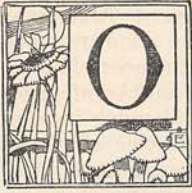


## THE MYTH OF LAND-BILL ALLEN.



ON the evening of one of the first days of December, 1891, I was at work in my study in the church tower, when the tramp of numerous feet on the stairs outside, and a vigorous rap at the door, introduced a delegation of my neighbors, several of whom I knew as representatives of labor organizations.

"We have come," said their spokesman, "to see if we can secure your church for the funeral of Land-Bill Allen, and whether you will conduct the services and deliver a memorial address."

I told my friends that I should be happy to serve them in anything within my power, but I was obliged to confess that my information concerning the deceased was vague.

"Have n't you been reading the papers lately?" they asked, somewhat disconcerted.

I answered that I had not read them very carefully, that I had seen the name in question in the newspaper head-lines, but had failed to read the articles.

"Well," they said, "Land-Bill Allen was a man to whom this nation owes a great debt of gratitude. He was the author of the Homestead Bill—the man who originated the idea of giving to every actual settler a farm of one hundred and sixty acres. He spent his life and his fortune in getting that measure enacted into a law, and he has just died in the poorhouse. We have undertaken to give him an honorable burial. His body will be brought over from the infirmary to-morrow, and will lie in state in the rotunda of the Capitol. We wish to have the funeral service day after to-morrow, and we have come to see whether you will help us."

My callers were very much in earnest, and it was impossible not to be moved by their appeal. They were clear-headed, capable men, and they were animated by a laudable purpose.

"What you say," I replied, "is extremely interesting. I don't know why I should have been kept in ignorance of such an important bit of local history. That a man who has given homes to so many millions should die in the poorhouse is tragical enough. Of course our church is at your service, and so am I. You may depend on me to do what I can to make the occasion memorable."

I am sure that the parish minister, who is compelled to deal so largely with subjects purely

didactic, and who often wishes that he knew how to get a little more life and color into his discourses, will understand the zest with which I seized upon this theme. The time of preparation was short, but surely something could be made of it. The incident was sufficiently dramatic. Precisely what it taught was not so clear. That republics are ungrateful? But that would never do. An induction from one fact is a popular method of reasoning the sophistry of which I had too often exposed. Republics are not ungrateful; they are sentimentally and effusively grateful; they overdo the business of gratitude in a very mischievous way. The lesson of the incident was not obvious, but a lesson could be found. I recalled that good story, published by THE CENTURY several years ago, "The New Minister's Great Opportunity," and thanked my stars that though I was not exactly a new minister, my opportunity at length had come.

"How much can you tell me about this man?" I asked my friends.

"Not much," they answered, "except what is in the papers. He was the author of the Homestead Bill."

"The author of it. Then he must have been in Congress. Do you know when?"

No; they did not know anything about the particulars; they only knew the general facts.

"Very good," I answered; "I will make investigation; there must be many old citizens who are familiar with the history."

My friends left me to my researches, putting into my hands a copy of one of the daily papers containing a notice of what might properly be termed the "demise" of this luckless personage. In the four-line heading which emphasized the importance of this melancholy event was this impressive, if somewhat ambiguous, sentence: "The Benefactor and Originator of the Homestead Act Passes Away at the Poorhouse." The article proceeded as follows:

A public benefactor passed away under sad and cruel circumstances as the day dawned on the Advent Sunday. He had contributed largely to the betterment of humanity, and helped thousands to secure happy and prosperous homes. . . . The greater part of the life of Land-Bill Allen has never been written, and is veiled in the misty recollections of the past. His service to humanity in advocating the passage of the bill giving settlers 160 acres of land for homesteads was an inestimable service, and worthy of remembrance as it doubtless will be [*sic*]. It is strange that such a useful

life should end amidst such surroundings, but who can read the mysteries of the Book of Fate?

