

JAMES A. HERNE: ACTOR, DRAMATIST, AND
MAN.

An Appreciation by HAMLIN GARLAND, J. J. ENNEKING, *and*
B. O. FLOWER.

I. HIS SINCERITY AS A PLAYWRIGHT.

WHEN I first met James A. Herne and his brave little wife, they were fighting a losing battle with a play called "Drifting Apart." This was in the first months of 1889, and all through 'ninety and 'ninety-one, and the summer of 'ninety-two, ill-luck pursued them. I saw a great deal of them during those years, and their sincerity of purpose as well as their unconquerable courage won my profound admiration. They had the highest ideals of what the drama should be, and they never swerved from the course which Mr. Herne himself outlined in his first letter to me, written in answer to a criticism I had made of "Drifting Apart." He believed that a drama should interest,—he knew it must do that,—but he also insisted that it should have as a basis a theme calculated to do good. He wished to send his audiences away morally better than they came. In one sense this was instruction, and in another sense it was not. It was true entertainment.

In the twelve years of our intercourse he wrote me freely and most intimately on his work as dramatist and playwright, and I can say that while he acknowledged the necessity for a money success he never retrograded in search of it. He believed that a "box-office winning" and an artistic success were both possible in the same play—which he proved in "Shore Acres" and "Sag Harbor."

Mr. Herne took his work seriously. He was never flippant about it. He had ideals and was not ashamed of them—he was, indeed, ready to fight for them. That he stumbled and fell short of reaching his ideal did not sour him or discourage

him. When "Margaret Fleming" failed, he said, "I'll write a better play." When "Griffith Davenport" was taken off, he said, "The time will come when this play will be considered one of my best." When he was forced to give up his part in "Sag Harbor" he at once planned to retire to Herne's Oaks and write a better play than either "Shore Acres" or "Margaret Fleming."

I have never known greater courage or more wonder-working pertinacity. He had his moments of black depression, but his resiliency at sixty years of age was a constant marvel to me. He was intellectually young. He seemed of my own age rather than a generation ahead of me. He was also intellectually hospitable to new ideas and capable of boyish enthusiasm; but through all his ups and downs, failures and successes, shifts of scene and confusion of advice, he never lost sight of the kind of drama he wished to produce, which was a sane, unexaggerated, humorous, and tender story of American life.

The fight he made to get "Shore Acres" produced was stern, as I know, for I shared it with him. The editor of *THE ARENA* and I helped to produce "Margaret Fleming," in Chickering Hall, and we suffered sympathetically all that Mr. Herne and his heroic wife went through in their determination to be true to their ideals. The story of those days of discouragement, if told, would set at rest any doubt of Mr. Herne's sincerity. It is a source of pleasure to me to remember that, after being all through those years of struggle, I was present, with Flower, and Enneking, and Hurd, and Chamberlain, on that glorious first night at the Boston Museum when "Shore Acres" began its golden tale of a hundred nights, and telegrams from New York poured in upon Mr. Herne offering "time" that he had almost begged for. This was the beginning of easier times for the author, and, mindful of his growing family, Mr. Herne kept closely to his success for several years. His play "Griffith Davenport" brought him some fame, but no money, and he went back to "Shore Acres." He began to plan other plays, however, and always sought a union of good work with

salable work; and it is this high purpose,—this inner sweetness,—hidden from many of his friends, that will live in his plays. They have faults of style and construction, but their main interest is wholesome and their outcome noble. "Uncle Nat" may be taken to represent the type of life that appealed to Mr. Herne with greatest power as a dramatist. As an actor he loved *all* quaintly humorous, unconsciously self-sacrificing characters—just as in life the cause of a self-immolating reformer like Henry George appealed to him with regenerative power. His humanitarian enthusiasm and his plays "Shore Acres" and "Margaret Fleming" expressed the man as I knew him. He made himself a national force in our drama, and the best of his teaching has already entered into the stage-craft of our day.

HAMLIN GARLAND.

West Salem, Wis.



II. MR. HERNE AS I KNEW HIM.

WHEN a noted man passes away who has helped along some great movement in art, literature, or science, the questions always arise: What has he accomplished? What influence has he exerted? Will his work live and be successfully carried forward by others?

