

FRAMLIN GARLAND: A STUDY
IN COMPROMISE

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE
David George Scafasci
1950

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A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School of
State College of Agriculture and
Science in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

1950

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I
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Garland, one of four children, was born in a bleak environment at best. His parents had only a rudimentary education and few possessions. His home was a simple, rude cabin. A bleak prairie, almost devoid of neighbors, was his environment. His earliest recollections were those of poverty and conflict, of the bitterness of the Civil War and of the endless struggle to wrest a living from the soil.

Garland's first education was gained in a neighboring farm house under the supervision of a farmer.

1. Biographical data for this chapter is chiefly from Hamlin Garland's Son of the Middle Border, Border, Trail Makers, and Trailers from the Middle.

I

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUNDS

Hamlin Garland, the prairie novelist, is a descendant of the earliest American tradition. His ancestors, of Scotch and English extraction, arrived in Massachusetts Bay from Sussex in 1627. For two centuries his forbears settled in New England and it was not until 1830 that his father, Richard Garland, and his grandparents migrated to Green County, Wisconsin. Richard Garland married Isabelle McClintock, the daughter of a neighboring pioneer family and together they established a modest farm near Onalaska, Wisconsin. Here in 1860 Hamlin Garland was born.

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1. Biographical data for this chapter was taken chiefly from Hamlin Garland's autobiographical works - The Son of the Middle Border, The Daughter of the Middle Border, Trail Makers of the Middle Border and Back-Trailers from the Middle Border.

teacher who taught him to read. At seven, he attended the public school in Onalaska. Impressed by literature even as a child, he eagerly read the few materials his surroundings offered, the Bible, Farmer's Annual and Harper's Weekly. Through McGuffey's Reader, he became acquainted with Scott, Byron, Southey, Wordsworth and Masters. His grandmother Garland, a bookish Boston import, taught him the poems of Whittier and Longfellow and the proverbs of the Puritans.

In February of 1869, Garland's father sold the Cooley farm and the family moved to Hesper, Minnesota. Here his youngest sister Jessie was born. Their settlement in Minnesota was short-lived, however, for Richard Garland, a restless pioneer who was always in search of new land, seized an opportunity to sell the property and again moved his family, this time to the bleak prairie of Mitchell County, near Osage, Iowa. Here young Garland learned what it truly was to pioneer. There was a house to build and a farm to establish, and at eleven, he was already behind the plow breaking new ground for cultivation.

Garland's education in Osage was intermittent. His services were needed on the farm and he attended school only when the weather made farm work impossible. He still found time to read however, and became acquainted with the dime novel, the New York Weekly, the New York

Ledger, Godey's Ladies' Book, Peterson's Magazine,
The Life of Barnum, and Franklin's Autobiography. It
was here too that Garland discovered his first impor-
tant chronicle of everyday life in a newspaper called
the Hearth and Home where he read a serialized edition
of Edward Eggleston's pioneer study, The Hoosier School-
master. He was deeply impressed to discover that a
novel could be developed out of a background of farming
and familiar scenes. Garland later said of the work,
"The book is a milestone in my literary progress as
it was in the development of Western fiction." ¹

In March of 1876, the Garland family moved again.
Richard Garland had joined the Grange, a farm coopera-
tive, and he moved into the town of Osage where he had
been offered employment as the official grain buyer for
the Grange. During the summer, Garland worked with his
father in the granary and in the fall entered the Osage
Seminary. When his parents moved back to the farm the
following year, Garland remained in Osage attending the
Seminary. At the Seminary, Garland developed an early inter-
est in artistic endeavor. He first turned his atten-
tion to drama and became a member of the Adelphean
Society, but his attempts at dramatic production were
unsuccessful. He then devoted himself to oratory and

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 115.

It was at this time that the reputation of the Dakotas

did succeed in establishing a modest reputation in the school. His enthusiasm for literature deepened as he became acquainted with Hawthorne and particularly Howells, whose novel, The Undiscovered Country, profoundly affected him. ownership, and then to sell it. In 1880, Garland graduated from the Osage Seminary. His parents had moved to Ordway, South Dakota and Garland, unwilling to accompany them, travelled instead into Minnesota, looking for a teaching position. He was unsuccessful however, and being destitute, he accepted temporary employment, as a construction worker, as an office copy boy, and even as a singer in a Y.M.C.A. band. He then went to Grundy County, Ohio, where he taught in a country school, later securing a position as an instructor in a small normal college in Morriss. Eager to see the country, he travelled during his free time with his brother to Boston, New York, Washington and Chicago.

In 1883, he returned to his parents' home in Ordway to work in a small store which his father had established. But he was much more interested in teaching than in business, and he spent his time reading Taine, Chamber's Encyclopedia of English Literature and Greene's History of the English People in an effort to discover the laws which govern literary development and to learn the methods of self expression.

It was at this time that the expansion of the Dakotas

was underway. Garland decided to take advantage of the government's offer of free land and established a claim of his own in McPherson County. His intention was to acquire the land, remain on it long enough to develop it and establish ownership, and then to sell it, but one dry and scorching summer and a severely cold winter destroyed his taste for pioneering. At the suggestion of Mr. Bradford, a Portland minister, he mortgaged his claim and went to Boston to continue his education. He was dissatisfied with the Boston University offerings, however, and confined his studies to the Boston Public Library, where he read Spencer, Darwin, Fiske, Helmholtz, Haeckel, Whitman and others. Since he was not a resident and without means, Garland was unable to withdraw books and had to do all of his reading in the library until through the courtesy of Dr. Edward Everett Hale, he was able to secure a library card. E. Hurd, literary editor of the Transcript, who Garland's finances were at a low ebb when he met, Dr. Cross, a kindly Bostonian who took an interest in him and offered him accommodations in his home. This arrangement permitted Garland to remain in Boston where he spent what little money he had on lectures, concerts and every other educational offering within his reach in a feverish desire to acquire learning. He was especially attracted to the performances of Edwin Booth,

the noted Shakespearian actor. Garland attended his every performance and, as a study, he composed several orations on Booth's acting techniques and his interpretation of Shakespeare.

At the close of a free lecture in the Boston Public Library, Garland arose and congratulated the speaker, Moses Browne, who was a professor of oratory in a school which he directed. The professor was impressed with Garland and there began an association which was important in the shaping of Garland's career. The professor arranged for Garland to teach oratory at his school, The Moses True Browne School of Oratory, and also included a program of Garland's lectures on Booth. One of the students in Garland's classes, a Mrs. Payne of Hyde Park, recognized Garland as a lecturer of promise and used her influence to sponsor him in a private lecture series. At the first of these lectures, Garland met Charles E. Hurd, literary editor of the Transcript, who urged him to write for publication. Through Hurd, several of Garland's critical studies appeared in the Transcript. Encouraged by his first appearance in print, Garland attempted his first creative piece, The Western Corn Husking, a grim and revealing story of western life. He sent the manuscript to William Wyckoff, editor

of the New American Magazine, who received it enthusiastically. Garland then wrote a series of short stories depicting various seasons on the farm, which Wycoff also published.

It was at this time that Garland received a copy of Zury, from Hurd who asked him to read the novel and to write a review for the Transcript. Garland was deeply impressed and wrote a highly flattering account which Hurd published. Kirkland, the author of Zury, was greatly pleased by the article and he wrote Garland asking him to visit in Chicago.

This meeting with Kirkland was instrumental in directing Garland into his main-stream of creative work. Kirkland, who had read some of Garland's western sketches, urged him to write fiction. Garland explained that he hesitated to try fiction because he felt weak in the use of the conversational medium. Kirkland encouraged him to try, advised him to write realistically of the middle border area which he knew best, and asked him to fulfill his obvious promise.

Garland returned to his former home with a new perspective. His trip to Boston had brought into sharp focus the appalling contrast between Eastern and Western living. His reading of the economic philosophies of Henry George, Karl Marx, and William Morris had inflamed him with the unnecessary injustice of it all.

The words of Kirkland rang in his ears and he began to see himself as the interpreter of his prairie people, the voice of their suffering. Bitterly, Garland noted the details of their poverty, their sordid struggle and half-hidden despair, with rebellion and rage. In the Son of the Middle Border, he reported, a fiction

now tell the truth about it." "Instructed in the new philosophy, I now perceived that these plowmen, these wives and daughters had been pushed out into these lonely, ugly shacks by the forces of landlordism behind. These plodding Swedes and Danes, these thrifty Germans, these hairy Russians had all fled from the feudalism of their native lands and were here because they had no share in the soil from which they sprung, and because in the settled communities of the eastern states, the speculative demand for land had hindered them from acquiring even a leasing right to the surface of the earth".¹

Garland worked in the fields that summer intending to return to Boston in the fall. Every detail of his daily life on the farm now assumed a literary significance. He noted all the discomforts of physical labor and its unpleasant results but "with no intention of exalting toil into a wholesome and regenerative thing as Tolstoi, an aristocrat, had attempted to do ... the but as warfare".² Through it all, Garland wrote feverishly and with bitter conviction. From a conversation with his mother, Garland developed the theme

land arranged a meeting with George and the friendship

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 267-68.

2. Ibid, 371.

1 Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 371.

which followed greatly influenced Garland's career as for his first story, a tale of an old pioneer woman who made a trip back to her New York home after an absence of nearly thirty years. Garland sent the unfinished manuscript to Kirkland who commented, "You are the first actual farmer in American fiction — and now tell the truth about it." ¹ who were agitating for

In the fall of 1887, Garland returned to Boston with the manuscript and other sketches he had written. He presented them successively to Harpers and the Century and other leading magazines of the time, but they were all rejected. The editors considered the stories too brutal and suggested that he write less frankly. At this point, however, Garland refused to compromise. ¹ political radical.

During his second visit to Boston, Garland attended a lecture delivered by Henry George in Faneuil Hall. George was attracting considerable attention as an economic reformer who offered a program of land and tax reforms as a solution to poverty. Garland had been attracted to George by an earlier reading of his Progress and Poverty, which outlined the basis of the Georgist theory. Garland had found there a solution and a program of action for the problems with which he was immediately concerned. After the lecture, Garland arranged a meeting with George and the friendship

1 Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 371.

which followed greatly influenced Garland's career as a reformer. During the next ten years, Garland was to become prominent as an agrarian reformer and a devotee of the Single Tax Plan.