The Land Bill, of which so much has been said, provided for the donation of 160 acres of land to all actual settlers coming to the State [*sic*]. It is said he spent \$60,000 in trying to get the bill passed and that from a comparatively wealthy man he became a financial wreck. His possessions were finally reduced to a little cabin in Plain township, in which he lived till it was sold at sheriff's sale, and the unfortunate man was compelled to leave it and become a wanderer, dependent upon the generosity of a few friends. About two months ago Allen became an inmate of the Franklin County infirmary, where he ended his days as an invalid.

All the local papers, as I found, had elaborate obituary notices of this "hero-pauper," as one of them eloquently described him. "The Great Benefactor Dies in the Poorhouse!" "Sixty Thousand Dollars Spent by Him in Passing that Well-known Measure, and He Reaps not that many Cents from It!" Such were the head-lines under which the story, substantially as recited above, was many times retold.

Going back a little in my search for information, I found several copies of newspapers published in other cities whose representatives had visited Allen in the infirmary before his death, and had spread before their readers the story of his life. One of the most affecting of these may well be quoted:

"Yes, sir: I am William Allen—Land-Bill Allen." The tremulous and quavering voice that spoke thus was for an unbroken half century the thundertone of the poor and downtrodden of America. He whom the newsman had found in the degradation and charitable charge of a public infirmary was but a few years since the spokesman and the champion of the people—a valiant leader in the cause of the masses in their struggle for the existence that mother earth owes all mankind. In silent reverence, the emissary of the—grasped the shrunk hand which this noble man extended as he slowly rose from the couch on which he had been wearily reclining, and faced the visitor.

There was a good deal of fine writing of this sort. Newspapers from the Hudson to the Missouri seized upon this dramatic incident, and were working it up in characteristic fashion. The hearts of the charitable in various places had been touched, and contributions for the relief of the benefactor had begun to arrive before his death. When the news of his death was spread abroad, a movement to erect a monument to his memory was immediately set on foot. Despatches and letters from individuals, and from assemblies of workmen in distant places, had been constantly arriving for several days. Omaha had been especially

stirred. Out in Oklahoma the settlers had been getting up a fund to which each was to contribute twenty-five cents for his removal to that Territory. When his death occurred, the West immediately put in the claim for the location of his monument somewhere on the Missouri River. All this I learned as soon as I began to gather up the recent newspapers. And many of my neighbors were talking about the melancholy and tragical fate of the poor old man. It was evident that I had a fruitful and inspiring theme. But there was still much indefiniteness respecting the precise service which this benefactor had rendered to struggling humanity. One reporter of a Cincinnati paper had, however, attempted to get at the facts. In an interview with Allen at the infirmary, several weeks before his death, he had gathered a little information. I pass by Allen's account of his early years, and come directly to what he says of his work as land reformer.

I came to Columbus in 1829, and edited the "Ohio State Journal," and afterward the "Gazette." All this time I had in mind the homestead idea, which I had been considering since I was twenty years old. [He was born in May, 1809.] First, I wanted to get up colonies to go west and colonize counties of land, to populate and sell. Finally I decided that the government should donate 160 acres to every man who would guarantee to settle on it. If he came back, it was to be taxed at once.

After reciting his achievements in the Know Nothing campaign, he goes on:

"Then I started out campaigning for my idea. I went through Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Texas, and saw the public land, and I spent \$60,000 to introduce my ideas. Some of this money I earned, some I inherited from my parents, and some from my brother James who died at Batavia. Afterward I traveled the West in a wagon selling notions. I had it painted with signs: "Land-Bill Allen's Wagon." "Land for Everybody." "Give us Soil that we may Thrive." They called this wagon "Bill Allen's Land Wagon." I made speeches from it. People used to say, "If I could talk like you, I would n't be toting that wagon around twenty-four hours."

. . . After peddling fifteen years I came back to Columbus and started selling comic almanacs and notions on High Street. Then I traveled over the State several years. . . . In '63 my bill passed Congress, giving 160 acres of public land to each settler.

