

= The Bread @-@ Winners =

The Bread @-@ Winners : A Social Study is an 1883 novel by John Hay , former secretary to Abraham Lincoln who in 1898 became Secretary of State . The book takes an anti @-@ organized labor stance , and when published anonymously sold well and provoked considerable public interest in determining who the author was .

The plot of the book revolves around former army captain Arthur Farnham , a wealthy resident of Buffland (an analog of Cleveland) . He organizes Civil War veterans to keep the peace when the Bread @-@ winners , a group of lazy and malcontented workers , call a violent general strike . He is sought in marriage by the ambitious Maud Matchin , daughter of a carpenter , but instead takes a woman of his own class .

Hay wrote his only novel as a reaction to several strikes that affected him and his business interests in the 1870s and early 1880s . Originally published in installments in The Century Magazine , the book attracted wide interest . Hay had left hints as to his identity in the novel , and some guessed right , but he never acknowledged the book as his , and it did not appear with his name on it until after his death in 1905 . Hay 's hostile view of organized labor was soon seen as outdated , and the book is best remembered for its onetime popularity and controversial nature .

= = Plot = =

One of the wealthiest and most cultured residents of the famed Algonquin Avenue in Buffland (a city intended to be Cleveland) , Captain Arthur Farnham is a Civil War veteran and widower ? his wife died of illness while accompanying him at a remote frontier post . Since he left the army , he has sought to involve himself in municipal affairs , but fails though political naiveté . The victorious party has allowed him the position of chairman of the library board . In that capacity , he is approached by Maud Matchin , daughter of carpenter Saul Matchin , a man content with his lot . His daughter is not , and seeks employment at the library as a means of bettering herself . Farnham agrees to put her case , but is defeated by a majority on the board , who have their own candidate . She finds herself attracted to Farnham , who is more interested in Alice Belding , daughter of his wealthy widow neighbor .

Saul Matchin had hoped that his daughter would become a house servant , but having attended high school , she feels herself too good for that . She is admired by Saul 's assistant Sam Sleeney , who lives with the Matchins , a match favored by her father . Sleeney is busy repairing Farnham 's outbuildings , and is made jealous by interactions between the captain and Maud . Seeing Sleeney 's discontent , Andrew Jackson Offitt (true name Ananias) , a locksmith and " professional reformer " , tries to get him to join the Bread @-@ winners , a labor organization . Sleeney is happy with his employment , " Old Saul Matchin and me come to an agreement about time and pay , and both of us was suited . Ef he 's got his heel into me , I don 't feel it , " but due to his unhappiness over Maud , is easy game for Offitt , who gets him to join , and to pay the dues that are Offitt 's visible means of support .

Maud has become convinced that she is in love with Farnham , and declares it to him . It is not reciprocated , and the scene is witnessed both by Mrs. Belding and by Sleeney . The widow believes Farnham when he states he had given Maud no encouragement , but her daughter , when her mother incautiously tells her of the incident , does not . When Farnham seeks to marry Alice , she turns him down and asks him never to renew the subject .

Offitt 's membership has tired of endless talk , and plans a general strike , a fact of which Farnham is informed by Mr. Temple , a salty @-@ talking vice president of a rolling mill . An element among the strikers also plans to loot houses along Algonquin Avenue , including Farnham 's . The strike begins , paralyzing Buffland 's commerce , though it is initially nonviolent . Neither the mayor nor the chief of police , when approached by Farnham , are willing to guard Algonquin Avenue . Farnham proceeds to organize Civil War veterans , and purchases weapons to arm them . After Farnham 's force rescues the mayor from being attacked , he deputizes them as special police ? on condition there is no expense to the city .

Meanwhile , Maud tells her father she will never marry Sleeney . She is wooed by Bott , who is a spiritualist and a Bread @-@ winner , and also by Offitt . Neither meets success , though Offitt dexterously prevents her from actually saying no , and through flattery and stories of his alleged past piques her interest .

By the end of the second day of the strike , which has spread to Buffland 's rival city of Clearfield [in the serialization , " Clevealo "] , the mood among the laborers has turned ugly . Temple warns that the attacks on Algonquin Avenue are imminent , and aids Farnham 's force in turning back assaults on the captain 's house and on the Belding residence . Bott and Sleeney are captured by the force ; the former is sent to prison but Farnham has pity on Sleeney as a good workman , and the carpenter serves only a few days . The settlement of the strike in Clearfield takes the wind out of the Buffland action , and soon most are back at work , though some agitators are dismissed .

