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HARRY ORCHARD'S CONFESSION

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As collaborators in preparing Harry Orchard's confession, James McParland and Albert E. Horsley [Harry Orchard's real name] fitted together exceptionally well. McParland quite properly took credit for having identified an inner circle of Western Federation leaders who conspired to arrange for violent episodes in conflict between miners and managers, primarily in Idaho and Colorado. (His earlier Molly Maguire experience provided him a model for interpretation of later Western Federation incidents.)

He also took pride in his skill in getting Horsley to admit having been employed to perpetrate a long sequence of such violent incidents. In doing so, McParland and Horsley managed to account for about every unexplained incident in Idaho and Colorado mine warfare. Their remarkable achievement benefited from Horsley's unshakable conviction that he had done everything he claimed that Harry Orchard did, and his totally convincing account gave McParland an elaborate and compelling detailed confirmation of his long established confidence in his inner circle interpretation of Western Federation strife. He quite properly regarded his success in persuading Horsley to confess to such a remarkable sequence of incidents as to an exceptional achievement. By almost any measure, Harry Orchard's confession became a remarkable document, especially in its two subsequent versions which expanded significantly upon its original text.

Horsley also could take credit for collaborating in an exceptional achievement. He had McParland's assurance that he would be a lot better off--morally as well as in his prison tribulation--if he only would collaborate in developing Harry

Orchard's full and complete confession. As it developed, both Horsley and McParland gained enthusiasm for completing their unmatched account of industrial warfare. As they went along, both were totally convinced that every detail was accurate, and that they were gaining a fuller understanding of a complex situation that long had been in need of explanation. If anyone had doubted their veracity and accuracy interpretation, they would have been quite properly offended. They believed in what they were doing, and though each profited greatly from their accomplishment, they had no feeling that they were simply trying to promote their own interests. As a result, Harry Orchard's story stood up very well under expert cross-examination in court--with an unintended result of gaining an even more general acceptance of its veracity.

More than a few skeptics doubted that Harry Orchard's confession was accurate, and some incidents were demonstrated to be erroneous. But McParland and Horsley made such a good team that their product has made an exceptional impression in later years as well as in 1906 when it was developed. Their impact upon Western Federations history has been substantial, largely because their conviction that they had prepared a true account of an controversial sequence of incidents gave Harry Orchard's confession far more credence than it could have gained if less skillful and self-assured collaborators had developed it. They are worthy successors to Washington Irving and B. L. E. Bonneville.

by Merle W. Wells

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