The late James A. Herne, who has recently passed from among us, rose to a prominent position among the revolutionary or evolutionary Progressives of the world, not only helping in the reconstruction of the drama—which stood in much need of sincerity, virility, and truth in tendency and expression—but also throwing himself heart and soul into the conflict for the rights of the people.

I for one am satisfied that his influence for good, as stage manager, actor, dramatist, and social economist, will be of permanent value, because he went back to first principles—to Nature—to Truth. At the time when Mr. Herne turned to truth for art's sake, the difficulties confronting him seemed insurmountable. It was almost impossible for him to gain

a hearing, and it required the greatest courage to persevere in a course that seemed to promise nothing but defeat.

I remember that it was about that time that there was considerable discussion going on relative to the establishment of a *theatre libre*, to give opportunity for the introduction to the public of progressive men and their work. Mr. Hamlin Garland, through whom I became acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Herne some time before they presented "Margaret Fleming" to the Boston public, was very enthusiastic over the proposition to have such an institution brought into existence, because it was so discouragingly difficult to get a fair trial for any play that did not pander to the popular taste. Mr. Herne often remarked that he envied the painter, because it was easy for the latter to bring his work before the public. In the field of art, competition was yet free and healthy. It must have been disheartening for Wagner to wait eleven years before one of his great productions was performed. Millet during his lifetime was appreciated by a few artists, but not by the public. He died very poor and is hardly yet understood, although his pictures now bring princely prices. Very few great men have lived long enough to enjoy the material fruits of their labor, Turner and Mendelssohn being notable exceptions.

Mr. Herne, although an avowed realist, a grubber for unadulterated truth, and a stickler for its objective representation, was impressionistically inclined, and would in time, I believe, have gravitated to idealism and subjective representation. But in this event his work would have been genuine, because this evolution of a playwright from the bondage of stage tradition, conventionalism, and superficialism to almost brutal truth and rigid simplicity is the natural course for him to follow in order to find his true or best self somewhere between the two extremes. The realism of Ibsen, Tolstoi, and Sudermann served to blaze the way for Mr. Herne. Henry George guided him in the way of social justice and economic progress. Hamlin Garland, Mr. Howells, and others were staunch friends and were likewise making for the same goal; but from no one did Mr. Herne receive so much inspiration, sympathy, and help as

from his devoted and accomplished wife, Katherine Herne, who ever understood and encouraged him.

His "Drifting Apart" and "Margaret Fleming" are powerful sermons. "Shore Acres" represents the heart life of the people. "Griffith Davenport" is a grand summing up of a great national struggle and gives almost a complete impression of the great Rebellion. This last great effort gave me (as an artist) the highest opinion of him, not only as an actor and a playwright but as a great artist and a strong man. In the field of painting such men are not always at once appreciated, any more than in the dramatic world. Thus Hunt, George Fuller Innis, Homer Martin, and many others have had to die to be recognized at their true value.

Mr. Herne when in Boston found his way into my studio frequently. He as well as his wife loved pictures, and were especially interested in all representations of Nature that were honest, individual, and truthful. When I first knew the actor he was almost too rabid a realist for me, and we had some spirited talks on the subject. I remember one of these discussions, when Mr. Howells and Hamlin Garland were also present. Either Herne or Garland insisted that I was a realist, because pictures standing around proclaimed me as such. I promptly denied the charge and insisted that what he designated as pictures were only careful studies. Some one then said, "If you are not a realist, what do you call yourself?" I replied, "I do not know what I am, but I try to be an unadulterated individual."

In the course of the conversation either Mr. Herne or Mr. Howells asked my definition of the real and the ideal. On the spur of the moment I said, "The ideal is the choicest expression of the real;" whereupon Mr. Howells said, "Good!—that is the shortest definition on record." Mr. Herne also liked the definition, saying that it exactly voiced his sentiments.

The death of Mr. Herne is a grievous loss to his family and a great loss to the world.

J. J. ENNEKING.

Boston, Mass.

III. THE MAN AND HIS WORK.

I.