We have here, undoubtedly, the complete and authoritative statement of this benefactor's services to humanity. I confess that I read it with some sinking of the heart. It is singularly indefinite. There is a plentiful lack of evidence connecting the claimant with the achievement. Such vague assertions were not promising; but

there was a date or two. Not before 1829 had the homestead idea entered his mind, and there is no intimation that anything was done about it before the Know Nothing campaign. It took me only a few minutes to find out that the first Homestead Bill was introduced into Congress in 1814—when Allen was five years old; and that between that time and 1830 the national legislature had considered a great variety of schemes for disposing of the lands by sale or gift. Allen could not have been the author of the bill which was introduced into Congress when he was five years old, and there was not a particle of evidence to show that he had the remotest connection with any of the other schemes discussed in Congress before he was twenty years old. Indeed, he himself testifies that he had not begun to think of the matter before that time. Seven or eight years before the date at which he asserts that he entered upon his first public advocacy of the measure, there was a national party in existence,—the Free Soil party,—in whose platform for 1848 the homestead idea was clearly formulated.

To a pulpiteer in search of the dramatic this began to look like an anticlimax. A few hours of investigation on the following morning confirmed my skepticism. The great majority of those to whom I spoke indorsed Allen's claim; I found people who had been laboring to get an appropriation for him from the legislature, on the score of his great service to humanity; but a few elderly gentlemen, who had known him through all the years of his residence in the city, at once testified that the claim was preposterous. The facts which they gave me illustrating his intellectual habits and his family history threw considerable light upon the case. It was evident that the subject of my discourse was a difficult one to handle. It would be cruel to tell the generous people who had invested so much in him, and were eager to do him honor, precisely what manner of man he was; the occasion was plainly one on which the whole truth could not be spoken: but the main facts must come out, and the mantle of charity could not be stretched sufficiently to hide their naked deformity.

I did not know, when I spoke at the funeral, all that I now know; the credit that he received in the address was larger than I could yield him to-day: but I could say at that time nothing less than this, that the man's claim to be the author or originator of the Homestead Bill was utterly groundless; that he might about as truly have claimed the authorship of Magna Charta or the decalogue; that he had simply identified himself with the measure, and had succeeded in convincing himself that he was the author of it; that he had successfully imposed upon himself, and upon the whole

community. After saying this, all the charitable things that I tried to say went for little; the coldness that fell upon the meeting was depressing. The minister's great opportunity had been fruitful of everything but applause. Some of my auditors took what was said good-naturedly enough, but a good many of them were evidently inclined to resent the truth I had told them. I had thrown a big bucket of ice-water upon one of their most ingenuous and laudable enthusiasms, and it was hard for them to forgive me; I doubt if they have ever done so.

The project for a monument was of course nipped in the bud. The body of the poor old pretender was decently interred, and his name suddenly disappeared from the newspapers in which for many days it had taken so much room.<sup>1</sup> I am not quite willing that he should be so soon forgotten. Such a career is certainly entitled to a permanent record. Let me try to tell the true story of his life.

Allen says that he was born in Windham, Connecticut, May 23, 1809. (The reporters all spell it "Windom," but Allen is not responsible for that.) His father was a tailor, and he worked at the same trade, the family living in Providence, Pawtucket Bridge, Rhode Island, and Batavia, New York. In the last-named town he tried to learn the printer's trade, and I have in my possession partial files of two old newspapers published in Batavia in 1827 and 1828, which were among the few effects left in his old hut by Allen when he was removed to the poorhouse. Allen was living at this date in Batavia, and he may have been employed upon one of these newspapers. This was in the height of the anti-Masonic excitement; in these files is a full report of the trial of the abductors of Morgan, and the account of that mysterious disappearance written by Thurlow Weed, then editor of the Rochester "Daily Telegraph." Here also we may read a presidential message from John Quincy Adams, proclamations by Governor De Witt Clinton, and the latest news from the Greek war of independence, with the great tidings of the battle of Navarino; and in a later number George Croly's poem on "The Greek and the Turkoman," which some of us spouted, a few years later, on the school-house stage. All these large affairs are, however, overshadowed by the anti-Masonic tempest, which rages through every column.