Offitt , despite being one of the leaders of the assault on the Belding house , has escaped blame and befriends the sullen Sleeney on his release . Upon learning that some workers pay their landlord , Farnham , in the evening of the rent day at his home , Offitt comes up with a scheme ? rob and murder Farnham and let Sleeney take the blame as Offitt elopes with Maud . Accordingly , Offitt sneaks into Farnham 's house with Sleeney 's hammer , but just as he is striking the fatal blow , Alice Belding , who can see what is going on from her house through an opera glass , screams , distracting Offitt enough so that Farnham is hurt by the blow , but not killed . Offitt hurries away with the money , and proceeds to frame Sleeney . After realizing Offitt 's treachery , Sleeney escapes jail and kills him . The stolen money is found on Offitt 's body , clearing Sleeney in the assault on Farnham , but the carpenter must still stand trial for the killing of Offitt , in which he is aided by partisan testimony from Maud . A sympathetic jury ignores the law to find him not guilty . Sleeney wins Maud 's hand in marriage , and Farnham and Alice Belding are to be wed .

= = Background = =

= = = John Hay = = =

John Hay was born in Indiana in 1838 , and grew up in frontier Illinois . During his apprenticeship to become a lawyer in his uncle 's office in Springfield , he came to know Abraham Lincoln , and worked for his presidential campaign in 1860 . He was made Lincoln 's assistant personal secretary , and spent the years of the American Civil War working for him ; the two men forged a close relationship .

After the war , Hay worked for several years in diplomatic posts abroad , then in 1870 became a writer for Horace Greeley 's New @-@ York Tribune , continuing there under Whitelaw Reid after Greeley 's death in 1872 . Hay was a gifted writer for the Tribune , but also achieved success with literary works . In 1871 , he published Pike County Ballads , a group of poems written in the dialect of frontier Pike County , Illinois , where Hay had attended school . The same year , he published Castilian Days , a collection of essays on Spain , some of which had been written while Hay was posted as a diplomat in Madrid .

In 1873 , Hay began to woo Clara Stone , daughter of wealthy Cleveland industrialist Amasa Stone , and wed her in 1874 . The marriage made Hay wealthy . Hay and his wife moved to Cleveland , where Hay managed Amasa Stone 's investments . In December 1876 , a train of Stone 's Lake Shore Railway was crossing a bridge when the structure collapsed . The Ashtabula River Railroad Disaster , including the subsequent fire , killed 92 people , the worst rail disaster in American history to that point . Stone held the patent for the design of the bridge and was widely blamed ; he left Hay in charge of his businesses in mid @-@ 1877 as he went to travel in Europe .

Hay biographer Robert Gale recorded that between the publication of the last of Hay 's short fiction in 1871 and that of his only novel in 1883 , " Hay married money , entered into a lucrative business arrangement in Cleveland with his conservative father @-@ in @-@ law [and] joined the right wing of the Ohio Republican Party ... The Bread @-@ Winners was written by a person made essentially different as a result of these experiences . "

= = = Postwar labor troubles and literary reaction = = =

Although the American Civil War did not itself transform the United States from a largely agrarian to an urban society , it gave great impetus to a change already under way , especially in the North . The challenges of feeding , clothing , and equipping the Union Army caused the building or expansion of many factories and other establishments . This made many wealthy , and led to an industrialized America .

This transformation did not stop when the war ended ; industrial production in the United States increased by 75 % from 1865 to 1873 , making the U.S. second only to Britain in manufacturing output . Railroad construction made practical the exploitation of the trans @-@ Mississippi West . Although the railroads helped fuel an economic boom , they proved a two @-@ edged sword in the 1870s . The 1872 Crédit Mobilier scandal , over graft in the construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad , shook the Grant administration to its highest levels . Railroad bankruptcies in the Panic of 1873 led to loss of jobs , wage cuts , and business failures . These disturbances culminated in the Railroad Strikes of 1877 , when workers struck over cut wages and loss of jobs . The action originally started on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad , but spread to other lines , including the Lake Shore , much to Hay 's outrage . Federal troops were sent by President Rutherford B. Hayes to quash the strikes , at the cost of over 100 civilian lives . The Lake Shore dispute , unlike those elsewhere , was settled without violence . Hay remained angry , and blamed foreign agitators for the dispute . He condemned the " unarmed rebellion of foreign workingmen , mostly Irish " and informed Stone by letter , " the very devil seems to have entered into the lower classes of working men and there are plenty of scoundrels to encourage them to all lengths . "

