

The San Francisco Call, Saturday, March 6, 1897

James A. Herne, Single Taxer

The Actor is a Hot Champion of the Great Economic Reform

Says the Realization of Henry George's Dream is Not Far Off

Believes the State of Washington Will Lead the Way into the Promised Land

James A. Herne, who has created new things upon the stage, who has distinctly widened the wide horizon of the theater, and who will no doubt have such a following in the future as to give him the rating of a founder of school, is not only a great realistic actor, but he is a careful and earnest student of social problems. He is known everywhere throughout the country as among the most ardent champions of the single tax. Everywhere he goes he is called upon to "help the cause" in some way, for he is known to be always willing, and when he is not called upon he does it of his own accord.

For instance, upon his visit in this City some years ago, when he was not nearly so well known as he is now, he hired a hall, paying the expenses himself, in order to preach the doctrine which he believes will eventually inaugurate the era of freedom and justice among men.

Mr. Herne is not merely a student, he is a scholar. He is a strong personality, a real force. He talks as impressively from the platform as he plays delightfully before the footlights, and the Single-Tax Society is arranging to have him lecture under its auspices during his stay in the City.

"The single taxer," said Mr. Herne, "has become a factor in affairs that is hardly realized by those who have not watched the signs of the times. Some of these days the question will get before the people, and, as Henry George says, there will be so many of them that their opponents will be kept guessing where they came from. They will seem to rise up out of the ground.

The question is now before the Legislatures of five States in the form of constitutional amendments -- the States of California, Colorado, Delaware, Kansas and Washington. The last-named State will be the first to see the new era inaugurated if the signs count for anything. It is also being worked indirectly in New York. It is in the National Congress, led by Maguire, and it will remain there, thrusting itself forward forever until its mission is realized.

"Yes, I have been called upon to talk the single tax at almost every stopping place over the country and beyond it. Indeed, they have the single tax now, practically, in Manitoba. The people are happy and well-to-do. They know nothing of tramps and beggars there. It is amazing to me that the system is not adopted now, or long since, in view of the conditions which I find everywhere as I find them here -- men

who do not want charity, but work, and who are yet compelled to drag wagons about the street, begging for food. The single tax, at one stroke, in one day, would change those conditions, would give employment to all and set everybody on the road to prosperity and a higher plane of existence.

"Is it not strange that they refuse to listen and keep binding themselves with new chains day by day? But, as I said before, it will burst upon us some day from some place that even the prophets of the doctrine cannot now nominate.

"I have said that I think the State of Washington will inaugurate it. Certainly the indications are most favorable there. There is a majority in the Assembly there in favor of it. The Governor, a Populist, is opposed to it. It is hard to reconcile these things and it is just as well, perhaps, not to try but just go on making the fight. The State is full of single-taxers, however, and a good strong pull, all together, would carry it over the line into the promised land, so to speak.

"That reminds me that I organized the first single-tax club in that State. There were seven single-taxers in the State when I chanced to go there in the first instance. They asked me to talk on the subject on Sunday night and I consented. They hired an old barracks of a hall, stocked it with benches and chairs and then put forth their energies to fill it with influential people. They got together a remarkable audience for the place -- lawyers, doctors, preachers, judges -- the very best men and their wives. Well, we had a famous meeting. It was after 12 o'clock before it broke up, and the enthusiasm was great. That meeting resulted in the formation of a club. I saw a clipping in the paper after I left. It was called the James A. Herne Single-Tax Club. From that small beginning the State has taken the first place in the lists.

"I was at Denver a short time ago, and was asked to speak before a joint session of the two houses of the Legislature, which is now wrestling with the local-option or home rule single-tax proposition. I consented, and had a good strong speech prepared, but the opposition fought the move, and it was decided best not to urge it. I lectured in a church there the following Sunday on 'The Theater.' The church was crowded and most of the Legislature was there, and I took occasion to work in my speech on the single tax.

"'Shore Acres' took a strong hold upon theatre-going people during its long run in Boston. That was when the play was new and my picture was not scattered about town with the same profusion that it is now. I knew that there would be a good many people who would like to see how 'Nathaniel Berry' looked off the stage. I hired Agricultural Hall, and it was crowded with a class of people who had never heard of the single tax before, and I gave it to them for a couple of hours.

"At Toronto a little lunch to me was made the occasion of bringing a lot of good people -- I mean influential people -- together, and then I preached to them. They are getting there fast in Toronto. But I might go on and give you instances of how the good work is progressing in every State, but it is enough to say that it is progressing. The Mormons are turning to it at Salt Lake. You know the Mormons

originally worked under the single-tax system, and it is a proverb how entirely prosperous and contented they lived.

"Every man was allowed all the land that he could work. A merchant was given a site for his store. The gentiles have introduced the new system of high rents and high taxes, besides other burdens, and the Mormons are restive under it.

"It is spreading as rapidly as it is becoming understood in all parts of the country. As the Masons say every good man is a Mason at heart, so we may say every good man is at heart a single taxer, and, as the majority of men are good men, it only remains for us who have come to see the way clearly, to point it out to others.