It is plain that Allen's apprenticeship to the printer's craft must have been very brief; for

<sup>1</sup> Since these pages were written there has, however, been printed in one of them a homily upon the ingratitude of republics to their greatest benefactors, coupled with an allusion to the fate of Land-Bill Allen. Such delusions die hard.

in 1829 he is back in Newport, Rhode Island, attempting to start a newspaper of his own entitled the "Anti-Masonick Rhode Islander." I have the prospectus of that publication. Under the motto, "Thou shalt do no murder," is the following announcement:

Having entered into a copartnership in publishing the *Anti-Masonick Rhode Islander*, we solicit, and hope for the generous support of all those, who have a just value for the Rights and Liberties of Freemen.

Our columns will be uniformly devoted to *Anti-Masonick*, *Moral*, *Scientifick*, and *Political* Subjects; either original or selected; and to the encouragement of Industry, Economy, Temperance, and the diffusion of *Truth* and *Useful Knowledge*. They will also furnish the earliest *Foreign* and *Domestick* intelligence and carefully record such facts as are connected with the *Agricultural*, *Commercial*, and *Manufacturing* interest of this great and growing *Republic*.

The prospectus signalizes the irruption of the final *k*, which certain spelling-deformers, following Dr. Johnson, were then trying to foist into our long-suffering English speech. The files of Batavia newspapers of previous years do not adopt the spelling; it must have been a New England fad of about this date. The first spelling-book that was placed in my hands—about a dozen years later—bristled with these final *k*'s.

"Allen and Folsom" is the firm-name appended to this prospectus. Of the junior partner I know nothing. Thirty-three names of subscribers follow, all in the same bold hand-writing. In the papers of Allen I also find two letters from the firm of Greele & Willis of Boston, referring to type and press which they had sent to Allen, and for which they had received his notes, indorsed by Benjamin Waite Case. It is therefore clear that he undertook to start an "anti-Masonick" newspaper in Newport; but as the type was not sent him until April 24, 1829, and as he himself testifies that he removed to Columbus in 1829, it is probable that the newspaper was not successful. Reasons for its failure are not far to seek.

Allen says that he came to Columbus and edited the "Ohio State Journal." Here, now, is a statement which enables us accurately to gage his truth-telling capacity. The files of the "Ohio State Journal" are in existence, and they are clear witnesses against him. The editors of the paper through all that period were well known. Allen was certainly not one of them. They were men who could construct coherent sentences and logical paragraphs, and this is a feat which Allen probably never succeeded in performing. It is possible that he may have worked as a tramp journeyman in the composing-room of this paper. A few years later he collected unpaid subscriptions from delinquent subscrib-

ers, and I have an old receipt-book in which are many signatures of the proprietors of the "Journal" to receipts for small sums thus collected by him. His connection with this newspaper was probably limited to some such service as this. The fact that he could claim to have been the editor throws a flood of light upon his mental proclivities. There is no doubt that he would readily have undertaken to edit the London "Times" or the "Revue des Deux Mondes"; but no sane proprietor could have put into his hands the care of the most insignificant journal. The same mental process by which he magnified his office as a mere runner of the counting-room into the editorship of the newspaper reappears in his claim respecting the Homestead Bill.

Allen is undoubtedly right in saying that it was after the subsidence of the Know Nothing excitement that he "started out campaigning for his ideas." He was a peddler *à la cart*—if I may be allowed the expression; one of that fraternity, forty years ago quite numerous, of which Dr. Marigold is an ornament, and to which the late lamented James Fisk lent the brazen luster of his name. Upon the sides of the cart, which carried notions, cheap prints, and comic almanacs, Allen had painted the legends which he recites above. Undoubtedly he tried to harangue the people who gathered about his vehicle on the subject of the Homestead Bill; one would be glad to see a stenographic report of some of these speeches. I suppose that the thing was taken up at first as an advertising device; but gradually his mind was completely absorbed by this idea,—it was a case of possession, a pathological condition to which minds like this are easily subject,—and he talked so much about it that he came at length to feel that he was the embodiment and representation of the idea, and that it had originated with him. The reporters tell us that he spent his fortune "in presenting to the public, to Congress, and to State legislatures his homestead laws." The reporters evidently suppose that Allen framed some such measures, and got them into the hands of the law-makers. Much was also said, at the time of his death, of his voluminous correspondence with statesmen, and I believed, at that time, that there must be some foundation for this claim; but there is not a scrap of paper in the mass which he has so diligently preserved to indicate that he ever wrote a letter to any man of note or received a word from such a source. I can hardly believe that he would have failed to treasure documents of this nature. He may have written such letters, but the perusal of his manuscripts will explain his failure to receive replies. No statesman would be likely to think that a letter written by him called for a reply. As to his framing a bill for such a pur-

pose, he could no more have done it than he could have written the "Mécanique céleste."

