of that harvest, but on Saturday nights always the men went to town, where they celebrated by getting drunk. And as for Hamlin Garland, he enjoyed the leisure of Sunday only to find that

> it was always hard to go back to the farm after one of these days of leisure -- back to greasy overalls and milk-bespattered boots, back to the society of fly-bedevilled cows and steaming, salty horses, back to the curry-comb and swill bucket. . . .[39]

In the autumn of '75 the entire family moved to Osage, where Hamlin worked occasionally in his father's elevator and mingled with young people in attendance at the local seminary. In '77, Richard Garland, finding his renter unsatisfactory, returned to the farm, but it was agreed that Hamlin might go to the seminary in Osage as soon as the wheat was harvested. The crop was enormous that year,

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., p. 180.

Garland recalls, and although self-binding harvesters were coming in, he says:

> I bound grain until my arms were raw with briars and in stacking-time I wallowed round and round upon my knees, building great ricks of grain, . . . until my trousers, re-inforced at the knees, bagged ungracefully and my hands, swollen with the act of grappling the heavy bundles as they were thrown to me, grew horny and brown and clumsy. . . .[40]

The crops of succeeding summers were not, however, so abundant as the one of '77, for the chinch bug invaded while Hamlin was at Cedar Valley Seminary, and by 1880 the harvest became a season of disgust and disappointment. Says Garland in the fashion of a true realist:

> . . . not only had the pestiferous mites devoured the grain, they had filled our stables, granaries, and even our kitchens with their ill-smelling crawling bodies -- and now they were coming again in added billions. By the middle of June they swarmed at the roots of the wheat -- innumerable as the sands of the sea. They sapped the growing stalks till the leaves turned yellow, . . . and many men began to offer their land for sale.[41]

Naturally the business of grain buying suffered, and Hamlin's father, selling his share in the Grange elevator at Osage, joined the movement of emigrants bound for Dakota. Describing the plight of those emigrants, Garland recollects that in 1880

> the movement of settlers toward Dakota had . . . become an exodus, a stampede. Every man who could sell out had gone west or was going. In vain did the county papers and Farmer's Institute lecturers advise cattle raising and plead for diversified

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[40] Ibid., p. 207.

[41] Ibid., p. 229.

> tillage . . . ; farmer after farmer joined the march to Kansas, Nebraska, and Dakota. "We are wheat raisers," they said, "and we intend to keep in the wheat belt."[42]

The Garlands thus bid farewell to one cycle of emigration and entered upon another. Hamlin's actual experience on the farm was about over, though, for as soon as he helped his father put a roof on their new house near Ordway, he began a long adventure through the Eastern states -- an adventure from which he was not to return until 1883. In the meantime settlers -- immigrants from every country of the world -- continued swarming into Dakota, staking their claims with "straddle-bugs," building tiny cabins, and living in hope that rain would save their crops. By the fall of 1883, however, many people began to abandon their claims, business declined in the little store Richard had established near Ordway, and Hamlin, seeing that numerous squatters would have "starved and frozen had it not been for the buffalo skeletons which lay scattered over the sod,"[43] had his enthusiasm for pioneering chilled.

The rest of Garland's story the reader already knows. He went East again -- to Boston -- to study, to find himself, to develop a theory of writing, and, finally, after two visits to Ordway in '87 and '89, to put into literature Midwestern farm life and all its hardships. Before he left

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[42] Ibid., p. 234.

[43] Ibid., p. 309.

Dakota in '84, he, to be sure, knew the meaning of drudgery and monotony, but because his father, a land owner in '63, had never been forced in Hamlin's lifetime to mortgage his farm, young Garland perhaps did not know the full sting of poverty. By 1887 he had studied Henry George and hence as he returned to Dakota, the poverty of this arid region appalled him. Conditions were different anyway; free lands were gone, prices were now set by speculators, and "this wasteful method of pioneering," he says, "this desolate business of lonely settlement took on a new and tragic significance as I studied it."[44] He saw the man who, "with hands like claws, was scratching a scanty living from the soil of a rented farm, while his wife walked her ceaseless round from tub to churn and from churn to tub."[45] In '89 he went again to Ordway, but situations were no better. Richard Garland, who was cultivating more than five hundred acres of land, was worried because his wheat was "thin and light" and the price less than sixty cents per bushel. Two of the Garlands' neighbors had gone insane over the failure of their crops; "several had slipped away 'between two days' to escape their debts."[46] And the whole migration of the Garlands seemed a madness.