Shortly after his meeting with George, Garland joined the Anti-Poverty Brigade, a group of noisy and persistent political radicals who were agitating for economic reform. He volunteered to speak at an organization meeting and his Sunday address which Garland later described as a "heretical harangue" was reviewed in the Transcript. The protest was immediate. Overnight, Garland had reached the lime-light of conservative Boston's disapproval and had won the recognition of the forces of reform. He soon became known as a lecturer and political radical.

Garland's chief ambition was to become a writer, however, and his desire was given additional impetus when he read Howells' book, The Minister's Charge, and he wrote a glowing review of it for the Transcript.

A meeting was arranged with Howells, who at this time was clearly the most discussed literary personality in Boston. He was in the full tide of his powers and his challenging social criticisms were widely debated. His books were being read aloud in reading clubs for the enjoyment of his delicate humor and graceful yet incisive style. The critics praised his characteri-

zations. Garland fairly idolized Howells, avidly followed his lectures, read his books, and seized every opportunity to visit the man and to discuss his literary and social views. Howells' success deeply impressed Garland, and was the greatest single influence upon Garland's determination to become a writer. Through Clements, editor of the Transcript, Garland also became acquainted with James Herne, the popular playwright. Garland was delighted with the homey American quality of Herne's dramatic pieces, and they struck up a friendship which lasted throughout Herne's lifetime. In the summer of 1889, Garland returned to his former home in the Dakotas. He was appalled by the deterioration of the homestead area. Two seasons of drought had reduced the promising farms to desolation. The wheat crops were alarmingly light in the face of a falling market price. Everywhere there was discontent and misery, and out of the common dissention there rumbled murmurs of rebellion against God and government. Moreover, Garland was affected strongly in a personal sense. His family fortunes were at their lowest ebb; his father was near bankruptcy and his mother had suffered a stroke induced by years of hard farm labor. It was this second visit to the west which completely confirmed Garland in his convic-

tions on the need for reform. He began to write with bitter resentment and a vigorous intention to tell the truth about the plight of the Western farmer who was an innocent victim of both man and the weather and the innocent pawn of greed and ignorance. In this spirit, he finished A Prairie Heroine, a study of a crisis in the life of a despairing farmer's wife which presented a tragic and hopeless common case. Aware that the story was too grim and rebellious for the dignified Century, Garland sent the manuscript to the Arena, a new Boston review whose spirit was frankly radical.

"All this", says Garland, "will explain why The story was immediately accepted and Garland was amazed to find a note from the editor, B.O. Flower, saying that the Arena welcomed the expression of strong opinions and urging Garland to submit more of the same frank material. This endorsement by Flower was another significant episode in Garland's career. Flower, though a local pride in the color and truth of his work. In a young man, was attracting considerable attention as a crusading editor. He devoted his magazine to controversial material and dedicated himself to social progress as a champion of reform. Garland became a regular contributor to the Arena which published, in addition to a number of his essays, his play, Under the Wheel, and The Declaration of Rights. It was

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border. 115.

Flower who suggested that Garland collect and publish his short stories which Garland later issued under the title of Main Travelled Roads.

Main Travelled Roads remains as Garland's most powerful and pointed social protest, the full outburst of the indignation which Garland experienced upon his return to the West from Boston. It is significant to note also that this work was produced during a time of great personal sorrow; his young sister Jessie had died suddenly, his mother was hopelessly crippled and his father was aged and near bankruptcy. Leave Beauty out of the picture.

"All this", says Garland, "will explain why the dedication was bitter with revolt. It will explain also why the comfortable, the conservative, those who farmed the farmer, resented my thin gray volume of acrid accusation".¹ Fiction with my polemics".

The protest was instant and astonishing to Garland who believed that literary people of the West would take a local pride in the color and truth of his work. Instead, he found himself execrated by critics as a bird willing to foul his own nest. Editorials poured into his office to prove that his pictures of the border were false, statistics were provided to show that pianos and Brussels carpets adorned almost every Iowa farmhouse, and tilling the soil was declared by numerous

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 415.

correspondents to be the noblest vocation in the world. Garland was called a rabble-rouser, an anarchist, and a prophet of hate.

In spite of the general outcry, Garland nevertheless received encouragement from a few of the writers who admired him. Whitman hailed him as the literary pioneer of the West, and Howells, while praising him, left him a word of warning, advising him to exemplify and not to preach, not to allow his stories to degenerate into tracts. Similar advice came from Richard Watson Gilder, who urged him not to leave Beauty out of the picture.

more lucrative outlet by Gilder for his literary endeavors. Garland achieved a measure of security and set about to avoid the fault of mixing his fiction with my polemics".¹

The protest and the "friendly council" of his exemplars brought about a division between Garland the reformer and Garland the artist.

Garland had concrete evidence of the practicality of the dichotomy when he submitted a manuscript, A Spring Romance, to Gilder, editor of the Century. The story, deliberately stripped of controversy and grim realities, won Gilder's approval and a substantial fee for Garland. Flattered by Gilder's recognition

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 412.
1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 417

and awakened to the financial possibilities of his less controversial material, Garland, by 1895, definitely decided to separate his social protest and his literary endeavor. He freely acknowledged where the emphasis would be placed, however, by admitting that his "reform notions were subordinate to the desire to take honors as a novelist".¹

It is significant that Garland found financial advantage in his dual role as reformer and man of letters. Supplied by Flower with campaign funds and a publication outlet for his reform literature and granted an even more lucrative outlet by Gilder for his literary endeavors, Garland achieved a measure of security to the extent that he was able to recognize his earnest ambition to rescue his parents from their pioneer isolation and relocate them on the family homestead at the place of his birth. For himself, Garland established a headquarters in Chicago, confident that the midwestern metropolis would one day be the center of a truly American art.

Chicago in 1893 was a large, sprawling city which was much more industrial than cultural in its outlook and aspirations. Scattered throughout the population however, were a small number of young aesthetes, the

"Bunnies" and a number of writers such as Eugene Field,

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 412.

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 4

artists, writers, and sculptors who were struggling for recognition. But in those days, as Garland phrased it, "Art was young and timid in Cook County".¹ There was almost no cultural organization, and Garland, partly because he recognized the mutual stimulation and inspiration which artists could give each other and partly because he simply enjoyed being surrounded by artistic personalities, assumed a certain leadership in establishing clubs and in attracting established and promising writers and artists as members.

A lecture called Impressionism in Art which Garland delivered in Chicago and in which he vigorously endorsed the so called "New Art" and "The Open Air School of Painting" won for him the instant attention of the artistic circle in general and of Loreda Taft in particular. Taft was the foremost Chicago sculptor of the time and a recognized leader in artistic thought. Through Taft, Garland joined the "Bunnies", an association which included Bessie Potter, Edward Kemey, Oliver Grover, Charles Brown, Herman MacNeill and other young artists of promise. The group met informally in Taft's studios and presented a united front against criticisms of their art. He also became a member of the "Little Room" club, which included most of the "Bunnies" and a number of writers such as Eugene Field,

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 4

Opie Read, Ralph Clarkson, George Ade and Henry Fuller.

Garland's club activities expanded beyond these modest beginnings. He helped to establish the "Cliff Dwellers", which he saw as a rallying point for Midland artists and writers and he was instrumental in getting the site and funds for the Century Club in the Huntington Library. An ardent and active club man, Garland was convinced that associations such as these would one day make Chicago an important cultural center.

Chicago in a very real sense became the scene of Garland's struggle with his own art. Soon after his arrival he wrote and published Crumbling Idols which he intended as a manifesto of the new art. An ardent plea for a native American literature, based on uniquely American ideals and philosophies, he hoped in the book to establish himself as an art critic. From Chicago he travelled widely to the South and West in search of new material to authenticate the backgrounds for a whole series of romantic novels which he produced during the period. He avidly courted the attention of American and European artists, eager to be received by them and to be stimulated by their encouragement. He could be counted upon to champion any cause of promise and to grace and significant aesthetic gathering.

While in Chicago, Garland married Zumile Taft, by the sister of Loreda Taft, the sculptor, and the daughter of a prominent family. They had two daughters, Constance and Isabella.

By 1915, Garland's dream of Chicago's future had faded and he returned to New York, convinced that Chicago would never reach his earlier expectations and satisfied that his future lay in the more secure Eastern environment of established literary tradition and in closer proximity to his publishers.

Upon his return to New York, Garland began his autobiographical period, producing a series of novels which narrated the family history. The works were well received and the first of these in particular, The Son of the Middle Border is still acclaimed as Garland's greatest literary accomplishment.

By slow degrees, Garland was realizing his ambitions. Though he never became wealthy, Garland did achieve security and more important, won the literary recognition he so passionately sought. In 1918, he was elected to the American Academy, which was to Garland a hallowed circle. In 1921, he was given the Pulitzer Prize in biography and in 1922 was awarded an honorary doctor's degree from the University of Wisconsin. His improved financial condition permitted him to maintain summer residence in London and a

mountain retreat in the Catskills. He was received by, if not intimate with, the privileged classes which he once reviled but had now come to admire.

By 1930, Garland, comfortable and established, turned his efforts to reminiscences and criticism, and in the next ten years produced a series of reminiscent excursions on his literary activities and critical evaluations of his associates. The volumes are dreary and discursive, lacking in vitality and far too personal to be of general interest, enlightened only by the intimate glimpses and anecdotes of the many great personalities who left deep impressions on the era and on Garland himself.

Garland, the occasional realist and literary opportunist, died in 1940, a novelist of reputation and for a time, at least, a significant voice in American reform. After fifty years of effort, the prairie farmer was far from the security for which he had labored. His rented, unimproved land was depleting, his obligations were increasing, and he was caught in a cycle of brutal toil and poverty. And, he was but one of the economic victims of the times — Across the entire country there swelled a chorus of protest of the

1. See John D. Hicks, *The Peasant Revolt*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1931; also, Oscar Cargill, *The Social Revolt*, New York, Macmillan, 1933.

II

SOCIAL THEORY

It was inevitable from the beginning that Garland would be attracted to social reform. The first twenty years of his life were spent in the rural Middle West during troubled, turbulent times.¹ Immediately preceding his birth was the colorful era of Western expansion, not the thrilling or picturesque exploits of the adventurer but the determined and equally heroic struggle of the frontier farmer to make a permanent home upon the land. Theirs was not the spectacular lure of gold but the call of fertile land which offered a home and security in return for hard work.