The fortune of sixty thousand dollars which he expended in this propagandism is of the same substance as his editorship of the newspaper and his authorship of the law. That he was ever, at any period of his life, possessed of one thousand dollars in his own right, I should find it difficult to believe. His accounts, as I have run over them, do not indicate such a scale of expenditure as is customary with men of fortune. There is nothing among his effects to indicate that he ever expended a cent of money directly in promoting his idea. It would seem that if there had been expenditures of such a nature, whether for printing or for any form of service, some document, hand-bill, memorial, or other record would have been preserved by him. The money which he paid for having those legends painted on his cart may be regarded as a contribution to this cause; I can find trace of no other.

After peddling and preaching free land for a few years Allen came back to Columbus, and started a little shop for the sale of notions and comic almanacs. Connected with this establishment was an occasional auction of the cheap-jack variety, and in the character of auctioneer Allen was often led a merry dance by the boys of the town, who amused themselves by guying him. His lack of faculty manifested itself here as everywhere, and he soon found himself stranded in a remote rural neighborhood with no visible means of support. The village near which he lived bears the orthodox name of Gahanna. The poor little home in which he took up his abode was purchased for three hundred dollars; the property consisted of two thirds of an acre of land, on which was a house and barn. Here from some time in the sixties he continued to live until he was carried to the poorhouse. How he subsisted is a mystery; his papers show that he sold patent medicines of various sorts; his living was evidently very precarious. He was one of the ne'er-do-weels whose number seems to increase as wealth increases, and who constitute one of our most serious social problems. Through all the years of this penury his monomania was fastening itself more and more firmly upon him, and a large part of his leisure must have been spent in committing to writing his own sense of the importance of the service which he had rendered to his countrymen and to the human race.

His literary remains are somewhat voluminous, and they afford an unerring test of his intellect. No impostor should ever permit himself to write a line. The literary touchstone is apt to be fatal. When the writing medium assures me that he is possessed of the spirit of Emerson or Thackeray I can very quickly sat-

isfy myself as to the truth of his assertion. And the man who claims to have been the author and originator of a great measure of statesmanship can be accurately judged by those fruits of his intellect which he has left in manuscript.

It is painful to go over these dirty piles of paper, and to trace the same hallucination through them all. There is no coherency, no connection or progress of thought, no evidence that the writer had done anything more than to glean a few well-worn phrases from the lips of stump-speakers, and to weave them together in all manner of permutations. It is necessary to quote a little of this literature. The readers of this article must be able to judge for themselves as to the character of the man. There is but one theme — Land-Bill Allen. These pages are devoted to the celebration of his praises. If faith in himself could have removed mountains, the writer would have had no difficulty in putting every obstacle behind him. I quote from a document which is headed "Land-Bill Allen," and runs thus:

Land-Bill Allen, the originator of the Homestead Bill has invariably made it his business to stem the torrents of prejudice and vice and never to give up to sect nor party what was meant for mankind, and has more ambition to do right, than to be great, and is conscious of having more regard for the Public good than his own, for he taught the good to reason while knaves were prosyliting the credulous and using every finesse which ingenuity could devise to dazzle and bewilder the popular mind and make the poor oppressed and imbesiles who are easily overreached and easily seduced, believe that the effects of bad government and wicked laws, which bring upon the People more povity and depravity and crime than all private causes put together are the dispensation of Devine Providence, by a gross violation of the sacred laws of humanity, that they might carry out their secret tricks of fraud and Land Monopoly, in disposing of the Public Lands the property of the whole People, without their consent which had been palmed upon the Landless of the world by inflated and visionary productions of cunning artful and designing men, who were bankrupt in principles of love and friendship law and government. He has more regard for man's necessities than their fancies and sought to benefit nations that he might be recollected with pleasure and extolled with ardor by generations yet unborn, and can now look back (on the sands of time) on a pathway adorned with the evidence of his good deeds. His splendid scheme of securing Equal justice and restoring homes to every American citizen and to the industrious the enjoyment of their honest gains and his devotion to the welfare of human races has given him the proud consolation of knowing that he is a living monument of his own glory. If there is any person now living who deserves the blessings of Heaven and the gratitude of all mankind "LAND-BILL ALLEN" is that man.