In 1891, the author returned to the West again, this

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[44] Ibid., p. 367.

[45] Ibid., p. 375.

[46] Ibid., p. 398.

time to collect material about the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist party. His interest in the farmer, of course, was still high, and as he talked with his father, who had become a county officer for the Populists, he obtained what he believed was a statement of the Border's poverty. Said Richard:

> " . . . I'm getting the work systematized so that I can raise wheat at sixty cents a bushel -- if I can only get fifteen bushels to the acre. But there's no money in the country. . . . I never expected to see this country in such a state. I can't get money enough to pay my taxes. Look at my clothes. I haven't had a new suit in three years. Your mother is in the same fix. . . . "[47]

The change in his father, Garland believes, was typical of the change in the entire West.[48] The era of free land was over, a day of reckoning had come, and in the tones of a genuine realist the author recalls:

> I now perceived the mournful side of American "enterprise." . . . Families were everywhere breaking up. Ambitious young men and unsuccessful old men were in restless motion, spreading, swarming, dragging their reluctant women and their helpless and wondering children into unfamiliar hardships -- At times I visioned the Middle Border as a colony of ants -- which was an injustice to the ants, for ants have a reason for their futile and aimless striving.[49]

In the final chapter of this chronicle, Richard Garland, like his neighbors, left Dakota, and on Thanksgiving day, 1893, he and Belle, his wife, had dinner in the cottage

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[47] Ibid., p. 425.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., p. 440.

their sons purchased for them near West Salem, Wisconsin. Hamlin and Frank were with them, and though the opening of this home may not seem important to the reader, it actually, says the author, was the marking of an epoch:

> . . . it was the ending of one life and the beginning of another. To him [Richard Garland] it was decisive and not altogether joyous. To accept this as his home meant a surrender of his faith in the Golden West, a tacit admission that all his explorations of the open lands with whatsoever they had meant of opportunity, had ended in a sense of failure on a barren soil.[50]

With the conclusion of A Son of the Middle Border, Garland completes for the most part his autobiographical picture of Midwestern farmers; he makes only scanty references to the post-Civil-War era in A Daughter of the Middle Border and almost no reference in Back-trailers from the Middle Border. The latter books, in fact, are chiefly intellectual and spiritual histories of the Western family turned East.

In A Daughter of the Middle Border, the sequel to A Son of the Middle Border, he relates the circumstances connected with the bringing home of the "new daughter," his wife, to his aged parents and continues with his travels, writing, and life in the West from the time of his marriage until the death of his father, in 1914. He, producing an autobiography of personal living, thrusts social conditions far into the background as he pays honor to the Garland-McClintock family

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[50] Ibid., p. 463.

turned back on the trail, but still, inevitably, he voices a few echoes of the farm life he knew from experience.

He, for instance, tells of a time in 1897 when he was in Washington, D. C., at dinner in a senator's home. Theodore Roosevelt and other guests "heckled" him at length to obtain a statement of what "ailed" the Middle West, but they were unable to abash him. Roosevelt, a former resident of Dakota, seemed proud of him, in fact, as he in defending the farmer argued thus: "'The man on the rented farm who is raising corn at fifteen cents per bushel to pay interest on a mortgage is apt to be bitter.'"[51] Garland, indeed, had not forgotten his old neighbors who existed under the burdens of a mortgage.

In 1900 Hamlin's Aunt Susan died, leaving her dower of a few thousand dollars to Richard, and the intensity of freedom that then came to the author's father as he gained a sense of security affords the reader another close glimpse into the sternness of the farmer's life. Richard still owned his land in Dakota, but now, observes Garland, a little wealth

> released him from the tyranny of the skies. All his life he had been menaced by the "weather." Clouds, snows, winds, had been his unrelenting antagonists. Hardly an hour of his past had been free from a fear of disaster. The glare of the sun, the direction of the wind, the assembling of the clouds at sunset, -- all the minute signs of change, of storm, of destruction had been his incessant minute study. For

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[51]Hamlin Garland, A Daughter of the Middle Border, p. 56.