The pioneer did not travel Westward alone. With him went the land speculator, the money lenders, and the business interests which bought, traded and rented at a profit. After fifty years of effort, the prairie farmer was far from the security for which he had labored. His rented, unimproved land was depleting, his obligations were increasing, and he was caught in a cycle of brutal toil and poverty. And, he was but one of the economic victims of the times — Across the entire country there swelled a chorus of protest of the demands of the Plainsman, while "Coin" Harvey

1. See John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1931; Also, Oscar Cargill, The Social Revolt, New York, Macmillan, 1933.

impoverished, victims of unbridled capitalism and
 greed. The Grange had been social or at
 most The decade of the eighties witnessed the rise of
 the reform champions: Henry Adams and his denuncia-
 tion of political corruption and machine power; Theo-
 dore Roosevelt, the standard bearer of civic reform;
 Henry George, the economic theorist and spokesman for
 the impoverished; Edward Bellamy, the Utopian Roman-
 cer; William Howells, the Christian Socialist; James
 Baird Weaver, the clarion of the Populists; William
 Jennings Bryan; "Coin" Harvey; General Cockey; Igna-
 tius Donnelly; John Altgeld; and a host of others.
 The decade saw the rise of the Grange, the Farmers
 Alliance, and the organized action of farm coopera-
 tives. The discouragement of all the oppressed was
 finding collective expression in a national unity.
 As ten-cent corn and ten percent interest troubled
 Kansas, so six-cent cotton inflamed Georgia, and both
 were frankly sympathetic with Montana and Colorado
 miners who suffered from a drop in the price of silver.
 To express the meaning of this revolt, a number of
 radical orators were commissioned and in the field.
 Mary Ellen Lease and "Sockless Jerry" Simpson voiced
 the demands of the Plainsman, while "Coin" Harvey
 stirred the "Silver Bugs" of the 90's almost to a
 beyond the earliest primers which served only to stim-
 ulate an appetite which would never be fulfilled.

frenzy. It was an era of fervent meetings and fulminating resolutions. The Grange had been social or at most commercially cooperative in its activities, but the Farmers Alliance came as a revolt. One and all, the victims found haven in the People's Party which was challenging the old-line political conservatives.

Hamlin Garland, like the others, looked for reasons to explain the poverty and deprivation of the people from whom he came. Reared as he was in poverty, gifted with sensitivity and intelligence, he was determined to voice the injustices of the border world. As a child, his keen observation quickly noted the comparison among the tenant farmer, the landowner, and the city dweller. His youthful eyes noted the rough garb, the knarled hands, the wearisome stoop of the tenant as opposed to the grace, charm and sophistication of his more fortunate neighbors. As a youth, he knew the despair of crop failure, blight, and drought, which were frequently the reward of endless labor. He witnessed the constant migration of farmers who, leaving the land on which they had toiled in vain, went in search of more fertile land or a homestead free from the exorbitant rents of the landowner. He saw his childhood friends pressed into early service behind the plow, denied the advantages of education beyond the earliest primers which served only to stimulate an appetite which would never be fulfilled.

Most of all, his sensitive nature rebelled against the drudgery of women whose endless labor made them old before their time.

Exercise their natural instincts to trade which would enrich the people in California. "Is it not time that the human hand ceased to be primarily a bludgeon for hammering a bare living out of the earth? Nature, all bountiful, indiscriminating, would under justice, make such a toil unnecessary. My heart burned with indignation. With William Morris and Henry George I exclaimed, 'Nature is not to blame... Man's laws are to blame!'.¹

Eager for justice, Garland thought that he had found a solution in the economic credo of Henry George.

Garland became acquainted with George in Boston. George had been attracting widespread attention among agrarian groups for his economic philosophy, the central themes of which were a single tax plan and the abolition of trade barriers.² George advised the collection of economic rent by the government based on the strict assessed valuation of land, exempting all buildings or improvements of any sort. He believed that the plan would bring all idle lands into use and would discourage the large holdings of unused lands by banks and corporations since no one could afford to keep strictly taxed land out of production. He believed further that the revenue from such a plan

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 363.

2. See Henry George, Progress and Poverty, New York, Doubleday, 1926; Also, C.O. Steele, "Our Credo", The Freeman, VI (May 1943) 3.

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 313.

would be sufficient for all legitimate operations of government and that no other taxes would be necessary. The abolition of trade barriers would free men to exercise their natural instincts to trade which would enrich and raise the standard of living of all the peoples of the world. George, who began his campaign in California, carried the idea eastward to New York City where he unsuccessfully became a candidate for mayor. Believing in the international aspects of his plan, he brought his ideas to England and to Ireland, where he was twice imprisoned. His Progress and Poverty, a manifesto of his economic views, published in 1879, attracted much attention. In 1893, Garland attended a George lecture in Faneuil Hall in Boston which inspired him to read Progress and Poverty. Here, Garland found the program he had been seeking. In comment on the work, Garland said,

(famous for her admonition to Kansas farmers to "raise less corn") "Unrestricted individual ownership of the earth, I acknowledged to be wrong and I caught some glimpse of the radiant plenty of George's Ideal Commonwealth. The trumpet call of the closing pages filled me with a desire to battle for the right. Here was a theme for the great orator. Here was opportunity for the most devoted evangel".¹

His efforts attracted the attention of H.O. Flower, and for almost a decade Garland travelled in the Georgist camp. In 1886, he joined the Anti-Poverty Brigade and closely followed George as a speaker. His writings

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 313.

and lectures made him prominent as an agrarian radical and devotee of the single tax plan. He joined the Populists, who, representing the farmers in the West, were the first great social realists of the new era; the first to speak openly and bravely of the dangers of plutocracy, the first to convey something of the bewilderment and anguish a whole generation felt in the disillusionment that followed the Civil War. Populism, being essentially a ground swell of protest, was the first to influence a folk literature based on common needs and a common struggle. Garland offered his services to the Populist State Central Committee of Iowa and actively campaigned in the interests of the third party. He spoke at picnic grounds, livery stables and conventions, his indignation growing sharper at every stop. Along with other eager young reformers such as the sharp-tongued Mary Ellen Lease (famous for her admonition to Kansas farmers to "raise less corn and more hell") and the persuasive Jerry Simpson, he journeyed from one meeting place to another inciting protest, arousing public confidence in victory and the subsequent reform legislation.

His efforts attracted the attention of B.O. Flower, crusading editor of the Arena, who financed Garland on trips to Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska, interviewing farmers, speaking for the Populists, and recording

his experiences of the privation and discontent which he witnessed for the Arena. Thus it was that Garland became a literary reformer. Encouraged by Kirkland and Howells to write about the things he knew, presented with a concrete program of action by George and the Populists and now offered a publication outlet in the Arena, Garland seized the opportunity to tell the story of the impoverished farmer and to sow the seeds of his own bitter rebellion.

Haskins pressed his family into service to improve the farm. "I grew up on a farm and I am determined once and for all to put the essential ugliness of its life into print. I will not lie, even to be a patriot... I am a competent witness and I intend to tell the truth".¹

Three novels, A Member of the Third House, Jason Edwards, and A Spoil of Office; the collection of short stories, Main Travelled Roads and Other Main Travelled Roads, and the drama Under the Wheel were the result of this determination. Through these works march a parade of characters, slaves of the land, subjects of the most brutal toil, victims of the perversity of nature and the parasitic demands of the landowner and speculator. Always on the surface is Garland's bitter indictment of the greedy landlord and the corrupt politician who permit this merciless exploitation.

1. Garland, Main Travelled Roads, 140.

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 416.

Garland achieved his greatest eloquence in Under the Lion's Paw, a short story in Main Travelled Roads. His protagonist, Mr. Haskins, leaves his farm, which was destroyed by grass-hoppers in the Dakotas, to return to Wisconsin. He rents a farm belonging to Jim Butler, an owner-parasite. "No slave in the Roman galleys could have toiled so frightfully and lived, for this man thought he was free and that he was working for his wife and babes"¹. Relentlessly, Haskins pressed his family into service to improve the farm which he hoped eventually to purchase. His efforts are in vain, however. He discovers that his improvements on what was once an almost worthless property have now added to its value and that his efforts have served only to enrich Butler, who in consideration of the improved value, proportionately increases the purchase price. Though the moral injustice of the situation is readily apparent, Haskins has no recourse. The demands of Butler as the legal owner of the farm would be upheld in courts, interpreting laws which permitted the exploitation of ignorant but innocent victims. Haskins is redrawn in numerous other characters in the Garland stories. Evident in them all is the farmers' basic honesty, simple faith, and dogged determination

1. Garland, Main Travelled Roads, 140.

to achieve security by their own efforts. With a song on their lips, they moved westward to wrest their livelihood from the soil. Their labors are frustrated and their optimism crushed by ignorance and greed. Men, women and children tread the same vicious circle, their cries of anguish ignored by the society which is responsible. Their "song of immigration had been in effect the hymn of fugitives".¹

A remarkable shift in emphasis followed Garland's publication of the works cited. The storm of bitter protest which greeted his work startled him. The quality magazines took no interest in such frankly rebellious material and only the most radical publications would publish it. Even his closest friends warned him against being too caustic. It became apparent to Garland that he had taken the wrong course. His chief ambition was to succeed as a writer and not as an orator and doctrinaire of political reform. His present course aligned him with the radicals and not the artists.

Garland decided to experiment. While still publishing his caustic reform material for the Arena, he composed a short story called A Spring Romance, a romantic three-part tale of Wisconsin which carefully

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 368

avoided grim realities and controversy, and sent it, to Gilder of the Century. Garland was startled to find it accepted and to be paid the enormous sum of five hundred dollars for the manuscript. He submitted a second attempt called A Little Norsk, a trivial, sentimental tale of a June and December romance in a western background. It too was accepted. The experiment was very important in determining Garland's subsequent career. He was flattered by the recognition of Gilder, whom he regarded second only to Howells in literary judgement, and more important, he was convinced that his literary success could be accomplished only by a more genteel literature. Garland, therefore, made his decision. He chose to follow Gilder whose tastes were aesthetic, rather than Flower, whose interests were ethical. He established himself in Chicago, no longer the militant crusader, but the romantic artist, his energies no longer directed toward social reform, but toward social criticism as a literary vehicle. His cause had now become his material. As subjects and literary material, all the unfortunates of the country came in to range. Still believing in the authenticity of background and character types, he travelled widely exploring new locales. Everywhere he found new unfortunates who needed an interpreter. One by one,

2. Garland, Captain of the Gray Horse Troop, 413.

he espoused the cause of the Indian, the mountaineer, the miner and the Alaskan primitive.