This is an unusually coherent passage. On another sheet I find this:

He has spent his time and fortune upon the altar of the public for more than half of a century in restoring and securing Natural Rights and establishing Equal Justice to all mankind by setting his seal upon Land Monopoly in which there is no glory to God on high nor the least tincture of good will to man on earth, on whose walls is written *Mene Tekel*, weighed in the balance and found wanting, a weed that grows in every soil, the mother of all slavery that Aristocracy may fall like Lucifer never to rise again. And all he has received in return for it is barely the scoff and scorn of knaves and fools.

Several of these sheets contain a preamble, often rewritten, reciting the imperishable services of Land-Bill Allen, followed by the form of a subscription, in which a grateful people were to contribute the sum of one hundred thousand dollars as a reward for "the most magnanimous achievement of human wisdom ever devised by man"; and also to give him free passes on all the railroads for the remainder of his life. A glowing tribute to the goodness of the Creator concludes with the statement that "the same unerring power called into existence 'Land-Bill Allen,' the originator of the Homestead Bill to meet the *Crises* that was approaching to abolish Chattel Slavery which we are unable to remove, and protected his sacred person in so righteous a cause and made him a greater national benefactor to the whole human race than all the politicians and Christians that ever existed since the days of Christ and his apostles." In another connection we are told "there never was and never will be but one 'Land-Bill Allen,' all the rest are his satellits, his name is more imperishable than adamant, for it is immortalized, and stamped on every acre of land with an imprint that cannot be obliterated."

In one of the most remarkable of these productions Allen appears to conceive that he has been nominated to the Presidency of the United States with General A. M. West of Holly Springs, Mississippi, as Vice-President. This is a letter of acceptance in which, with his customary lucidity, he outlines his policy. Whether he actually supposed himself to have received this nomination, or only imagined that this lightning might strike him at some future time, and thought it well to practise a little upon letters of acceptance, so that such an exigency might not find him unprepared, I will not undertake to say.

I have made free citations from this literature because I know that they will be interesting reading to all the newspaper writers who interviewed Allen before his death, and who succeeded in lifting him, for a short space of time,

to that pinnacle of notoriety toward which, through all his life, he had been climbing. It is well that they should have plenty of evidence respecting the quality of the mind whose great achievements so deeply impressed them.

That this poor man succeeded in convincing himself that he was the paragon of statesmen and philanthropists is nothing singular. Minds of this type are not rare. The remarkable thing, the astonishing thing, is that in the county where he had lived for more than fifty years he should have imposed upon the public to such an extent that all the newspapers accepted his claim without hesitation, and united to spread his fame to the ends of the earth. For two months or more before his death he had been the subject of newspaper discussion, and yet until the hour of the funeral no word of caution had been publicly spoken respecting his absurd claims. Legal gentlemen had taken part in a movement to secure for him an appropriation from the legislature in recognition of his patriotic services, and no ripple of dissent had appeared upon the surface of the public mind. Newspapers all over the country had taken up the refrain, and had published such particulars of his career as he could impart, without once questioning his claim. Yet it would not have required ten minutes' investigation on the part of any man who knows how to use historical reference-books to find out that the assertions of Allen were preposterous. The bill with which he sought to connect himself became a law only thirty years ago; it should not have been difficult to learn something definite respecting its origin and authorship; it would seem that some intelligent editor or reporter might have thought it worth while to find out precisely what connection this claimant had with so great an achievement. If he had been in any proper sense it. author or originator, that fact could hardly have escaped some sort of record. The implicit faith which the representatives of the press reposed in the unsupported assertions of this incoherent person is worthy of all admiration. Who says that this is a skeptical age?

