

# Who is ...

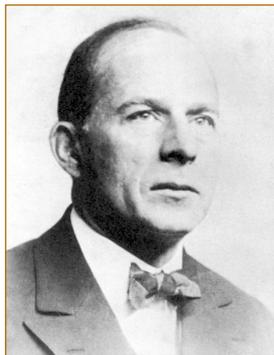
## Garet Garrett

BY JEFFREY TUCKER

**G**aret Garrett (1878–1954) is a case study in a forgotten genius, about whom Ludwig von Mises said: “His keen penetration and his forceful direct language are . . . unsurpassed by any author.” Mises was speaking about his book *The People’s Pottage* (1953), which is a collection of three powerful essays that linked the failures of the welfare and warfare states.

But there is more to Garrett. Both his nonfiction and his novels display a most rare talent. His entire *oeuvre* offers a sparkling vision of peace under free markets. Whereas many intellectuals on the Right and Left regard the peaceful, bourgeois society as something of a bore—with the middle class amassing wealth and spending it on fripperies—Garrett saw peace and freedom as the essential precondition for the real drama of human life that revolves around creation, association, risk, love, courage, and the full range of human experience that transform society in spectacular ways.

Garet Garrett was born in Pana, Illinois. His formal education was slight but his independent study took him through all the classics, as



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shown by the remarkable erudition of his writings. His influence in economics came primarily through a book by the American academic Simon Newcomb: *Principles of Political Economy* (1886). Newcomb was an advocate of the gold standard and *laissez-faire*, an early convert to the marginalist revolution. So Garrett's Austrianism is present, but in a back-door way, via William Stanley Jevons and the American hard-money school that was actively writing in the late nineteenth century.

At the age of 20, he left for Chicago to work as a reporter for the *Cleveland Recorder* and then later covered politics in Washington, D.C., writing reports on the administration of William McKinley for the *Washington Times*. In 1900, he went to New York and joined the staff of the *New York Sun* as a financial writer. He moved on to the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* until he joined the *New York Evening Post* in 1909.

In that time, business reporting consisted mostly of reporting prices and dry facts. Garrett, in contrast, wrote with drama on personalities and events, infusing the activity of commerce with a fire and passion that later made his fiction so enormously popular.

He began to write fiction in the early 1920s. *The Driver* (1922), *The Cinder Buggy* (1923), and *Satan's Bushel* (1924) are novels that tell thrilling stories about American history, with complex plot and character development, in which the glorious drama of commercial life plays the central role. These novels chronicle dramatic social and economic transformations in the context of fierce struggle and great risk—all within the framework of peace.

He wrote another novel about the failure of a socialist experiment: *Harangue (The Trees Said to the Bramble Come Reign Over Us)* (1926). It shows that socialism is not economically viable and collapses from its own inner contradictions. He also foresaw that once the socialists discovered this, they would turn to extolling the virtues of poverty and urge the worship of mother earth—and finally turn on reason itself.

Garrett's knowledge of economic forces was so profound that he wrote the first full and widely circulated explanation of the 1929 stock market crash. *The Bubble that Broke the World* (1932) placed the blame on an overextension of credit made possible by the Federal Reserve; this created, said Garrett, a false prosperity that led to a correction. This book alone is proof that his journalism continued through the Depression and war, always with a decidedly and even radically libertarian cast.

Following this success, Garrett began as a featured contributor to America's most successful periodical, *The Saturday Evening Post*, but his contributions were not limited to this. He also wrote for *Collier's*, *Everybody's Magazine*, and *The New Republic*. His topics usually centered on financial matters.

With a change in editorial direction at the *Post* in 1942, Garrett left, and two years later founded the journal *American Affairs*. This journal by itself is a remarkable accomplishment. In a time of all-around planning and war, Garrett managed to produce a free-market publication that took on labor unions, price controls, inflation, war planning, international agencies, centralization of power, and war propaganda, and to fight for liberty of the individual in issue after issue.

In 1953, his masterpiece of nonfiction writing appeared: *The People's Pottage*. This was a collection of three essays. "The Revolution Was" shows that the New Deal transformed American society to such an extent that it was foolhardy to

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listen to American politicians and their warnings of dangers from the outside. Murray Rothbard writes in *The Betrayal of the American Right* that this is “one of the most sparkling and influential attacks on the New Deal.” The second essay is “Ex America” (1951) a shocking look back at what America was and what it had become. The third essay is “The Rise of Empire” (1952). Here Garrett spells out the conditions that signal the move from Republic to Empire, including the dominance of the executive, the rise of the military mind, a “complex of vaunting and fear,” the subjugation of domestic concerns to foreign ones, and a system of satellite nations.

The list is an eerie one for us today, for it essentially spells out what drives American policy in the post-Cold War world. With the fear of Communism out of the way, we should be more positioned than ever to heed his warnings.

One of his last works was a wonderful history of the Ford Motor Company called *The Wild Wheel* (1952) that should be read by all American school kids.

To Garrett, there is no heroism in statism but only in creativity and production, and no folly greater than overthrowing the institutions that make creativity and economic progress possible. He was not just a great writer of fiction, not just a courageous opponent of the planning state and war; he was a prophet of the fate of America under government control, a brilliant intellectual force in the twentieth century, and a wise and eloquent spokesman for freedom itself. ■



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