He found real inspiration in the Indian problem. Here was an opportunity for realism with an epic quality which his publishers were demanding. Here was a whole new field of literary exploitation whose problems could be treated without running the risk of giving personal offence or invoking controversy. Garland said,

"The trip into Indian territory turned out to be a very important event in my life. First of all it enabled me to complete the writing of the Captain... and started me on a long series of short stories depicting the life of the redman. It gave me an enormous amount of valuable material and confirmed me in my conviction that the Indian needed an interpreter".¹

And interpret them he did. He was convinced that the redman was passing, "as the buffalo had passed, as the plains and the wild spaces were passing, as every wild thing must pass before the ever thickening flood of the white ploughmen pressing upon the land".² (It is interesting to note that his former victims had themselves become oppressors.)

The redman was passing because of the inhumanity of the white man, which stemmed from two sources —

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 182.
2. Garland, Captain of the Grey Horse Troop, 413.
2. Ibid, 57.

the popular contempt for the Indian and the blunders of official Washington policies which were actually intended to help him. A brief conversation of the principals in the Captain of the Grey Horse Troop illustrates the popular attitude. In answer to a question, "What is a savage?", he replies,

Garland had little patience with the writers who regards: "A man who needs converting to our faith", he is said Jennie.
almost "A man to exercise the army on", said Noble Maynard.
Savage: "A man to rob in the name of the Lord", said Parker. 1

"The scalp-dance no more represents the Garlands also railed against the laws and policies made in Washington for the government of the Indian. represents the whiteman's civilization".
There was a concerted effort being made to locate the Indian geographically and to establish them as an agrarian group.

"Any attempt to make the Tetong conform to the isolated, dreary, lonesome life of the Western farmer will fail. He had always lived a communal life, with the voices of his fellows in his ears... He seldom worked or played alone. His worst punishment was to be banished from the lead, camping circle". 2
If the not coarse and he cannot afford to be unjust.

According to Garland, the government's unenlightened policy was making the Indian justly rebellious. He suggested a program for group settlement which would permit the Indian to keep his tribal associations. Garland carried out this theme in a series of novels developed out of his experiences with the Indian. The

1. Garland, Captain of the Grey Horse Troop, 298.

2. Ibid, 57. Captain of the Grey Horse Troop, 574

2. Ibid, 179.

3. Ibid, 298.

4. Ibid, 120.

As for the government's feeble attempt at education, Garland remarked, and The Book of the American Indian. The Captain is a study of the Indian problems

"I am not one to be teaching creeds that are dying out of our own life; to be clean, to be peaceful, to be happy --- these are the precepts I would teach them." ¹

Garland had little patience with the writers who regarded the Indian as a wild beast and savage. He is almost Rousseauistic in his concepts of the "Noble Savage". He observed,

"The scalp-dance no more represents the redman's daily life than the bayonet-charge represents the whiteman's civilization".²

The white man does not properly appreciate the Indian's way of life. His natural environment is to be preserved not destroyed.

"My conviction is that savagery held more true happiness than we have yet realized and that civilization does not advance the sum of human happiness as it should".³

If the white man would help the Indian, he must lead, not coerce and he cannot afford to be unjust.

"The bearer of the torch should not burn, he should illumine".⁴

Garland carried out this theme in a series of novels developed out of his experiences with the Indian. The

1. Garland, Captain of the Grey Horse Troop, 154
2. Ibid, 179.
3. Ibid, 298
4. Ibid, 120

most significant are the Captain of the Grey Horse Troop, Moccasin Ranch, and The Book of the American Indian. The Captain is a study of the Indian problems through the eyes of a white man who is frankly critical of the attitude of his own people. The Book of the American Indian is supposedly related by the Indian who pictures his life as he endured it. A highlight of the latter novel is the Indian version of the famous Custer episode in which the Indians are the heroes and Custer the victim of his own brutality and aggression.

Garland was pleased and flattered at the success of his Indian novels. He was delighted that the audience which had protested so loudly over the brutality of his early work received his new effort with acclaim.

"My tales of the Indian had created a friendlier spirit among my readers. My later themes were happily outside the controversial belt. Concerned less with the hopeless drudgery and more with the epic side of Western life, I found myself almost popular."¹

Garland's decision to court the good will of his readers had succeeded. He was determined to permanently avoid controversy and offence, and passed from a crusader into a Romantic-Regionalist writer of fiction. His significance as a social reformer had come to an end.

1. Kazin, Alfred, On Native Grounds, 16.

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 182.

III

THE ROMANTIC-REALIST

"Realism in America, whatever it owed to contemporary skepticism and the influence of Darwinism, poured sullenly out of Agrarian bitterness, the class hatreds of the eighties and nineties, the bleakness of small-town life, the mockery of the nouveaux riches, and the bitterness in the great new proletarian cities." ¹ "No one invented it", said Howells, "it came".

That Garland first emerged as a realist can be explained in at least three ways:

First, the realistic literary medium seemed best suited to his demands for social reform, it offered the best opportunity for his expression of his youthful indignation. Garland had endured the life on the border and was convinced that he could make others know it as he knew it. He wrote,

Thirdly, Garland's emergence as a realist was most immediate. "I was ready to concede with the realist that the poet might go round the earth and come back to find the things nearest at hand the sweetest and best of all, but that certain injustices, certain cruel facts must not be blinked at." ²

Secondly, the sudden popularity of realism and the success of its exponents were encouraging to an aspiring

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 350.

1. Kazin, Alfred, On Native Grounds, 16.

2. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 384.

author. Howells, Eggleston and Kirkland were among the top writers of his day. A visit to Kirkland, the author of Zury, gave him the impetus he needed. Kirkland praised Garland's western sketches, urged him to write fiction of the border background, and convinced Garland that he might become the interpreter of the Middle West. Garland was further encouraged by Howells who had already achieved much distinction as a realist. The older man's eloquent inquiry into social evil thrilled him, and his success as a writer inspired him -- here was a champion such as the young Garland

dreamed of becoming. His youthful impatience, his personal frustrations fired him to dig even deeper and to probe more ruthlessly into social problems than had his model. "While I admired the grace, the humor, the satire of Howells' books, I was saved from anything like imitation by the darker and sterner material in which I worked".

Thirdly, Garland's emergence as a realist was most immediately influenced by his trip to Boston in the summer of 1887 which ripened the seeds of revolt that had been sown intermittently throughout his boyhood. His trip and his studies there had served to bring into sharper focus the miserable circumstances

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 350.

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 350.
 2. Ibid, 161.

in which he was born and deepened his enthusiasm to write his protest of such appalling inequality.

grim, gloomy tales, told in settings of shanty-like cabins. "New England, rich with its memories of great men and women, had no direct inspiration for me, a son of the West. It did not lay hold of my creative imagination, neither did it inspire me to sing of its glory. My desire to create the West was growing... I studied the land, musing upon its distinctive qualities and while I acknowledged the natural beauty of it, I revolted from the gracelessness of its human habitations... The lack of color, and of charm in the lives of its people, anguished me. I asked myself, 'Why have the stern facts never been put into our literature as they have been used in Russia and in England?' " Terrible rebellion of

a Lucretia Burns. Their physical ugliness is as Painfully aware of the injustice and cruelty which nothing in the face of their spiritual degradation. were the lot of the border farmer and which were identified with Garland's own frustration, the indignant vigorous brutality towards their fellow men, as is demonstrated in such tales as William Bacon's Man pleasant truth.

and A Preacher's Love Story. Ignorance and misunder-

standing. "I began to write, composing in a glow of about flaming conviction... I had no doubts, no hesitations about the kind of effect I wished to produce. I perceived little that was humorous in 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. On the contrary, the life of such a family appealed to me as almost most unbelievable in its futility." ² Situation,

There followed Main Travelled Roads, Other Main

day after day and year after year cannot easily keep gentle; sooner or later, the

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 350. cold
2. Ibid, 161.

Travelled Roads, and Prairie Folks, which together form his most significant realistic work. They are grim, gloomy tales, told in settings of shanty-like cabins of rude furniture and plank floorings. Outside are the flies, the odor of barnyards and the inevitable dust or mud. In such habitations the toiling men and women sink at times almost to the level of beasts. They are ugly and often ridiculous, but heartbreaking in their rude despair. Warped with poverty and toil, they take on the pitiful subterfuge of a Daddy Deering, or the terrible rebellion of a Lucretia Burns. Their physical ugliness is as nothing in the face of their spiritual degradation. Their lives of toil produces savage passions and a vigorous brutality towards their fellow men, as is demonstrated in such tales as William Bacon's Man and A Preacher's Love Story. Ignorance and misunderstanding permit a question of property to bring about A Division in the Coolly. The careless and negligent brutality of her husband and the nagging of her in-laws make Agnes Kinney's life a purgatory. Years of unrecognized labor bring dreadful rebellion to Lucretia Burns. As Douglas Radburn sums up the situation,

"Men who toil terribly in filthy garments day after day and year after year cannot easily keep gentle; sooner or later, the frost and the grime, the heat and the cold

will 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." 1

The most terrible thing about the stories is There are brighter aspects in the Garland settings, the hopelessness of their outlook; most of the characters seem to come to an absolute impasse. The heroic ugliness. Garland admits in his preface to Other of A Stop Over At Tyr is literally forced by circumstances into a marriage that strikes a death-blow to

all his "youth and love are able to transform a pulled bleak prairie town into a poem, and to the holmake of a barbed-wire lane a highway of inequality of opportunity and environment make the brother

Yet, watching the merry-making of the Groves School-house, the gaiety of the racing drivers, the shyness, "coupling off" in the intermissions of farm labor, we are confronted always by the question of how long the youthful love will last, how long before the rosy, laughing girls will be transformed into gray and shapeless slatterns, the dashing youths into surly brutes. The landscape, marred only by the habitations of man, loses not a whit of the beauty it bore to the dreaming eyes of the prairie boy; but, apt in death. We find

Simeon Burns trying to puzzle out the situation over "how much consolation does the worn and which weary renter find in the beauty of cloud

backers disputed while hard-working, discouraged far- 1. Garland, Other Main Travelled Roads, 112-13 2. Ibid, VIII, mered and wordless resentment toiled on.