I have thus given a plain narrative of the genesis and growth of the myth of Land-Bill Allen. Round about this peculiar personage had gathered an envelop of popular beliefs, by which he was elevated to the rank of a demigod. His body lay in state for a day under the dome of the capital of Ohio; the scene of his triumph was a city which is the seat of two universities, and whose intelligence is promoted by four daily newspapers.

I ought to mention one circumstance which undoubtedly aided this delusion. Among the governors of Ohio was a well-known personage

of remarkable popular gifts, a great tribune of the people, whose name was William Allen. "Old Bill Allen" was the familiar designation often applied to him. Many of those writing at a distance may have confused these two. But the name of the subject of our sketch was not William. "George Wheaton" was his prænomen. The "Bill" by which he insisted on being known, and which his children were required to employ in addressing his letters, was only a portion of the title of the act of which he pretended to be the author. "Land Bill" was no part of the name by which he was baptized. The confounding of William Allen with "Land-Bill Allen" gave color to the supposition that he had been a person of prominence and influence. This error could scarcely have been committed by natives of Ohio, certainly not by residents of Columbus.

The outstanding fact is this stupendous imposture, perpetrated upon a community which boasts sufficiently of free schools and a free press, by an uneducated and underwitted man. I do not wonder at the deception of the workmen who so heroically took up the cause of their alleged benefactor; they could not have been expected to question the unqualified statements of the newspapers; their action in the premises reflects only honor upon them. To the newspapers the main credit for the propagation of this myth must be given; and the incident shows how much more carefully the average reporter is trained to work up a sensation than to make an investigation. Nor is the reporter chiefly censurable on this account: he does what he is hired to do; he knows that if he fails to do this very thing he will be discharged. The managing editor, for his part, will reply that sensations are furnished because the people crave them; that the sheet which serves up the largest number of them, piping hot, morning and evening, will have the largest circulation. Very likely this is true; and by those who suppose that the chief end of a newspaper is to increase its circulation it will be regarded as an adequate explanation.

It must be admitted that the narrative here given sets before us in a startling light the possibilities of imposture in this enlightened land. One would have said beforehand that such a delusion could not have become epidemic in America. In Spain or Lower Canada things of this kind might occur, not in the United States. But when we stop to reflect and investigate, we discover that human credulity, even in the most enlightened lands, is still a vast deep.

The success of those rascally endowment orders, of which hundreds have been freely operating in all parts of the country during the last five years, is an illustration, even more

startling, of the extent to which human beings are ready to be fooled. It is almost incredible that men and women who can read and write, and who know the multiplication table, should be able to believe in the validity of a financial scheme which promises that for a total of three hundred dollars, paid in monthly instalments for seven years, one thousand dollars will be given at the end of that time. Yet tens of thousands of men and women who are supposed to be sane,—teachers, clerks, professional men, skilled mechanics,—have invested their earnings in these enterprises.

Another type of popular delusion is scarcely less astonishing. Newspapers of large circulation may be found in many of our Western communities in which has been kept standing, from week to week of this year of grace, a forged encyclical of Pope Leo XIII., asserting that this continent belongs to him, and that the time has now come for him to take possession of it, and calling on the faithful to rise, on or about September 5, 1893, and "exterminate all heretics found within the jurisdiction of the United States of America." This document has been published as a handbill, for free circulation; thousands of copies of it have been distributed by persons who assert that they are patriots, and assume that they belong to a superior order of Christians; it has been kept standing, as I have said, in the columns of a weekly newspaper which has been especially commended by the Protestant clergy in their convocations; and not a voice has been raised in denunciation of it as a forgery, or in protest against the use of such weapons in religious controversy. It is impossible to believe that many of the people who have aided in the circulation of this document have done so knowing it to be a forgery; we are therefore forced to the conclusion that most of them believe it to be genuine. The fact that tens of thousands of the graduates of our public schools can be imposed upon by such a preposterous fraud is a melancholy revelation of popular ignorance and credulity.