Public opinion was generally against the strikes in the 1877 disputes and called for them to be ended by force to preserve property and stability . The strike and its suppression featured in many books of the period , such as Thomas Stewart Denison 's *An Iron Crown : A Tale of the Great Republic* (1885) , with novelists often sympathizing with the demands of the strikers , though decrying their violence . Another labor dispute that likely affected Hay 's writing of *The Bread @-@ Winners* was the Cleveland Rolling Mills strike of June 1882 , which occurred just before Hay first submitted his manuscript . During the dispute , union members violently attempted to prevent strikebreakers from entering the mills . A third strike that may have affected the final form of *The Bread @-@ Winners* was that against Western Union in 1883 ? Hay was then a director of that corporation .

Gale noted that *The Bread @-@ Winners* has sometimes been characterized as the first anti @-@ labor novel , but it was preceded by Thomas Bailey Aldrich 's *The Stillwater Tragedy* (1880) . Aldrich had little knowledge of workers , and his book was not successful . Nevertheless , *The Stillwater Tragedy* was one of a very few novels to deal with labor unions at all , prior to Hay 's book .

= = Themes = =

Scott Dalrymple , in his journal article on *The Bread @-@ Winners* , argues , " the brunt of Hay 's ire seems aimed less toward these working men themselves than toward troublesome union organizers . Left to their own devices , Hay believes , most laborers are reasonable creatures " . Hay biographers Howard L. Kushner and Anne H. Sherrill agree , writing that the author was attempting " to expose the way in which this class , due to its ignorance , fell prey to the villainies of false social reformers " . To Hay , unions were dangerous as they manipulate the uneducated worker ; it was better for laborers to work out their pay and conditions individually with their employer , as Sleeney does with Matchin . In his journal article , Frederic Jaher notes that Offitt , a self @-@ described reformer , " is arrogant , tyrannical and self @-@ righteous . Hay 's message is clear : the established system needs no basic change ; eliminate the agitator and harmony returns . "

Offitt , at birth , was given the forenames Andrew Jackson , which according to Hay shows that the bearer " is the son of illiterate parents , with no family pride or affections , but filled with a bitter and

savage partisanship which found its expression in a servile worship of the most injurious personality in American history " . Hay despised President Jackson and Jacksonian democracy , which he deemed corrupt and responsible for the continuation of the slave system that Hay saw overthrown at huge cost in the American Civil War . He feared a return to values he deemed anticapitalist , and made the Bread @-@ winners " the laziest and most incapable workmen in town " , whose ideals are pre @-@ industrialist and foreign in origin . Hay saw no excuse for violence ; as the will of the people could be expressed through the ballot , the remedy for any grievances was the next election . According to Gale , Hay " never loses an opportunity to demean the Irish " ? they are depicted as talkative and easily led (Offitt writes for the Irish Harp) , and the reader is told that " there was not an Irish laborer in the city but knew his way to his ward club as well as to mass " .

Jaher noted that Hay 's view of what a worker should be is summed up in the character of Saul Matchin . Although a successful craftsman , he remains within the working class , not seeking to rise above his station , and is content with his lot . His children are not willing to remain within that class , however : the sons run away and the daughters seek to marry well , symbolizing the change being wrought by industrialization . Robert Dunne points out that the working classes are not depicted favorably in Hay 's novel , but as " stupid and ill @-@ bred , at the best loyal servants to the gentry and at the worst overly ambitious and a threat to the welfare of Buffland " . Sloane considers unfavorable depictions of the working classes inevitable given the plot , and less noticeable than skewed portrayals of the wealthy in other books of the time .

Farnham and Alice Belding are the two characters in the novel who were never part of the working class , but who are scions of wealth , and they are presented favorably . Other , self @-@ made members of the elite are depicted as more vulgar : Mrs. Belding 's indulgence in gossip endangers the budding romance between her daughter and Farnham , while Mr. Temple , though brave and steadfast , can only discuss a few topics , such as horse racing , and his speech is described as peppered with profanities . The rest of Buffland 's society , as displayed at a party at Temple 's house , is composed of " a group of gossiping matrons , vacuous town belles , and silly swains " .

= = Writing = =

Hay wrote The Bread @-@ Winners sometime during the winter or spring of 1881 ? 82 . At the time , he was busy with his part of the massive Lincoln biography he was compiling with John Nicolay , Abraham Lincoln : A History . His work on the Lincoln project had been delayed by diphtheria and attendant medical treatment , and was further delayed by The Bread @-@ Winners , as once Hay began work on his only novel , he found himself unable to put it aside . The manuscript was completed by June 1882 , when he sent it to Richard Watson Gilder , editor of The Century Magazine , though whether he was submitting it for publication or advice is unclear . Gilder called it " a powerful book " , but did not immediately offer to publish it in his magazine .