> over fifty years he had been enslaved to the seasons. His sister's blessing liberated him. He agonized no more about the fall of frost, the slash of hail, the threat of tempest. Neither chinch bugs nor drought nor army worms could break his rest. He slept in comfort and rose in confidence.[52]

In 1903, Garland installed a fireplace in the West Salem homestead, and on one winter evening he invited a few of his father's old friends in to criticize the new chimney. His mother was now dead, his father was lonely, and the whole group spent an evening of reminiscence. Their conversation, as Garland records it, was sentimental; it pictured an early day of optimism, yet it revealed an aspect of poverty that even long years had not erased. The effects of the farmers' diet were still evident in their health, for, explained one of the guests:

> "I used to eat anything at any time," . . . " probably that is the reason why I can't do it now. In those days we didn't know anything about 'calories' or 'balanced rations.' We et what was set before us and darn glad to get it."[53]

Another guest then recalled the days "when buckwheat cakes and sausages swimming in pork fat and covered with maple syrup, formed his notion of a good breakfast." But, he soon added, "'Just one such meal would finish me now.'"[54]

Nothing ever "finished" the strong, upright body of Richard Garland, though, until death finally came in October,

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[52] Ibid., pp. 169-170.

[53] Ibid., p. 308.

[54] Ibid.

1914. And then, says his son, "The veteran pioneer . . . passed to that farther West from whose vague savannahs no adventurer has ever returned."[55] Richard Garland represented an era in American settlement -- an era that had already gone down in defeat -- but the author does not try to give dubious appraisal to either the era or its representative. He merely states that his father had faced the open lands for seventy years, had covered an enormous span of living, and at last had "mustered" out in the fashion of a true soldier.

The actual passing of the old farmer, of course, leaves only the son and his family to fill the pages of the fourth volume, Back-trailers from the Middle Border. And really -- so far as farm life on the Middle Border is concerned -- the author's long epic would be as complete without this volume as with it. Published in 1928, it tells chiefly of the author's delight in his rediscovery of New York and of his public recognition as he reaped the reward of a long devotion to literature. Literary success naturally brought him economic security, but it never caused him to forget the struggles of his father. Thoughtfully, therefore, as he went into a New York bank in the 1920's, he recalls:

> The word "harvest" had many associations both glad and sad. To make his harvest my father had to plow and sow and reap, agonizing over frosts, droughts, chinch bugs, army worms, hail and a hundred other

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[55] Ibid., p. 397.

> assaulting forces, with no respite till his grain was safely in the bin. His living was won in snow and rain and heat and dust whereas I gathered my produce in a vast and splendid hall whose guards touched their caps to me as I passed.[56]

Garland completes with Back-trailers from the Middle Border the chronicle of his pioneer ancestors and his own life to 1928, and though he does not paint the return of the Western family in as large a manner as he does the earlier invasion, this volume serves its purpose in suggesting a movement that also affected the economic and financial life of our country.

The quartet on the whole, therefore, is not solely confined to a history of a family; it constitutes in addition a record of the development and decline of the Middle West. Trail-makers of the Middle Border and A Son of the Middle Border, says Garland, are as true to the life of the prairie as his memory will permit,[57] but the former, a record of another generation, can not, in spite of the author's honest devices, of course, be as realistic as the latter. A Son of the Middle Border, in fact, is recognized as Garland's "great bequest to American letters."[58] It is "the spirit of the Middle Border in its hopes and its defeat, . . . the history of the generation that swept across the western

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[56]Hamlin Garland, Back-trailers from the Middle Border, p. 173.

[57]Hamlin Garland, The Westward March of American Settlement, p. 33.

[58]Parrington, op. cit., p. 300.

prairies . . . -- one of the significant chapters of our total American history."[59] Garland, in "the mellow tone that comes of long perspective,"[60] has written into this volume the drudgery of plowing, the barrenness of rural education, the pleasures of wild meadows, and the poverty of land renters. He records "the last stand and the fall of our antebellum agrarian democracy,"[61] but always he writes in a style that is "personal, lyrical, and consequently universal";[62] and he remains "indissolubly married to his memory of actual events."[63] In A Daughter of the Middle Border he remains truthful to Border life as he describes active characters endowed with human frailties, but in this volume, as well as in Back-trailers from the Middle Border, he necessarily neglects the soil as he completes his narrative with emphasis upon the spiritual and intellectual efforts of a defeated society moving East. He added the last two volumes wisely, however, for with their help he pictures the settlement of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Dakota as it is, perhaps, etched by no other writer. He tells of the end as well as of the beginning and the height of an era.