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 262.

and tree or in the splendor of the sunset? Grace of flower does not feed or clothe the body, and when the toiler is both badly clothed and badly fed, bird song and leaf-shine cannot bring content". 1

The most terrible thing about the stories is the hopelessness of their outlook; most of the characters seem to come to an absolute impasse. The hero of A Stop Over At Tyre is literally forced by circumstances into a marriage that strikes a death-blow to all his ambitions. He "jumped into a hole and pulled the hole in after him". In Up The Coolly, the inequalities of opportunity and environment make the brother who went to New York rich and successful, the younger, who stayed behind and took up his father's burdens, poor and oppressed with a bitter sense of failure.

The tales are filled with scenes that are symbolic. Garland is at his best in the tender, pathetic story of Martha, in Behind the Low Green Door, who doesn't care to live but who never thought she would die so early and so unsatisfied, who never got to "the sunny place we girls used to think we'd get to", who never found rest except in death. We find Simeon Burns trying to puzzle out the situation over which Democrats and Republicans, Grangers and Greenbackers disputed while hard-working, discouraged farmers in bewildered and wordless resentment toiled on.

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 268.

We discover Williams, the frustrated violinist who turned to alcohol for his fulfillment. We see the despair of poor Haskins after his years of killing and fruitless labor who was "under the lion's paw...¹ half hid in the mist and there was no way out".

"The toilers are indeed of the Main Travelled Roads, the roads arid and brown with the choking dust of the summer, desolate with the dingy mud and stinging snow of winter, the road long and wearisome, almost always ungracious to the laboring feet that traverse it".²

The denunciation of the stories was immediate and bitter. "Editorials of criticism poured into the office", wrote Garland, "all written to prove that my pictures of the Middle Border were utterly false".³

There is no doubt that this criticism was a major factor in the remarkable change in Garland which was mentioned earlier. Sensitive, insecure, and burning with a desire to succeed, Garland was hurt and frightened by the storm of protest and the accusations of bad taste. Painfully aware of his humble origins, the accusations of crudity hit Garland in his most sensitive area. Eager for approbation, he had slavishly imitated what he considered was good taste.

Garland subsequently avoided controversy. He

1. Garland, Main Travelled Roads, 216
2. Dondore, Dorothy, The Prairie and the Making of Middle America, 323.
3. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 318.

Here indeed was a dilemma. Garland himself and his literary friends felt that he had the greatest chance for success in his interpretation of the frontier. His deep-seated moral indignation insisted upon a realistic treatment of that frontier. However, the people who bought his books and those who would insure his literary and financial success were shocked and horrified by the brutal truth. Garland was bewildered. He had a message to give and yet he dared not to offend. He tried a reconciliation - he decided to straddle the fence. He would write of the border and the things he knew but he would avoid injury to the tender sensibilities of his readers. His earlier statement: worked tirelessly to maintain

his farm and to provide small comforts and advantages

"Obscurely forming in my mind were two great literary concepts - that truth was of a higher quality than beauty, and that to spread the reign of justice should everywhere be the design and intent of the artist. The merely beautiful in art seemed petty, and success at the cost of the happiness of others a monstrous egotism." ¹ I seen with their husbands, covered with dust, clasping wailing babies in their arms, and who at twenty were not infrequently had given way to - the shoulders and flat and stiff in the hips, making degenerated into sallow and querulous wives. "I must be careful to keep a certain balance between Significance and Beauty. The artist began to check the preacher". ²

John Dutcher, intending a better fate for Rose, spared her Garland subsequently avoided controversy. Had an

1. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 374.

2. Ibid, 418.

abandoned his antagonistic crusading spirit in favor of a tempered, conciliatory approach. By 1893, he had passed into a Romantic-Regionalist writer of fiction. Still longing for a certain authenticity of background, he extended his range over the entire Western half of the United States. A whole series of romantic novels followed.

Of the romantic novels, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly (1895) is the most significant, for in it the reader can discover at least three of the media which Garland consistently employed. In it can be found the remnants of his crusading spirit, his pleas for the border victims. Rose was born in an uninspiring environment. Her father worked tirelessly to maintain his farm and to provide small comforts and advantages for Rose. He sought to protect her from the fate of the border women who, and morality with ease, and eventually

marries an accomplished husband. "at sixteen had beaux, at seventeen many actually married, and at eighteen might often be seen with their husbands, covered with dust, clasping wailing babies in their arms, and who at twenty were not infrequently thin and bent in the shoulders and flat and stiff in the hips, having degenerated into sallow and querulous wives of slovenly, careless husbands".¹

her story. Rose's yearning and struggles to succeed, John Dutcher, intending a better fate for Rose, spared her the drudgery of the field and gave her instead an early ambitions. Rose is truly the forerunner of 1. Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, 71.

opportunity for education and culture. He wanted an accomplished and refined young lady to grace his lonely life and to comfort his old age. In providing an education for Rose, he lost her. Rose's keen mind was quickly noted by her teacher, who inflamed her with a desire to enter the University. Reluctantly, John Dutcher was influenced to arrange it.

The second strand, Garland's entry into romantic fiction, is here evident. Rose, the sensitive and gifted heroine, by virtue of a University training and the tutorship of the Thatcher family, is transformed from a rude country girl into an accomplished and refined young lady. Her charm and refinement and her ladylike graces (with which all the Garland Romantic women were endowed) wins her many admirers. She becomes an accepted part of a cultured circle, discusses politics, art, and morality with ease, and eventually marries an accomplished husband.

Most significant is the third strand in Rose which is prophetic of Garland's most successful medium - autobiography. Aside from the fact that Rose is a woman, it is really Garland's story that he tells in her story. Rose's yearning and struggles to succeed, her passion for recognition, and the type of success which she achieved are all characteristic of Garland's early ambitions. Rose is truly the forerunner of

Garland's most successful work, A Son of the Middle Border.

It was sometime after Rose, however, before Garland became truly autobiographical. For the next fifteen years, he had all but abandoned his border crusade and devoted himself almost entirely to romantic fiction. It would not be accurate to say that he was no longer a moralist because in all of the stories he champions some cause or other, but the tone, characters and narrative are romantic. There is a strange combination of atypical heroes or heroines in a painstakingly authenticated background. The Eagle's Heart, Her Mountain Lover, Captain of the Gray Horse Troop, Money Magic, Cavanaugh and The Forester's Daughter are all illustrative of Garland's Romantic-Regionalist fiction. They indicate too his transition from a middle border local colorist. His expanding interest in material carried him from his native scenes to the East, South, far West and the mountains. Garland was no longer a spokesman and a champion, he was a landscape and portrait artist.

It is interesting to note in passing that Garland's mountain stories of the period were much less bitter than his prairie tales. Garland explains,

"All of my emotional relationships in the 'High Country' were pleasant, my sense of responsibility less keen, hence the noted

resentment and opposition to unjust social conditions which made my other books and articles an offence to my readers were almost entirely absent in my studies of the mountaineers. Lonely as their lives were, it was not a sordid loneliness. The cattle rancher was at least not a drudge. Careless and slovenly and wasteful as I knew him to be, he was not mean".¹

The explanation is quite acute, particularly the observation of his lessened responsibility. Considering the fact that Garland was deliberately avoiding controversy, this factor was even more important in the tempering of the belligerent and polemic quality which appeared in his earlier works. The border injustices were a personal injury and his protest and social criticism a personal invective. In the romantic novels, whose backgrounds are a safe distance from the scene of his own frustrations, Garland is able to review the social problems of others with sympathetic delicacy. He could not however, be so dispassionate in the handling of problems that were so immediately identifiable with his own.

His biography of U.S. Grant, written during this period (1898), is also clearly indicative of the decline of the "unflinching realist", as Garland once called himself. Still clinging to his passion for authentic detail, Garland "visited every town wherein

1. Garland, Laughter of the Middle Border, 229.

Ulysses Grant lived long enough to leave a distinct impression upon its citizens in a search for first hand material".¹ The sum total is far from a realistic treatment, however. Grant has probably never been so thoroughly eulogized or white-washed. He is always the gentleman, scholar, and patriot. Garland absolves him, not by evidence but by a testimony of faith, from any taint of the scandal which so characterized the Grant administration, making him guilty of nothing more than the human error of misplaced trust when the charges of corruption which were brought against the Revenue Department reached into the Presidential Cabinet. He absolves him from any complicity in the infamous Ward scandal, indicating again that Grant's faith in the honesty of his fellow men had made him the dupe of unscrupulous cheats. It is significant that he mentions not a whit of Grant's deterioration and drinking following the Presidency. The sole cause of his ill health is a cancer of the throat and throughout his illness, Grant remains the sober, considerate patient and patriot. There can be no doubt that in his search for material, Garland discovered much of the unpleasant truth, but he no longer had the inclination or the courage to print what was ugly or offensive. The Grant biography was another offering on the influences upon his development. He traced his story

1. Garland, Ulysses S. Grant, His Life and Character, V.

altar of appeasement. By 1917, Garland had returned to his first subject and he had found his best medium, autobiography. His Son of the Middle Border is without doubt his greatest work. Garland himself is the central figure, but out of the novel emerge some of the finest characters of American literature, characters who are poignant and unforgettable because they are real - the rigid yet kindly father, whose pioneer spirit and constant search for greener pastures leads the family over the border which Hamlin came to know so well; Mrs. Garland, who represents the ideal of all the pioneer mothers, a loving, hard working, uncompromising frontier woman who used all her strength to serve the material needs of her family and her native refinement to bring sweetness and inspiration to her children; Uncle David, the handsome, muscular, laughing giant who could work with awesome intensity but in whose soul stirred tuneful melodies which, when produced on the violin, brought gaiety to his neighbors and lightness to their tired feet; The McClintocks; the Babcocks; Professor Bush; all come to life on these pages, and Garland's own life and experiences take on an interesting reality. In striking detail, he noted his reactions to his environment and the influences upon his development. He traced his story

from the farm to the seminary to Boston and Chicago, ending with his residence there in 1893. They are chapters cut from life, a warm and interesting human experience.

A Daughter of the Middle Border is the second of the series. It carries on the family history from 1893 and tells of Garland's marriage to Zumile, his struggles to establish Chicago as an art center, the birth of his daughters and the death of his mother and father. It is a family history from 1893 to 1914. Though he was awarded the Pulitzer prize for the Daughter in 1921, it does not equal the literary mastery of the Son. Garland himself felt that the award was given to the Daughter as a continuation of the first work. Garland is still the central character of this book but notable missing are the border scenes and personalities. The Son chronicles Garland's struggle to rise above his environment. The Daughter outlines his struggle with his art.

