

JASON EDWARDS: AN AVERAGE MAN

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Jason Edwards: An Average Man by Hamlin Garland

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HAMLIN GARLAND

**JASON EDWARDS:
AN AVERAGE MAN**

JASON EDWARDS

AN AVERAGE MAN

BY

HAMLIN GARLAND

Author of "Main-Traveled Roads", "A Spoil of Office", etc.

I swear that the builder no longer
To me shall be less than the plan,
Henceforward be guerdon and glory
And life for the average man!

BOSTON
ARENA PUBLISHING COMPANY
1892

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ABRORLAC

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1892

MAIN

TO

The Farmers' Alliance

WHOSE HIGH MISSION IT IS TO UNITE THE FARMER AND
THE ARTISAN, THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH, THE
BLUE AND THE GRAY UNDER ONE BANNER,
MARCHING IN A CONTINENT-WIDE BAT-
TLER-LINE AGAINST THE DENIAL
OF EQUAL RIGHTS,
I DEDICATE THIS STORY, WITH ITS IMPLIED HATRED OF
ALL SPECIAL PRIVILEGES.

TO THE
ANNALS

OTHER WORKS BY HAMLIN GARLAND

MAIN-TRAVELED ROADS:

Six Mississippi Valley Stories

A SPOIL OF OFFICE:

A Story of the Modern West

PREFACE.

FOR more than a half century the outlet toward the free lands of the West has been the escape-valve of social discontent in the great cities of America. < Whenever the conditions of his native place pressed too hard upon him, the artisan or the farmer has turned his face toward the prairies and forests of the West. > The emigrant not only bettered his own fortunes, on the whole, but he bettered the conditions of his fellows who remained, by reducing the competition for employment.

Thus long before the days of '49, the West had become the Golden West, the land of wealth and freedom and happiness. All of the associations called up by the spoken word, the West, were fabulous, mythic, hopeful. At the knees of their parents, children heard songs that voiced the most buoyant and stirring emotions. Vast sweeps of untracked prairies, whose grasses waved like a sea; lakes in whose depths cool groves were mir-

PREFACE.

rored; droves of elk and deer and antelope; rushing rivers on whose banks stood vine-decked cottages—these were in the sunny vistas of the songs' pictures.

It was above all the El Dorado of the homeseeker. Free land, free homes, were the alluring words whose music made the heart of the toil-worn artisan leap like a child's and his breast expand with a nameless exaltation and longing.

But to-day this dream—this most characteristic American emotion—is almost gone. Free land is gone. The last acre of available farmland has passed into private or corporate hands. The nation has squandered the inheritance of the unborn as well as the living, and henceforward the stream of emigration must run athwart the speculator's barriers or rise to the level of his greed. Already the stream is slackening and the reaction upon industry is beginning. Its effect is seen in the ever-diminishing share which falls to labor from its own product and in the steady rise of rents.

What will be the outcome?

HAMLIN GARLAND.



JASON EDWARDS.

AN AVERAGE MAN.

PART FIRST—THE MECHANIC.

I.

THERE was a phrase which very completely defined the character of Walter Reeves. He was level-headed. He faced the street, hideous with mud, and tumultuous with the war of belated business, with a laughing face and steady brown eyes, though the city impressed him more than he expected it to do. Fresh from college in an interior New England town, where life moved quietly—this rush of men and teams over greasy, black cobble-stones deafened and bewildered him.

He stood a little while in the mouth of the depot, a gloomy, castellated structure.