IN some respects the life of the late James A. Herne is unique. The eminent playwright, the delightful actor, and consummate stage manager rose to distinction and wrought effectively for a wholesome American drama in spite of adverse environments in early years and the temptation of gold, ease, and ephemeral popularity later in his career. Thus he proved himself superior to the most baleful and seductive three influences of modern life. He was remarkable also in that, after an early career that counted for little in the work achieved, he awakened to a keen sense of the deeper meaning of art and manhood and became an earnest, aggressive, and constructive worker in artistic, literary, and social fields at a time when most persons become set, conservative, sluggish, and not infrequently indifferent and pessimistic. Like William Morris, who spent the early part of his brilliant literary career as "the idle singer of an empty day," but who later came under the compelling influence of the pending social revolution to such a degree that he became beyond all else an apostle of justice and human progress, so James A. Herne, after a varied career on the stage, as actor, stage director, and manager, married a woman of superior ability, both as an artist and a thinker; next he won a fortune in a conventional melodrama and was in a fair way to become immensely rich by catering to the tastes of those who care only for cheap amusement. Then, however, he came under the influence of the threefold revolution that marked the closing half of the nineteenth century—the evolutionary theory as expounded by Herbert Spencer, the revolt against artificiality in literature and art as led by Tolstoi, Ibsen, Sudermann, and Mr. Howells, and the social gospel as proclaimed by Henry George. These influences awakened all that was best in his being, quickening his emotional nature on its higher planes of expression. The effect was astonishing to those who had known the man in earlier days. He determined to devote the remainder of his life to serious and true

American dramatic work, and with this resolution formed he steadily refused to surrender what he conceived to be the true demand of dramatic art, though sorely tempted by wealth to be easily gained by ephemeral productions. For many years he was a student of Tolstoi, Sudermann, Ibsen, and other great veritists in literature, while the social philosophy of Henry George won his whole-hearted acceptance. In it he believed there was to be found social salvation with freedom, and to almost the day of his death he was ever ready to give his services freely for the cause of the single tax. His addresses were clear, popular, sincere, and convincing, and he contributed a magnificent service to the cause of social progress by his faithful work in this direction.

II.

Mr. Herne was worth about one hundred thousand dollars when he was overmastered by the light and determined to consecrate the remainder of his artistic career to the cause of truth in the field of dramatic expression. His "Hearts of Oak," a conventional melodrama, was phenomenally popular, but he determined on the creation of plays that should be at once serious, thoughtful, and true. His first drama in this direction was "Drifting Apart," probably the most powerful temperance sermon ever produced on the boards of a theater. It proved a financial failure, as did "The Minute Men," a pioneer Revolutionary study, though this latter was far stronger, finer, and more artistic than many recent dramatic successes among war plays. It was not difficult to understand the cause of these failures. Mr. Herne had for years been playing to audiences that demanded an exciting melodrama, filled with mock heroics, dramatic clap-trap, and spectacular effects that delighted the galleries. With his large following the new plays fell flat. The actor was speaking to them in an unknown tongue. There were in the cities in which he played thousands of persons who would have greatly enjoyed "Drifting Apart" and "The Minute Men," but few of these people had ever seen Mr. Herne, as the conventional melodrama had

little attraction for them. Hence he disappointed his old friends and had not as yet found an appreciative new audience.

A man less resolute would have given up the struggle when poverty stared him in the face, and, adopting the unworthy but popular cry of the modern commercial world, would have exclaimed, Since the people do not want good plays I will give them what they want!—and thereby become again independent. Had his home influence favored such a course, it is possible that he might have returned to the conventional, barn-storming melodramas; but in his high resolve to be true to the vital ideal, "art for progress, the beautiful useful," he was warmly seconded by his accomplished wife. Katherine Herne had entered heart and soul into the higher and broader conception of being which had so revolutionized her husband's work. Together they had studied and heartily accepted the vision of justice unfolded in the social gospel of Henry George. They had perused with delight the masterly exposition of evolution as given by the great philosophic thinkers who have made the nineteenth century forever memorable; while the rugged protests against the unreal, the artificial, and the hollow hypocrisy of a conventional literature and art by vigorous Russian, Scandinavian, and German thinkers awakened their enthusiasm and proved a positive inspiration. And now, when standing in the shadow of defeat, with fortune vanished and poverty present, Mrs. Herne courageously and steadfastly encouraged her husband to persevere.