The third biographical novel, Trail Makers of the Middle Border is chronologically first in the series of the family history. It is the story of Garland's father in Maine, his subsequent removal to Wisconsin, and his fortunes there. Trail Makers, though it does capture some of the border color, is not equal to the Son. It is an attempt to resurrect the story from the

memory of his father's accounts.

"I had in mind the desire to express the allurements which the woods and prairie lands of Wisconsin had for my father as a youth. Much of it was precisely as I remember him telling it, but as many parts of it had to be inferred, I was moved to change the names in it just enough to indicate the part which my imagination played in the effort to connect up the known facts of his life. I hoped to embody it with some part of the adventurous spirit which made the early fifties one of the most glamorous of our decades of discovery and settlement".¹

Unfortunately, however, Garland the imaginist did not have the strength of Garland the observer. His father's story is an idealized, imaginative narrative in a background more romantic than real.

Back Trailers from the Middle Border is the least effective of the autobiographical series. It is not so much a story as it is an apology. Garland, conscious of criticism, defends in it his removal to New York and his apparent abandonment of his native ground. He supports his action by saying,

"In taking the back-trail, we are as typical of our times as our fathers were of theirs."²

and, cites numerous illustrations to prove that he was not alone in the exodus. Howells, Hay, Eggleston, Twain, Hart, Markham, Masters, Pound, Fletcher, Eliot,

1. Garland, Back-Trailers from the Middle Border, 162.
2. Ibid, viii.

and Hemingway were, in his opinion, all back-trailers to the literary centers, recognizing the need for cultural association and the expediency of being near their publishers.

Back-Trailers clearly reveals the evolution of Garland. There was no doubt that he preferred the ease and comfort and artistic stimulation of his New York life to that of the pioneer. He reveled in the warmth of his apartment, remembering how he almost froze to death in a frontier cabin. He loved to push buttons for service, to find his milk at his door.

"There are still people who love to farm, to milk cows, to pick fruit and to dig potatoes - how else would we go on eating; but such things are not for me. I have had my share of activities. I am content to feed my goldfish and exercise my dog on the roof. I do not intend to play the hypocrite in the matter, urging others to go West as did Horace Greeley, while enjoying Times Square and Upper Broadway to myself." ¹

By 1923, Garland's happiest home was Madison Square and his "Friends of the city meant more than my Wisconsin neighbors". ² Garland was now comfortably established and respected as a writer. His break with Agrarians and Populists was complete.

It is significant that Garland back-trailed not

1. Garland, Back-Trailers from the Middle Border, 165.

2. Ibid, 263.

only from the border but from his earlier native Americanism. His fierce desire to acquire taste took him beyond the American scene. He traveled to London and found naive pleasure in establishing residence there, fairly gloating over the success of the Wisconsin farm boy who can provide European residence for his children. He reveled in the glories of English historical lore, its architecture and its artists, flagrantly courting the great and near-great and is flatulent in their recognition. His most serious social problem now is whether he should or should not give way to his former conviction and appear in a formal coat.

He back-trailed too from his earlier opinion of wealth. Having benefitted from the attention of the privileged, and having acquired a small but respectable corner on the world's goods, he felt inclined to justify the Capitalism he once reviled.

"All my life I heard much of the corruption of riches, the domination of the millionaire, and the criminal use of gold... It is only fair to say that in my later years I have found wealth to be a justifying, civilizing agent." ¹

At fifty-nine, Garland did not welcome violent change nor did he aspire to actively champion the cause of the underdog. Of the printers' strike he said,

1. Garland, Back Trailers from the Middle Border, 123.

"It may mean ruin to many of the periodicals and in this misfortune writers will share. It is all a part of the necessary and inevitable reconstruction of labor. So long as it moves in accordance with law, I have no complaint to make, but when it calls for a proletarian dictatorship, I become a conservative."¹

Garland feebly attempts to reconcile this attitude with his former position.

"Although a fairly consistent Republican, I have no antagonism to titles which have been won by scholarship, integrity, statesmanship and hard work... I believe in Ibsen's 'aristocracy of mind, character and will'. An inherited title is another thing."²

It is obvious that this is again a personal justification. Garland made the transition from poverty to moderate substance by dint of sacrifice and hard work. He felt that his achievement had earned him the right to privilege.

Garland moved a long way from Howells' prediction in 1894 -

"Garland... is taking on the world ingeniously and interestingly and he will never be sophisticated and I hope that he will never lose the simplicity of his ideal, sure as it was when he had Main Travelled Roads under his feet and throbbed with his fine, angry sympathy for the 'familiar and the low'".³

The angry if not the fine voice was stilled. Com-

1. Garland, Back-Trailers from the Middle Border, 128.
2. Ibid, 212.
3. Howells, William, "Mr. Garland's Books", North American, 178, 1894, 523-24.

fortable and almost smug in his financial security, Garland turned to reminiscent dreaming and self-appraisal. With exaggerated humility in his accomplishment, Garland undertook to explain his success and to evaluate his fellows. Garland, the reformer and would-be artist, had become Garland the critic.

IV

LITERARY THEORY

Garland's early success as a social critic and literary realist encouraged him to direct his efforts toward literary criticism. Shortly after his removal from Boston to Chicago, he published Crumbling Idols (1894), which contained twelve essays of his artistic philosophy, a somewhat windy but sincere plea for a native American literature. The essays contain five principal arguments:

1. Garland vigorously espouses the realistic medium believing that "truth is of greater significance than beauty" and that the design and intent of the artist should be to spread the reign of justice. The writer is at once a crusader who addresses himself to a mind prepared to listen. He destroys what is evil by displacement and not by attacking it directly.

2. Realistic treatment of subjects demands an intimate knowledge of them. Garland therefore urged localism as a means to the realistic method. He believed that writers should confine themselves to the specific areas with which they were familiar, and should treat of these areas faithfully and conscientiously, communicating their particular problems to the world. Localism is essentially an educating and reform technique.

3. Garland pleaded for a native American literature. He repudiated European influences and even rebelled against the cultural leadership of the East, which he felt was hopelessly steeped in European tradition. To Garland, a native literature was essentially Western, because he felt that only the Western civilization was singularly American.

4. Garland declared that a native American literature should stress the typically American philosophies of Democracy, Individualism and Progress as opposed to Aristocracy, Subservience and Conservatism. His own philosophy at the time was essentially optimistic, liberal and humanitarian.

"If the past was bond, the future will be free. If the past was feudalistic, the future will be democratic... If the past was the history of a few titled personalities riding high in obscure waves of nameless, suffering humanity, the future will be the day of high average personality, the abolition of all privilege, the peaceful walking together of brethren, equals before nature and before the law. And fiction will celebrate this life." 1

5. Garland advocated a realism which, though it was searching and representative, would remain on a level of moral decency.

"I resent those who would sluice upon us the worst in place of the best in Europe.

1. Garland, Crumbling Idols, 45-6.

The cynical blague of Paris, or the degenerate drama of Vienna is not the kind of culture the American Academy would import, just as it is opposed to the exportation of the worst and not the best of our own plays and novels. We stand for an exchange of the best and not the worst of modern art". 1

He advocated new forms and new themes and opposed the revival of old obscenities, vices and crimes. He argued for characteristic New World subjects and not the "worn-out sexual themes of the past".

"The new literature is concerned with the most hackneyed of all themes, seduction, robbery and murder. I advocated a fiction which was representative of the decent average not of the exceptionally bestial." 2

Garland's early optimistic faith in America is readily apparent. He calls himself a disciple of Spencer, believing in the inevitability of change, which he was sure, would be for the better. But, he exclaimed,

"until men come to see system and retrogression, and an endless but definite succession in art and in literature as in geologic change, until the law of progress was enunciated no conception of the future and no reasonable history of the past could be formulated". 3

Garland saw the literary artist as the educator and reformer who would bridge the gap between the distressing present and the brighter future. He believed that the

1. Garland, Back Trailers from the Middle Border, 157

2. Ibid, 165-66.

3. Garland, Crumbling Idols, 43.

writer, if he performed his true function, would educate others in social dynamics and would arouse them to endorse and actively support desirable social changes.

Garland's plea for a native Americanism in literature was not restricted to Crumbling Idols. He repeats the theme in Back-Trailers and gives it a more complete treatment in an article written for Current Opinion in 1924.

"In short, our fiction and our drama are in the process of being Europeanized. The themes and methods of treatment are increasingly alien to our tradition. Since the war, the number of our writers who are imitating the French, the Norwegian, and the Russian has notably increased. Half of the plays on our stage this year are said to be adaptations of farces from Vienna and Paris and several of our younger novelists are bringing to our fiction that eroticism which has so long been the peculiar province of the French novel. In others, the brutal plainness of speech of certain Scandinavian writers and the pessimistic animalism of modern Russian novelists appear while many of the English novels imported by our publishers are of the decadent quality of Matisse and Archipenko. Design is lost. The sense of humor which should be corrective is absent. It would seem that we are importing the vices and not the virtues of the Old World Art." ¹

Garland turned his guns not only upon the foreign importations but upon the foreign element in America, particularly in New York, which could'nt escape infiltration.

1. Garland, "Art in Our Times," Current Opinion, (Feb., 1924) 125.

"These concentration camps of foreign-born residents, many of them not citizens, had begun to affect our art, our drama, our fiction — in some ways to the good, but more often to the bad. The moving picture, the sensational press and the brutal novel flourished in this rank soil. In the reek of the city, an anti-American, anti-Puritan criticism had developed. These writers, European in tone and cynical in outlook set about to belabor the rest of America into their way of thinking... The alien element made New York a source of corruption in literature and in morals." ¹

This narrow and chauvinistic attitude is indeed far removed from the position he once held as a reformer and radical.

Garland saw Chicago as the great inland city of native America. In spite of its raucous and brawling exterior, he felt that it had great promise in the development of the arts. He worked energetically to make it an artistic center free from the corruption of European influences, courting artist, sculptors, musicians and writers in an effort to attract them to Chicago. He devoted his energies to establish a midwestern artistic circle, founded the Cliff Dwellers, which was a meeting place for midland artists and writers, helped to establish the Century Club for the same purpose, and solicited the financial backing of an art patron, Archer Huntington, to secure the site of the present library. He was an

1. Garland, Back-Trailers from the Middle Border, 312.

ardent promoter of the "salon" as a gathering place for talent and a means for artistic or philosophical conversation, aimed to exert a creative influence upon the literary personalities.