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Taylor, op. cit., p. 182.

[61] Ibid., p. 183.

[62] Carl Van Doren, "Contemporary American Novelists," The Nation, CXIII (November 23, 1921), 597.

[63] Ibid.

We of today are probably still too near the post-Civil-War period to rightly value Garland's four autobiographies, but in time to come when we ask questions about that epoch, it may be these books that will furnish the answers. They are written, it is true, with "a charm that comes from the softening influence of memory,"[64] but still they do not "idealize the picture into untruth,"[65] for Garland never hesitates to tell of the toil the women faced, or how low the price of wheat became, and even the animals he pictures as the unfeeling brutes they were as he had to tend them.

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[64]Quinn, op. cit., pp. 458-459.

[65]Ibid., p. 459.

CHAPTER VI

IN RETROSPECT

In 1887 when Garland returned from Boston to the Middle West only to view a treadmill existence, his heart grew full of rebellious wrath. No other man in our literature, says Parrington, had known the Middle Border so intimately as Garland.[1] He had lived from boyhood through its "restless swarmings," its "heedless venturings";[2] he had continually moved West, and he had sensed all the allurement of the untamed prairie. He had known the drab realities of labor, and he had seen his mother fail under the dreadful burdens of rural life. But now in the late eighties his eyes were opened as never before. Perhaps he sensed the social and economic injustice -- the decay that was eating away one of the strongest agricultural orders ever formed in America. Perhaps he was influenced by his acquaintance with Howells or by the single-tax proposal of George. At any rate, he grew intensely bitter, and armed with his theory that the future is built of the "mighty pivotal present," he set about making present conditions tolerable. He, as Parrington says,

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[1]Parrington, op. cit., p. 294. [2]Ibid.

> espoused a somber realism, for only by and through the truth could he hope to dislodge from men's minds the misconceptions that stood in the way of justice. The Middle Border had no spokesman at the court of letters and if he could gain a hearing there he must not betray his father's household by glossing ungainly reality; he must depict the life of the western farmer as it was lived under the summer sun and the winter cold, what harvests were brought to crib and what sort of wealth was finally gathered.[3]

And his short stories, which in their harsh objectivity belong to the earlier eighties,[4] were, Parrington continues, "the first authentic expression and protest of an agrarian America then being submerged by the industrial revolution."[5] Their psychology for the most part was that of "the first mood of dejection that came with the failure of western agriculture with its virgin fields, its new machinery, and its specialized crops."[6] They described a rich, productive region and told the unheeded truth about overworked husbands, lonely wives, envious brothers, poverty-stricken families; they laid bare the meagerness of entertainment, the scolding voice of religion; they spoke of unremitting toil, small rewards, ceaseless efforts, and fleeting joys. They were the mouthpiece, in fact, of an enthusiastic reformer and artist influenced by Howells to keep beauty and significance balanced.

Garland did not remain, however, the objective realist that he was when he wrote his short stories. Out of the

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[3] Ibid., p. 291.

[4] Ibid., p. 296.

[5] Ibid., p. 294.

[6] Ibid., p. 296.

natural bitterness of the farmers sprang the political movement of the Populists, and straightway he threw himself into the agrarian cause to put the Populists into fiction. His subjective writing -- A Spoil of Office -- was a novel that, as Parrington suggests, preserved "the spirit of the passionate uprising of the farmers."[7] But actually it did little more. It was only a long, sketchy story -- "a social tract rather than a work of art."[8] The author's other two reform novels, Jason Edwards and A Member of the Third House, were even less artistic than A Spoil of Office, for in their hastily created and melodramatic style they appeared not to portray accurately either the question of the single tax or the problem of legislative corruption. They were, in truth, but the grim sermons of a writer overshadowed by a preacher.