Aside from his family and Gilder , likely the only person who knew that Hay was writing a novel was his friend Henry Adams . In 1880 , Adams had published Democracy : An American Novel , anonymously , and when Hay arrived in Britain in July 1882 , he found speculation as to its authorship to be a popular pursuit . He sent Adams a copy of a cheap British edition , writing " I think of writing a novel in a hurry and printing it as by the author of Democracy . "

During the summer of 1882 , Hay showed the manuscript to his friend , author William Dean Howells . Howells urged Aldrich , editor of the Atlantic Monthly , to publish it . Aldrich agreed , sight unseen , on condition that Hay allow his name to be used as author . Hay was not willing to permit this , and resubmitted the manuscript to Gilder , who agreed to Hay 's condition that it be published anonymously . In an anonymous letter to The Century Magazine after the book was published , Hay alleged that he chose not to reveal his name because he was engaged in business where his stature would be diminished if it were known he had written a novel . According to Dalrymple , the likely real reason was that if it were published under Hay 's name , it would harm his ambitions for office , for " to attack labor overtly , in print , would not have been politically prudent . " Tyler Dennett , in his Pulitzer Prize @-@ winning biography , speculated that Hay , in his later career , would not have been confirmed either as ambassador to Great Britain (1897) or as Secretary of State (1898

) had senators associated him with *The Bread @-@ Winners* .

Although *The Bread @-@ Winners* was published anonymously , Hay left clues to his identity throughout the novel . Farnham leads the library board , as did Hay 's father . Hay 's brother Leonard served on the frontier , like Farnham ; another brother grew exotic flowers , as does Farnham . Algonquin Avenue , analog of Cleveland 's Euclid Avenue (where Hay lived) , is home to the novel 's protagonist . In the opening chapter , Farnham 's study is described in detail and closely resembles Hay 's .

= = Serialization = =

In March 1883 , the Century Company circulated a postcard , with copies likely going to newspapers and potential subscribers . Under the heading " Literary Note from The Century Co . " , and giving some information about the plot , it announced that an anonymous novel , " unusual in scene and subject , and powerful in treatment " would soon be serialized in the pages of the Century . The serial was originally supposed to begin in April or May , but was postponed because Frances Hodgson Burnett 's novel *Through One Administration* ran long . On July 20 , the date of release of the August number , the company placed newspaper advertisements for *The Bread @-@ Winners* , and stated that " the story ... abounds in local description and social studies , which heighten the interest and continually pique curiosity as to its authorship " . *The Bread @-@ Winners* appeared in the Century from August 1883 to January 1884 , when it was issued as a book by Harper and Brothers .

By July 25 , 1883 , Cleveland newspapers were taking note of the literary mystery , with initial guesses that the author was some former Clevelander who had moved east . In early August , the New @-@ York Tribune reported that the author was the late Leonard Case , a Cleveland industrialist and philanthropist ? the manuscript had supposedly been found among his papers . Few believed the chronically ill and introverted bachelor could have created the vivid portrait of the shapely Maud Matchin . With Case dismissed , speculation turned to other Ohioans , including Cleveland Superintendent of Schools Burke Aaron Hinsdale , former congressman Albert Gallatin Riddle (author of twelve books) , and John Hay . The Boston Evening Transcript on August 18 stated , " we have an idea that none of these guesses are correct " . Others suggested that the anonymous author of *Democracy* (Henry Adams 's authorship was not yet known) had penned a second controversial work .

The furor fueled sales , with the Century later reporting that it gained 20 @,@ 000 new subscribers because of the serial . The August issue of the Century , in which the first four chapters were serialized , sold out . The September issue also sold out , but went to a second printing . The Century loudly proclaimed these facts in promotional advertisements , and that it was coining money as a result . As the second installment was read , and the character of Alice Belding became prominent , there was speculation in the press that a female hand had written the novel , with suspicion falling on Constance Fenimore Cooper (great @-@ niece of James Fenimore Cooper) , whose novels were set in eastern Ohio . On September 18 , the Washington correspondent for the Evening Transcript noted the resemblance of Farnham 's study to Hay 's . Other candidates for the authorship were Howells (though he quickly denied it) and Hay 's friend Clarence King , a writer and explorer .