In each of the cases just mentioned a powerful passion was at work in aid of imposture. In the one case the greed of gain, the fierce desire to get something for nothing, makes the victims believe in promises to which their sober judgment could never give credence; in the other case traditional religious hatred—the most blinding of all passions—usurps the throne of reason. We may not marvel greatly at such triumphs of the baser principles of human nature, though they are deplorable enough. But the story which I have told shows us credulity wholly unmixed with passion; and gives us a striking illustration of the readiness with which people submit to be duped when

neither their interests nor their enmities are enlisted.

The revelation is not, I fear, a cheering one; but I hope that it may be profitable for doctrine. It is possible that some too confiding natures may learn from it that it is not quite safe to put too much trust in what everybody says. The fraternity of newsgatherers may be able to extract a moral from my tale; I leave that task to them.

One "improvement" I will venture to hint. Several of my reputable neighbors, as I have recorded, were quite ready to testify, when I called upon them, that this was a stupendous imposture. But they had not made this statement publicly. Perhaps they thought it not worth while. Perhaps they shrunk from braving the ill-will of those who were making a hero of the poor old man. It is not hard to understand their reticence. Yet it would have been well for them to consider whether they ought not to stamp out this delusion. Honest people all over the land were being imposed

upon, and were parting with their money as a result of this imposture. I dare say that some of them would have spoken if the thing had gone much further. But the duty of every individual in the community to contribute, by clear and prompt speech, to the destruction of impostures and delusions of all sorts, and to the formation of sane public opinion, is one that is not sufficiently enforced. The vitiation of public opinion by pretenders and charlatans of all sorts is constantly going on; I know no antidote for this disorder except that which is found in the sound and courageous words of sensible men. We are quite too prone to allow cranks and bigots and mischief-makers to go on sowing the wind, forgetting that we shall be compelled by and by to reap the whirlwind. It is often disagreeable to expose humbuggery; not more disagreeable, however, than many other public duties. And it is part of the service of a citizen to help to create an intellectual atmosphere in which imposture will not thrive.

*Washington Gladden.*

## A STUDY OF INDIAN MUSIC.<sup>1</sup>



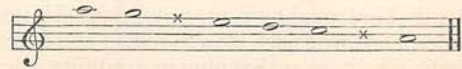
SOME time ago Miss Alice C. Fletcher of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University sent me an Indian song, desiring me to give her information as to the scale on which it was built, etc.

This led to personal consultations, and she eventually intrusted me with over a hundred songs that she had taken down among the Omahas and other tribes, commissioning me to study them, and to report upon them from the point of view of the technical musician. She afterward afforded me the opportunity of hearing Indian singing, and of taking down their songs and studying their rhythms, etc. at first hand.

The collection of songs made by Miss Fletcher has peculiar interest from a scientific point of view. All are undoubtedly old. Only a few had been heard by any white person until she obtained that privilege. The Indians have no musical notation, no theories of music whatsoever; the songs are handed down by tradition, and they are a purely natural product of the impulses of primitive man—the spontaneous result of the universal desire

to express emotion in song. Unfettered as they are by any speculations or theories, they afford entirely fresh material for discovering what is natural in music, and a rare opportunity for testing the naturalness of our own musical perceptions by means of comparison.

Being informed that their music was not only entirely vocal, but invariably without harmony, all their songs being sung in unison, with no other accompaniment than that of drums or rattles, my first inquiry was, naturally, On what scales are their melodies built? I soon discovered that they were, in a large majority of cases, in major keys, and built on five-toned scales, similar to those of the ancient Chinese, Hindus, Scotch, Irish, and other primitive peoples. The first one sent me was built on a five-toned (pure) minor scale, running, as nearly all of them do, from the highest to the lowest note of its compass, thus:



Those on five-toned major scales began and ended, as a rule, on the fifth of the scale, thus:



<sup>1</sup> See also "Indian Songs" by Miss Fletcher in the *CENTURY* for January. The music accompanying both articles is all derived from the Omahas.