Garland eventually outlived the day of agrarian revolt, and finally he produced other novelistic accounts of Midwestern farmers. These accounts, however, were only three in number, and of these three, two -- The Moccasin Ranch and A Little Norsk -- were novelettes that dealt merely with the short-lived settlement of the Dakota plains during the land rush in the early eighties. Their pictures of the bleak, dry, stormy plains were realistic enough, though, and The Moccasin Ranch especially was vividly descriptive of the

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[7] Ibid., p. 298.

[8] Ibid.

lines cut by storms and poverty into the souls of the pioneers. The third member of this group, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, was, on the other hand, decidedly Garland's strongest novel of the Middle West, for in it the author, no longer a radical, gave a down-to-earth account of the monotony, poverty, and loneliness existent on a Wisconsin farm in the late eighties and early nineties. He described the rebellion made by Rose Dutcher against the evils of the Middle Border and in general embodied the narrowness of rural life in a form which was more nearly finished than that of any of his other novels.

If Garland had continued with his farm literature in the same vein in which he wrote Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, he might be better known today as a portrayer of Middle Border life. But as for the reason he did not continue, we cannot be certain. Perhaps, as Granville Hicks indicates, after he was accepted into literary and academic circles, he "became fastidious and a little contemptuous of dirt and disorder."[9] Possibly, on the other hand, he needed to discover new material in order to be interesting to the public and hence continue to secure an adequate income.[10] It could be, too, that he simply needed wider sympathies or a larger ability, for as Carl Van Doren says, he believed that if he had represented the local color of his region once, he had done

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[9]Granville Hicks, "Garland of the Academy," The Nation, CXXXIII (October 21, 1931), 436.

[10]Taylor, op. cit., p. 175.

all he could.[11] And, to be sure, he had little sympathy with the past of any region. If he had just let his imagination serve him, though, Van Doren adds,he could have found in his section as many passions, tragedies, and joys as he could have needed for a lifetime.[12]

In the nineties, nevertheless, Garland turned to a series of wanderings into Colorado and the Yukon country and turned also to a group of romantic writings of the West. He thus took himself at the height of his career into a new country and began a new literature for which he had little background. His romances of the West achieved no spectacular success, though, for, says Van Doren, his formulas were "the inventions of a mind not essentially inventive," and his writing at best was "no more than sectional."[13]

Desperate, he returned in 1911 to the writing of his autobiography, a work he had begun more than a decade before. By this time he had discovered the error of his early disregard for the past, had sensed the value of comparative ideas, and unhesitatingly he set to work on a charming volume of reminiscence -- a social history that is significant to all America as it pictures the toiling, unfavored Midwestern population of post-Civil-War days. A Son of the

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[11]Carl Van Doren, "Contemporary American Novelists," The Nation, CXIII (November 23, 1921), 597.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists, p. 45.

Middle Border was heralded in 1917 on the front page of the New York *Times* by William Dean Howells' complimentary review, and the way was immediately paved for *A Daughter of the Middle Border*, *Trail-makers of the Middle Border*, and *Back-trailers from the Middle Border*, the remaining three volumes in what has proved an epic of the settlement and decay of the Middle West. The realities of *A Son of the Middle Border*, especially, as Van Doren points out, took the writer back again to *Main Travelled Roads* and its cycle, and in their personal, lyrical, and consequently universal aspects, represented Garland at his best[14] and America in one of its most vigorous efforts. They put the savage hardships and the rapturous beauty of the old frontier into their due places, and they revealed the life the author knew best.

In fact, a reader wonders with what success Garland would have met if he, having survived a period of radicalism, had given himself at the height of his career to the recording of the farm life of the Middle West. In his early short stories and his late autobiographies he hit -- against the advice of *Crumbling Idols* -- notes of universality and thereby endowed us for years to come with an authentic account of the prairie farmer. What would have happened had he remained loyal to the "humble, hapless" farmers of his native region as he wrote his novels? Or what if he had

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[14] *Ibid.*

extended his loyalty to the urban as well as rural life of the Middle West? What if he had recognized early that universality -- not mere difference -- is the keynote to good literature and that the past as well as the present has its value? Would he have been a more noted exponent of his region than he was? These considerations, however, probably disturbed the author but little in his old days. He, Webb indicates, was accepted throughout America as the literary spokesman of the prairie farm;[15] the writings that he did finish brought him wealth, and verily he had his reward.

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[15]Webb, op. cit., p. 473.

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