On October 23 , 1883 , an interview with Hay , who had just returned from a trip to Colorado , appeared in the pages of the Cleveland Leader . Hay stated that such a novel would be beyond his powers , and that inaccuracies in the depiction of the local scene suggested to him that it was not written by a Clevelander . He offered no candidates who might have written it . Nevertheless , in November , the Leader ran a column speculating that Hay was the author , based on phrases used both in *The Bread @-@ Winners* and in Hay 's earlier book , *Castilian Days* , and by the fact that one character in the novel was from Salem , Indiana , Hay 's birthplace . Further textual analyses led a number of newspapers in early 1884 (when the novel appeared in book form) to state it had been written by Hay .

Tiring of the guessing game , some newspapers descended to satire . The New Orleans Daily

Picayune surveyed the lengthy list of candidates and announced that " the authors of The Bread Winners [sic] will all meet at Chautauqua next summer " . Another columnist suggested that a statistic be put in the next census for the number of people named as the author . The appearance of President Arthur 's annual message to Congress in December 1883 caused the Rochester Herald to opine that he had written The Bread @-@ Winners " because a careful comparison of his message with the story shows many words common to both " . Another Upstate New York paper , the Troy Times , evoked Parson Weems 's tales of George Washington : " We cannot tell a lie . We wrote The Bread winners [sic] with our own little hatchet . If any one doubts it , we can show him the hatchet . " This admission , the Buffalo Express felt , should put an end to the discussion .

= = Reaction = =

= = = Critical = = =

The Bread @-@ Winners received some favorable reviews , such as that by GP Lathrop in Atlantic Monthly in May 1884 . Lathrop applauded the author 's portrayal of the characters , and suggested that Maud Matchin was a notable addition to the " gallery of national types " in American literature . The Century reviewed the book the same month , in an article written by Howells , though he signed it only " W " . He saw Maud as " the great discovery of the book " and applauded it as a treatment of an area of American life not previously written about . Similarly , a reviewer for Harper 's Magazine liked the parts of the novel set among the lower classes .

According to David E. E. Sloane , " most American critics found it harder to overlook the coarseness of the book and its treatment of the labor problem . " A reviewer for Literary World in January 1884 called The Bread @-@ Winners a " greasy , slangy , malodorous book ... repulsive from the very first step " . The Dial , the following month , praised the author 's use of language but deemed the book " a preposterous tissue of incidents " populated by two sets of " exaggerated types " , one vicious , the other absurd . Continent , also in February 1884 , suggested that " the criticisms as a whole are severe , and justly so , the book being , with all its brilliancy , faithless and hopeless . " The Springfield Republic suggested that the author had " no sympathies beyond the circles of wealth and refinement " , from which " the workingman is either a murderous ruffian , or a senseless dupe , or a stolid , well @-@ meaning drudge , while the man of wealth is , necessarily , a refined , cultivated hero , handsome , stylish , fascinating " . A letter in The Century Magazine deemed the novel " a piece of snobbishness imported from England ... It is simply untruthful ... to continue the assertion that trade unions are mainly controlled and strikes originated by agitators , interested only for what they make out of them " .

British critics were generally more favorable toward the book than Americans . In a column in the Pall Mall Gazette , The Bread @-@ Winners was seen as " eminently clever and readable , a worthy contribution to that American novel @-@ literature which is at the present day , on the whole , ahead of our own , " a statement which Harper 's used in advertisements . A reviewer for London 's Saturday Review described the book as " one of the strongest and most striking stories of the last ten years " .

= = = Responses = = =

Hay 's novel provoked several works in response . Ohio Congressman Martin Foran announced in March 1884 that he would write a book rebutting the author 's view of labor , and published it in 1886 under the title The Other Side . Harriet Boomer Barber (writing under the pen name Faith Templeton) kept a number of Hay 's characters , while " turning the American industrial world into a sort of Christian utopia " in her Drafted In (1888) . Stephen Crane 's 1895 short story , " A Christmas Dinner Won in Battle " satirizes The Bread @-@ Winners .