Garland did not remain long in Chicago, however. The artists he sought to attract never arrived in satisfactory numbers, the publishing houses which were to make Chicago a publication center never materialized. After extensive trips gathering material for the Life of Grant, Garland returned to New York, confident that his future lay in the East and convinced that his Chicago dream would never be realized.

Simultaneous with Garland's retreat from his indignant social protest and his vigorous realistic writing was his abandonment of his earlier literary views. Garland after his return to New York no longer preached "democratic art" in the old sense. Actually, the shift had begun even earlier. A previous chapter cited Rose of Dutcher's Coolly as a key work signaling Garland's decline as a crusader. This work offers similar illustration of his shift in critical theory, in line with his fierce desire to acquire taste:

"Taste is our weak point in America, and in the rural regions . . . well, there isn't any taste above that for shortcake, dollar chromos and the New York Repository." ¹

1. Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, 387.

There can be no doubt of Garland's course after 1893. Careful to avoid controversy, he eagerly acquired culture in an effort to ingratiate himself with his public.

But Garland was far from gratified with the results of this decision. His books, prepared in this new vein, were enjoying only a very modest success. He felt that the newspapers were ignoring him. He was bitterly disappointed when the new medium of the motion pictures, after one dismal attempt to film Hesper, passed up his material. The magazines were catering to a newly enfranchized public whose taste Garland called flippant, ephemeral and vulgar.

By 1928, it was apparent to Garland that his attempt to steer a middle course was a failure. It was clear that he would have to align himself with those who labored for art or those who labored for popular approval. In Back-Trailers, Garland announced his decision. His statement is as much a rationalization for his very modest success as it is an explanation.

"My position is that of an intellectual aristocrat; I have no confidence in a 'democratic art', if by that phrase is meant an art based on popular approval. With due regard for the welfare of the average man, I do not value his judgment upon wall paper or rugs or paintings. Why should his verdict on a book or a play be considered something mystically sure and high and final? The Tol-

stoyan belief in the intuitive rightness of the peasant has always affected me as sentimental nonsense. I am gratified when my work appeals to a large number of my fellow republicans, but if one of my books were to have a very wide sale, I should at once lose confidence in its quality. The judgement of the millions when it comes to a question of art is essentially wrong. Furthermore, as one who believes in selection, I have helped to form various clubs and societies where merit counts above success or good citizenship or social position. Wild as I may have been on political economy, I have never believed in artistic anarchy. Ethics and esthetics are separated fields of thought in my world." 1

In the same text, Garland claims to have gained much more personal satisfaction from his invitation to Fellowship in the American Academy than he could ever have had from popular success. Of his acceptance in 1918 Garland said,

"To be chosen as a fellow by these most distinguished 'senators' was an honor of the highest value, more than a degree from a University, for it was a call to comradeship with the men I most honored." 2

There can be no doubt of the sincerity of this statement. Entrance into the Academy was in part at least a realization of Garland's ambitions, for it symbolized an accomplishment in the art to which he aspired and won for him the recognition of the men he idolized. It meant that he was no longer a

1. Garland, Back-Trailers from the Middle Border, 78-80.

2. Ibid., 79.

rude country bumpkin on the fringe of culture, but as artist and a member of a charmed circle. It is significant, however, to note Garland's change in attitude toward the Academy once he had been accepted. He no longer thought of membership in the Academy as a reward for devoted public service as he once had, but he thought of it as a group apart, a hallowed circle of distinguished arbiters in the world of art.

"Such an organization is needed in a democracy at a time when economic ideals are confused with esthetic principles and where the tendency is to regard the ballot box as a means of judging what is best in art." 1

Thus it is easily apparent that Garland became much more thoroughly aristocratic in his literary views than he did in his economic philosophy. Though he had never abandoned a passive sympathy for the common man in his economic struggle, he disdained his esthetic judgement.

"Wishing the average man all his rights, and willing to strengthen his demand for a just wage, I refused to accept his literary judgement. 'Democracy in Art' is a specious phrase." 2

Garland's position can in part be explained by

1. Garland, Companions on the Trail, 211.
2. Garland, Back Trailers from the Middle Border, 139.

his inability to produce what the public demanded. "The magazines", he said, "were demanding hot stuff, and I had no such hot stuff to give".¹ It can be explained too by a natural distaste for vulgarity which lead Garland to repudiate the frank European realism which he never came to understand. Whether this is a strength or a weakness is debatable, but it is significant that Hamlin Garland, the middle-roader, had at long last declared himself and taken a definite stand. His declaration came too late, however. Except for the lip service he continued to pay to the localistic "veritism" which he once so vigorously espoused, he thoroughly repudiated Crumbling Idols and its appeal for courage and originality. His career as a creative artist was finished.

V

GARLAND'S STYLE

Garland's metamorphosis of style follows the same general pattern as his evolution from reformer to literary aesthete. His early works are characterized by harshness, bluntness, and an indifference to the more delicate nuances of style. In simple, direct language, he presented the unlovely facts, writing powerfully with a force that grew out of his own flaming convictions. His words are simple and earthy, deliberately pointed. Men did not perspire, they sweat; cows were not odorous, they stank; men were not indifferent, they were shiftless; women were slatternly, slovenly; landscapes were cold or torrid and always cheerless; employment was bondage, brutal toil; houses were shacks and hovels. In keeping with the picture he intended to portray, Garland's language was blunt, polemic and powerful. His sentences were short and forceful and the imagery startling and grim. A passage from Lucretia Burns is typical:

"Lucretia Burns had never been handsome, even in the early days of her girlhood. Now she was middle-aged, distorted with work and childbearing, and looking faded and worn as one of the boulders that lay beside the pasture fence near where she sat milking a large white cow.

She had no shawl or hat and no shoes for it was still muddy in the little yard

where the cattle stood patiently fighting the flies and mosquitoes swarming into their skins already wet with blood...

She rose from the cow's side at last, and taking her pails of foaming milk, staggered toward the gate. The two pails hung from her lean arms; her bare feet slipped on the filthy ground; her greasy and faded calico dress showed her tired and swollen ankles, and the mosquitoes swarmed mercilessly on her neck and bedded themselves in her colorless hair." 1

Garland's description of a prairie school is also typical of his forthright bitterness:

"Many a girl caught her death-cold in that miserable shack, and went to her grave a gentle martyr to shiftless management." 2

In language which was pithy and incisive, Garland the reformer sharply uttered his indictment against society.

Garland's shifting of emphasis from reform to literary romanticism brought about a corresponding change in style as well as in attitude. In Hesper (1903), his description of the heroine, Ann Rupert, makes her a very different person from Lucretia Burns.

"Raymond was fairly abashed by the grace and youthful charm of his visitor. She reminded him of the stories he had read of princesses visiting the huts of their peasantry. She was of good height, but the proud life of her head made her seem taller than she was, and the cut of her gown, the color of her gloves and hat, told of good taste and the service of the best tailors and milliners... Ordinarily the only color in her rather impassive

1. Garland, Other Main Travelled Roads, 81.
2. Garland, Boy Life on the Prairie, 26.

face lay in the vivid scarlet of her lips and the deep gray of her eyes, but, today, she was radiant with the most delicate pink. She was as dazzling as the bride in the songs of Solomon, and the young ranchers were awed and humbled".¹

In his consuming desire for literary success, Garland was willing, even eager, to imitate certain of the formulae which his successful exemplars had followed. He admired the grace and charm of Howells who, though a reformer, was never caustic or brutal. When Garland was alarmed and hurt by the protest which greeted his Main Travelled Roads, he consulted Howells who advised him to be fine and to temper his hostility. He also consulted Kirkland who warned him not to preach but to exemplify. To Garland, both men were riding an enviable wave of popularity and their advice greatly influenced him. Garland eagerly studied both and other recognized stylists in his determination to improve.

The most striking and obvious evidence of Garland's conscious imitation can be found in a poem in Boy Life. Describing a wild goose, he wrote:

"Ah! Say you so, bold sailor,
In the sunlit deeps of the sky,
Dost thou so soon the seed of time tell
As circling in yon shoreless sea
Thine unseen form goes drifting by?"²

1. Garland, Hesper, 34-5
2. Garland, Boy Life On The Prairie, 73-4.

The obvious similarity of the verse to Bryant's To A Waterfowl is readily apparent. Moreover, the technique of Apostrophe, the form, and the imagery are too similar to suggest an unconscious imitation. The work was undoubtedly an experiment.

Garland was convinced of the wisdom of a more elegant style when the Century, a magazine which he felt was an unquestionable organ of refinement, accepted his Wisconsin Romance, his first major aesthetic experiment. Progressively, his characters become less rude, nature less malevolent, landscapes less dreary. Women become dainty, refined, self possessed rather than slovenly, ignorant and mute. Even place names underwent a change. In writing Her Mountain Lover Garland admits,

"Just why I changed the names of trails, towns and valleys I cannot explain... Perhaps I resented the prosaic sound of 'Sneffles' and 'Montrose Junction'".¹

Garland was not entirely unsuccessful in his efforts to acquire taste. Though he unquestionably lost much of his force and intensity, he managed to achieve a generally pleasing uniformity of style and diction, and occasionally a genuine brilliance. His power of natural description, though studied and deliberate is often exquisite. Of the mountains, he wrote:

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 99.

"Snow covered, flaming like burnished marble, the range with high summits sharply set against the cloudless sky, upreared in austere majesty, each bleak crag gilded with the first rays of the morning sun. Above the warm brown plain, the giants towered remotely alien like ancient kings on purple thrones". 1

He saw a prairie as

"... The tender springing grass, the far-away faint and changing purple of the woods, the shimmer of the swelling prairie, leaping toward the flaming sun — all the inexpressable glow and pulse of blooming spring". 2

Of London he wrote:

"As we dashed through Surrey, I caught glimpses of Tudor mansions, thatched cottages and Norman towers, and longed to stay, to clutch at the beauty spinning by like a billowing web". 3

Garland frequently reaches a pinnacle of excellence worthy of the greatest artists in his figurative expressions. His description of a wheat field is characteristic:

"Deep as the breast of a man, wide as the sea, heavy-headed, supple-stocked, full of multitudinous, secret, whispered colloquies — a meeting place of winds and sunlight — our fields ran to the world's end." 4

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 140.
2. Garland, Boy Life on the Prairie, 87.
3. Garland, Back Trailers from the Middle Border, 185.
4. Garland, Son of the Middle Border, 147.