It was during these trying years of adversity that Mr. Herne wrote "Margaret Fleming," which I think is by far his greatest dramatic creation, as it is also the most powerful protest against the double standard of morals to be found in our dramatic literature. But, fine as was the play, it was too unconventional for managers. Mr. Herne could find no means of bringing it before the public. It was at this time that Hamlin Garland, Mr. J. Henry Wiggin, and a few other friends interested themselves in the production, with the result that it was enacted for about two weeks at Chickering Hall, in Boston, Mr. and Mrs. Herne assuming the leading *rôles*, supported by a care-

fully selected company. The presentation, however, lacked the advantage of scenic effect and other auxiliary aids, but the essential greatness of the play was felt by all the more serious in the audiences. The critics, even those who championed the conventional drama, acknowledged its power and worth.

It was this production that introduced Mr. Herne to the thoughtful public and also acquainted managers with the worth of his new work. Mr. William Dean Howells further aided the actor with some fine criticisms and by a letter to Mr. Field, of the Museum, at the time the latter was debating whether or not to accept "Shore Acres," a simple and true play of New England life which the actor had written after the completion of "Margaret Fleming." Finally Mr. Field decided to give the new play a trial. It did not prove instantaneously successful, and toward the close of the second week I remember Mr. Herne's calling at my office in a rather despondent mood. He told me that Mr. Field did not consider the play a success and was talking of taking it off at the close of the next week, and the fact that the audiences were slowly increasing did not seem to convince the skeptical manager of the value of "Shore Acres"; but by the end of the third week the play was drawing fine houses, and thenceforth to the close of the season—a period of about one hundred nights—it was a reigning success. From that time, barring the financially unfortunate venture attending the production of "Griffith Davenport," Mr. Herne enjoyed the pleasures and comforts of prosperity.

III.

Perhaps no man with noble ideals and high aspirations at all times reaches the standard that floats as a pillar of fire before the soul, and Mr. Herne, in common with others, did not at all times, even in his later years, reach his ideals. This fact he expressed to me in a letter written less than two years ago. I had given my impressions of the actor-dramatist as I knew him, in a magazine article, and Mr. Herne, who was a man of few words, wrote me in regard to this paper. "You have," he said, "given me more than I deserve. I only wish that

I were all that you say of me, and what you have said is exactly what I wish to be." In my paper I had merely given the impressions of the man that I had received from seeing him in his home, from conversations with him, and from a study of his great characters; for in a man's master creations there is ever shadowed forth much of his own nature as well as his best aspirations.

It is a fact worthy to be mentioned in passing that nowhere was Mr. Herne so passionately loved as in his own family. He was almost idolized by wife and children, while his services to the cause of the American drama have during recent years been recognized by the most eminent and competent critics on both sides of the Atlantic. In his recent work on the American stage, the very able dramatic authority, Mr. Norman Hapgood, pays the following tribute to the work of Mr. Herne for the American drama:

"Two men stand out, as far as we may see, clearly ahead of their predecessors—James A. Herne for intellectual quality supported by considerable stagecraft, and William Gillette for the playwright talent, working on ideas of his own. Their plays are equaled by single efforts of other men, but no other American dramatist has done so much of equal merit."

Mr. Herne's loyalty to truth in art and his desire to make the drama a potent factor in present-day life—a real educator, as well as a true reflector of life and the aspirations of the age—were tested in the furnace of adversity to such a degree that it revealed the presence of that high, true spirit that in every age has marked the men and women who have carried forward whatsoever is best in religion, in science, in art, and in life, in spite of a mockingly indifferent and often openly hostile conventionalism.

B. O. FLOWER.

Boston, Mass.

subject for the October number relates to the industrial progress of the century.

Our symposium this month on the late James A. Herne is a merited appreciation of an actor whose services in the interests of a more worthy dramatic literature will have far-reaching effects. He was not a mere impersonator of character, but a student, a philosopher, a social reformer—a man interested in the progress and prosperity of his race. This feature is followed by an article from the pen of W. A. Hawley that Mr. Herne would have loved to read—"The Single Tax as a Happy Medium"—for the famous actor and playwright was a profound admirer of the late Henry George and his economic teachings.

An important symposium on "The Single Tax and the Trust" is in preparation for our next issue. Among the contributors to this discussion will be Louis F. Post, editor of the *Chicago Public*; J. H. Ralston, Esq., of Washington, D. C.; and Mr. Bolton Hall, of New York—three leading and thoroughly representative advocates of a principle of taxation in which an increasing number of social reformers are beginning to discern a solvent of our political, industrial, and economic ills.

J. E. M.