The most successful response was The Money @-@ Makers (1885) , published anonymously by Henry Francis Keenan , a former colleague of Hay 's at the New @-@ York Tribune . Keenan 's

work left little doubt that he had fixed on Hay as author of *The Bread @-@ Winners* , as it contains characters clearly evoking Hay , his family , and associates . Aaron Grimestone parallels Amasa Stone , Hay 's father @-@ in @-@ law . When the Academy Opera House collapses , taking hundreds of lives , Grimestone is deemed responsible for its faulty construction ? as Stone was for the deaths in the Ashtabula railway disaster . Grimestone eventually commits suicide by shooting himself in his bathroom , as did Stone in 1883 . His daughter Eleanor parallels Clara Stone Hay , and Keenan 's descriptions of Eleanor make it clear she is , like Clara , heavysset . The character Archibald Hilliard is modeled after Hay , and the description of his appearance is that of Hay even to the mustache . Hilliard was a secretary to a high official in Washington , and later a diplomat and editor , entering journalism in the same year as Hay . Hilliard becomes a brilliant writer at the *Atlas* , a reforming New York paper like the *Tribune* , under the editorship of Horatio Blackdew , that is , *Tribune* editor Whitelaw Reid . Although she is not physically attractive to him , Hilliard woos Eleanor , convincing himself he is not merely a fortune seeker .

When Hay received a copy of *The Money @-@ Makers* , according to later accounts , he is said to have hurried to New York to buy up as many copies as he could . He wrote the publisher , William Henry Appleton , complaining about the " savage libel " against Amasa Stone . Appleton agreed to several changes , including the manner of suicide , and undertook not to advertise the book further . Later in 1885 , a laudatory biographical sketch of Stone , written by " J.H. " , appeared in the *Magazine of Western History* , attributing Stone 's suicide to insomnia . According to Clifford A. Bender in his journal article on the Keenan book , " the principal reason *The Money @-@ Makers* has remained in obscurity seems to be that John Hay suppressed it , " and though he deemed it superior to *The Bread @-@ Winners* , Dalrymple suggests that Keenan 's book " seems more the product of a personal vendetta than an ideological disagreement " .

= = Publication and aftermath = =

By the standards of the day , *The Bread @-@ Winners* was a modest bestseller , with 25 @,@ 000 copies sold in the United States by mid @-@ 1885 . Two editions were published in Britain and a pirated edition in Canada , along with a reported sale of 3 @,@ 000 in the Australian colonies . Translations were published in French , German , and Swedish . By comparison , Adams 's *Democracy* sold only 14 @,@ 000 copies in the U.S. , and took four years to do so . Nevertheless , *The Bread @-@ Winners* did not compare with the leading bestsellers of the 1880s , such as Lew Wallace 's *Ben Hur : A Tale of the Christ* (1880) , which sold 290 @,@ 000 copies by 1888 , and Edward Bellamy 's story of the future , *Looking Backward* (1887) , which sold nearly 1 million copies in its first decade .

John Hay never acknowledged the book , nor was it attributed to him in his lifetime ; as Gilder put it , " guessing right isn 't finding out " . Hay and Adams amused themselves by suggesting that the other might have written it , with Hay writing to his friend , " if you have been guilty of this ... libel upon Cleveland , there is no condonement possible in this or any subsequent worlds " . At Hay 's death in 1905 , obituarists were uncertain whether to assign the novel to him , an exception being *The New York Times* , which used handwriting analysis to link the book to him , and published it in its entirety over six Sundays later that year . In 1907 , with the permission of Clara Hay , the book was officially acknowledged as his , and in 1916 it was republished in John Hay 's name , with an introduction by his son , Clarence .

= = Historical view = =

Jaher opined that the book became antiquated as America evolved an understanding of industrial problems , and found Hay 's view of labor superficial . Accordingly , the book had little lasting influence , and is remembered only for its onetime popularity and controversy . According to Dalrymple , " the anti @-@ labor novels fail to hold up particularly well . None is a masterpiece of language , plotting , or characterization . Ideologically all seem quite heavy @-@ handed , choosing to make their points with a nearly complete lack of subtlety . "

Because of his prominence as a statesman , Hay has had a number of biographers in the century since his death . Sloane suggested that early biographers , aware of the nature of the novel 's themes , were defensive in their treatment of it . Lorenzo Sears , for example , who wrote of Hay in 1915 , called *The Bread @-@ Winners* one of several " waifs and strays " of Hay 's literary career . Dennett , writing in 1933 , deemed the book Hay 's honest effort to set forth a problem he could not solve . Other historians were more hostile : Vernon L. Parrington in 1930 called it a " dishonest book " and " a grotesque fabric smeared with unctuous morality " . More recently , Gale (writing in 1978) described it as " a timely , popular and controversial novel that still rewards the sympathetic reader " , while Hay 's most recent biographer , John Taliaferro (2013) deemed it " certainly no love letter to [Cleveland] " .