Of news he wrote:

"News makes no noise. It walks with velvet foot, it speaks in a murmur; it hastens, but it conceals in haste".¹

He describes a naive man's visions of "wild meadows" which were

"filled with game and free lands which needed only to be tickled with the hoe to laugh into harvest".²

Of Bertie in Money Mad, who like Garland was struggling to acquire taste, he wrote:

"She divoured Shakespearean bread, Ibsen roasts and comic opera cream puffs with almost equal gusto".³

Garland very infrequently attempted description of the abstract but devoted most of his attention to the concrete and visual. A description of the impression which the music of Wagner made upon Rose is illustrative of his skill in this area:

"The voice of Wagner came to her for the first time and shook her and thrilled her and lifted her into the wonderful regions where the green trees dripped golden moss and the grasses were jewelled in the very truth. Wistful young voices rose above the lazy lap of the waves, sad with love and burdened with

1. Garland, Captain of the Gray Horse Troop, 37.
2. Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, 74.
3. Garland, Money Magic, 235.

beauty which destroyed. Like a deep-purple cloud death came, slowly, resistlessly, closing down on those who sang, clasped in each other's arms. They lay dead at last, and up through the hovering cloud their spirits soared like gold and silver flame, woven together, and the harsh thunder of the gray sea died to a sullen boom." ¹

The stylistic beauty to which Garland occasionally rose won him some contemporary recognition as an artist. It is doubtful, however, that it was compensation enough for the loss of his early promise as a realist.

1. Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly, 235.

VI

FINAL ESTIMATE

That Garland failed as a realist, and consequently as a significant artist, is generally agreed. The circumstances of the time and place of his birth placed him at the very core of the realistic movement. He matured with it, and his early experiences and utterances identified him with it. The opening struggle for realism made a timid beginning in social criticism and it clearly lacked a champion with the courage to write boldly and frankly and with the penetration to go beyond the suave satirical analysis of Howells into a forthright and unvarnished social representation. Garland might have become such a champion, for his early works demonstrated his promise. Yet, though he might have been a charter member and a director in the movement, the unfortunate fact is that he was only an over-night visitor who checked out before he became prominent and before his own powers had a chance to mature. That he did fail as a realist is an obvious fact. Why he failed is not so obvious.

The less penetrating and more numerous of the Garland critics attribute his failure to his own ambition. They label Garland a literary "opportunist" who turned his back on social criticism for a contem-

porary reputation and financial success. Uncharitable as the accusation is, it is not without truth. Garland himself admits "my reform notions were subordinate to my desire to take honors as a novelist"¹, and when he perceived that a more genteel literature had better opportunity for publication and that it met with less antagonism from his readers, he wrote what his publishers demanded and catered to what he believed to be the public's tastes.

A closer examination will reveal that Garland's failure as a realist was more fundamental than simple opportunism, however. It will reveal that Garland was never a realist in the true sense of the word. It will bear out that his first association with the movement was one of circumstantial accident, that he never fully understood realism and that he lacked faith in what he did understand.

Garland never had the opportunity or the inclination to completely understand realism. The only models he had were Eggleston's semi-realistic tales of familiar scenes and Howells' discreet and expurgated analyses of manners. The American realistic movement was in a tender formative stage and though the European realists, Goldoni, Valdes, Galdos, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Daudet and Zola, were at the full tide of expression, Garland did not profit by their example.

subject and his audience were passing. He repeatedly expressed his urgency to write of the border, to tell his stories before the generation which would be interested in his material was gone. He tells of being hurried by his publishers to produce while there was still a market. It was this narrow regionalistic conception of realism that made Garland provincial.

Garland's limitation stems also from his motivation for realism, which arose almost entirely from a personal indignation. The only writing that can be termed realistic stemmed not so much from his literary as from his social convictions based on the injustices which he and his family had endured. This identification of his own problems with his material accounts for the vigor of his early work, just as it accounts for the decline of that vigor when Garland had succeeded in rising above his environment. Once he and his family had escaped, his indignation waned. His forthright and brutal treatment of the frontier had resolved into a semi-romantic, reminiscent, almost wistful localizations. Loss of intimacy with the border made him feel that the border no longer existed — as indeed it didn't in the old way. Changing times brought new problems which were no longer identified with Garland's own. In his later bio-

He was repelled by their frankness, their vitality and penetration. Convinced that they were immoral sensationalists, he repudiated their influence before he understood them or could profit from them. To Garland, realism was elementary "truth-telling" with discreet reservations. His passion for "Veritism" - a term which he borrowed from the French - allowed him to produce a series of stories which were grim and bleak in their economic implications but an exaggerated Puritanical inclination forbade a frank penetration into personal morals.

Further, Garland mistakenly identified realism with regionalism and confused the technique with the cause. Local color, which should have been his method, became instead his end. Long before he had fully exploited his "border" material, he spent his energies finding new areas to develop, new scenes to portray. Though he could never entirely avoid making moral references, his point of concentration was the authenticity of background, edited, of course, in terms of his own sensitive discretion. This narrow regionalistic interpretation of realism resulted in a lack of faith in the universality and the permanence of his medium which was in turn responsible for his abandonment of the border crusade. He felt his cause too limited, too provincial, and that both his

graphy, he is almost reverent of the departed frontier.

"It all lies in the unchanging realm of the past - this land of my childhood. Its charm, its strange dominion cannot return save in the poet's reminiscent dream. No money, no railway train can take us back to it. It did not in truth exist - it was a magical world, born of the vibrant union of youth and moaning winds - a union which can never come again to you or me, father, mother, uncle or brother, till the coulees meadows bloom again unscarred of spade or plow." ¹

Memory and comfortable living softened the harsh, cruel outlines of his former existence. The ugliness was gone, its stark reality had disappeared, and only a wistful sadness and remembrance of the pain remained. Viewing the burned out homestead which he had helped to build in 1881, Garland said,

"It seems an immeasurable distance from me now and yet it is so near that the thought brings an illogical feeling of loss. It meant so much to me at that time. I hated it - and yet, as it was the only shelter my mother had, I dared not say so. From it my sister was married, in it she died. Flimsy as a pine box, it rested on the ridge, an ugly fungus of the plain. It floated for a time like a chip on the edge of a silent land-swell and then it sank as the village of Ordway had sunk. Nothing on the inexorable plain is built to last. Dozens of other towns, vociferous as ours, have found the same grave. One can hardly have found on the sward the spot which they once polluted. This is the genius of the Middle West, confident, ready, boastful,

1. Garland, Daughter of the Middle Border, 389.

it is for time only. It is tragic or it is humorous (according to the observer) when a people so hopeful and so vigorous dies out upon our plain as a river loses itself in the sand. Two thousand miles and several centuries of time lie between me and my New York study and the September morning when I first stepped out of the car upon that plain... It was another age, another world, jocund with ignorance and youth." 1

Clearly he felt that the border had passed and the cause he once had had vanished with it. He had nothing left but memories.

A closer examination will bear out not only that Garland failed to understand realism but that he never fully endorsed it as a literary medium. He admits that before he began his lowly literary career, his early lectures were sharply critical of the realists, particularly of the foreign writers. As was previously pointed out, he was repelled and shocked by their frankness. He would have excluded their material from America. It was not until he read Howells, whom he identified as a realist, that he took an interest in the movement. Howells had found that delicate compromise of social protest and discretion which met with the approval of Garland's own social convictions and yet did not injure his sensibilities and standards of good taste. He accepted realism as Howells defined it and though he was saved from slavish imitation by the

1. Garland, Back-Trailers from the Middle Border, 312.

more rugged material with which he worked, he never succeeded in advancing the cause of realistic interpretation much beyond the gentlemanly accuracy of his master. Garland was too sensitive, too squeamish to be a realist, too fastidious to be shocking.

As Garland's limitation in aesthetic philosophy was the fundamental cause of his decline, the immediate cause was his insecurity. Fundamentally, he lacked both the penetration and the persistency for the truly artistic personality. He was too much the extrovert, the social climber, with ambitions that were more for himself than his art. His prime motivations were material rather than aesthetic. Immediately, he was woefully insecure. His background was humble and offered no material advantage. He had no literary stimulation or association, no genuine climate of opinion. His education was haphazard and desultory, guided by no more sure opinion than his own choosing. He was forced literally to make his own way out of his environment. It is easy to understand then why Garland followed every avenue of promise. He needed associations and he went about getting them. He became an orator for a cause which would sponsor him, a champion for a program which would give him attention. He had to find his own contacts with publishers to provide outlet for his material, and to

establish these contacts, he was willing to accept dictation. The success of every artist inspired him and he eagerly sought out those who were successful in an effort to gain advice and an insight into their formulae. By dint of shrewd, practical observation, careful imitation and emulation, he learned to gain attention.

He never gained independence, however. His financial position and his artistic reputation remained very modest. Nagging him always was the painful awareness of his humble origins, which fired him with a passion to acquire culture. He became a hero-worshipper, an idolater who basked in reflected glory. He presumed only occasionally to be bold, but was quick to apology and appeasement. Learning that to give injury was to invite reprisal, he chose the security of social and literary refinement. He no longer dared to pioneer because he no longer dared to offend.

Garland's life-long dedication was not entirely in vain. His determination and compromise brought him much of the distinction he had sought. He had materially risen above the poverty in which he was born and had achieved the recognition of his contemporaries in the artistic world. His selection for the Academy was his final triumph. It represented his greatest accomplishment and the end of his career.

His contributions to American letters are not without merit. His short stories are an eloquent and powerful addition to the chorus of social protest, a moving testimony to the economic injustices of an era. They are faithful to their times and representative of the gathering forces in the socialistic revolt. His passion for Local Color aided materially in the literary exploitation of the American scene. His Son of the Middle Border is a genuine accomplishment in the field of autobiography, a supreme example of the warmth, sincerity and appeal of this literary method. Vascillating as his attention may have been, his will to succeed in spite of overwhelming odds is inspirational.

Though he did lack the courage and penetration for the independence of effort which makes for leadership and greatness, Garland did succeed in working himself snugly into the ranks of the American literary travellers. That he never fulfilled his promise as a realist is true, but he did advance the cause as a sloganeer, and a bill-board artist who advertised the campaign.

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