HAMLIN GARLAND: WRITER OF SIGNIFICANT AMERICAN FICTION, AND A LOYAL FRIEND TO THE INDIANS.
SCA was plowing in the small field behind his teepee close to the trail crossing. The reins hung from his broad red shoulders, and his knotted fingers gripped the crooked handles of the plow as though they were the horns of a mad buffalo, while the little ponies strained at the traces and wavered to and fro, now in, now out of the furrow, snorting and rebellious.

The old man’s head was bare, his hair, braided and adorned with eagle feathers, streamed in the air, and his ornamented breech-cloth fluttered comically in the rear. Determination was in his set lips and complete absorption marked his every gesture. He was plowing as he once went to war—with his whole might. He had no mind to the beauty of the plain—no thought of the sun, though his eyes were filled with scalding sweat. It was as if a man of the stone age had met and taken lessons of the advance guard of the age of steam.

A party of young Arapahoes came riding by—their gay trappings flapping in the wind, their dark faces agrin with delight at the old man’s boyish enthusiasm over his plow and his ponies.

Pulling their horses to a stand they began to call out witticisms: “Hello, Uncle, what are you doing?”

“If you push harder you will go faster,” laughed another.

“Ho! Osca, the great chief, is dead,” cried a third. “A squaw has taken his place.”

A fourth wag put his hands to the pommel of his saddle and imitated the humping gesture of the plowman.

The old chief straightened his gaunt form and turned his keen, deep-set eyes upon his insulters—his broad breast heaving with righteous indignation.

“You call me squaw-heart,” he began. “But your fathers did not so. The enemies of our tribe do not think of Osca in that way. You point at me because I am treading the white man’s road, but I do not beg of the white man with one hand and strike him with the other. I do not pretend to be at peace when I am hungry, and go to war when I am fed. You call me squaw-heart,” he repeated, and his voice began to rumble. He tore the shirt from his breast, pitted and seamed by knife and arrow—“I am a warrior, my record is written here. Who are you?”

There was such weight of scorn in his thundering voice, such withering accusation in his eyes, that the scoffers began to edge away with changed faces.
IN THE AUTUMN GRASS

Osca did not release them. “True, I fought the wonder-workers, but I fed myself. I have never asked the white man to put meat in my mouth, while I turned his counsels to mockery. Now I am facing a new road. It is a hard road. I’ve turned my back on the warpath. My guns are put away—this is now my weapon!” He laid a hand upon the plow. “You are too young to laugh at me. Where are your scars?” He waited a moment, grandly defiant, from his furrow. “Go!” he thundered. “When you have scars like these you may come to laugh at Osca. Away with you!” With a contemptuous gesture he dismissed them and turned to his work.

They wheeled their horses and rode away, crestfallen. In the blaze of the old man’s angry eyes their insolence withered. Shame and fear filled their hearts. When they looked back Osca had resumed his heroic struggle with the plow.

IN THE AUTUMN GRASS

DID you ever lie low
In the depth of the plain,
In the lee of a swell that lifts,
Like a low-lying island out of the sea,
When the blue joint shakes
As an army of spears;
When each flashing wave breaks
In turn overhead
And wails in the door of your ears?

If you have, you have heard
In the midst of the roar,
The note of a lone gray bird,
Blown slantwise by overhead
As he swiftly sped
To his south-land haven once more!

O, the music abroad in the air,
With the Autumn Wind sweeping
His hand on the grass, where
The tiniest blade is astir, keeping
Voice in the dim, wide choir,
Of the infinite song, the refrain,
The wild, sad wail of the plain!

From “Prairie Songs”
Courtesy of Stony and Kimbal
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—HAMLIN GARLAND.