

Annals of Iowa

ESTABLISHED 1863

VOL. XXXVII, No. 6

DES MOINES, FALL, 1964

THIRD SERIES

Radical On The Campus:

Professor Herron at Iowa College, 1893-1899

BY H. R. DIETERICH, PH.D.

H. R. Dieterich is presently an associate professor of History and American studies and is acting Chairman of the History Department at the University of Wyoming. The following article concerns the famed Iowa radical George D. Herron and his controversial tenure at Iowa College (now Grinnell) in the 1890's. Mr. Dieterich remarks that Herron "is a fascinating character, in part because his career spanned so many reform currents, in part because he was a kind of classic social radical." The episode involving Herron at Grinnell is a significant one in Iowa's intellectual history, for it is an expression of academic freedom in higher education. As will be apparent from the article, the author feels that Grinnell handled its maverick academic with a good deal of common sense and patience.

Mr. Dieterich is currently working on a full-length biography of Herron whose unique reform journey eventually carried him into the American socialist movement in the early years of this century and then into the diplomacy of World War I as a special emissary of President Wilson, both in Geneva and at the peace conference.

For the most part, American higher education reflects, sometimes with appalling accuracy, the dominant values and thought patterns of American society generally. Yet the tradition of academic dissent from the status quo is a strong and honored one, drawing vigor not only from that sprinkling of professors who have questioned publicly the conventional wisdom of their day but also from those college trustees and ad-

ministrators who have allowed, even protected, such nonconformity. A case in point is the colorful controversy that surrounded Dr. George Davis Herron, author, minister, lecturer, reformer and Professor of Applied Christianity at Iowa College (now Grinnell).¹

Even against the backdrop of populist agitation in the 1890's, Herron's radical views on society and his flair for publicity propelled his college to national attention and unsettled his colleagues and Iowans generally. When he finally resigned from the faculty, many breathed a sigh of relief. His summary dismissal had been a real possibility, and had such action been taken, the case might have developed into a *cause celebre* in the area of academic freedom. In fact, some of his contemporaries saw the episode in this light, alleging that it grew out of attempts by reactionary forces of economic and religious orthodoxy to muzzle and intimidate their critics in American colleges.² Herron thought so too, but the facts point in quite another direction. As events transpired, they reflected credit on both the college and its trustees, and in the end higher education in Iowa escaped what could have been an unsavory wrangle.

In the fall of 1893, Iowa College added to its staff a new post—Professor of Applied Christianity—and filled it with a thirty-one year old native of Indiana, George Davis Herron. The young Congregational clergyman had already achieved some prominence among those liberal churchmen who argued that organized religion must play a greater role in the solution of social and economic problems. Herron's position regarding the absolute interdependence of religion and reform was clear and unequivocal; and, while he refined and sharpened

¹ There is no published biography of Herron, but see my unpublished dissertation, "Patterns of Dissent: The Reform Ideas and Activities of George D. Herron," (University of New Mexico, 1957) and Phyllis Ann Nelson, "George D. Herron and the Socialist Clergy, 1890-1914" (unpublished dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1953).

² Thomas Elmer Will, "A Menace to Freedom: The College Trust," *Arena*, XXVI (September, 1901), 244-257. Will included the Grinnell affair with a number of other cases in the '90's in which he discerned dangerous infringements on academic freedom. For a more balanced view of many of Will's cases, see Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in The United States* (New York, 1955) pp. 413-467.

his case during the Grinnell years, he never denied the genuine radicalism of his ideas.

With the zeal of an Old Testament prophet, he preached the ethical and religious inadequacies of the existing order and the qualitatively different society that awaited mankind. The new society, he believed, would be a veritable Kingdom of Heaven on earth, a utopia in which the Christian ideals of brotherhood and cooperation would unify the spiritual and material aspects of life. Existing social and economic institutions stood as barriers to this ideal, and they would have to be drastically changed if not completely swept away. Individual self-interest as a social mainspring directly contradicted the teachings of Jesus and led to a degrading competitive system under which it was virtually impossible to lead a truly Christian life.³ For both his rationale and his rhetoric, Herron drew heavily on the tradition of evangelical Protestantism. He was of course not alone in his indictment of social and economic ills in the 1890's, but his call to reform steadily became more secular, more uncompromising and more activist. The process turned out to be a traumatic one for Iowa College.

Herron entered the academic world under unusual circumstances. From his position as associate pastor of the First Congregational Church in Burlington, Iowa, he alluded to these in a letter to a friend and fellow advocate of a socially-applied Christianity: "A large sum of money has been set apart for the development of the department of a School of Applied Christianity at Iowa College on the condition that I undertake the work." He continued that he would take the position, endeavoring to "interpret Christianity as it really is and interpret human life and institutions in the light of the

³ A prolific writer, Herron aired his ideas in a succession of books and in a flood of articles during the '90's. *The Kingdom*, a social gospel weekly which he helped edit, carried many of his short pieces and typical of his books during these years were *The New Redemption* (New York, 1893), *The Christian Society* (New York, 1894); *The Christian State* (New York, 1895) and *The Social Meanings of Religious Experience* (New York, 1896).

Christ-life."⁴

The Grinnell opening Herron owed to one of his champions in the Burlington church, Mrs. Eldbridge D. Rand, a widow of considerable means. Convinced that Herron's message deserved a wider hearing, she offered \$35,000 to President George Augustus Gates of Iowa College for the establishment of a department of applied Christianity, further stipulating that Herron be appointed its head. Gates gladly accepted the endowment; he knew Herron as a promising young minister and as the organizer of a retreat attended by those interested in the social implications of Christianity and held at Iowa College during the previous summer. Present when Herron announced his resignation in Burlington, Gates spoke enthusiastically of the new development. It would, he said, open a door for the "application of Christianity in every sphere of life."⁵

The new professor and his department proved an immediate success. A formal education that had ended with two years of preparatory school seemed little handicap to Herron, who in his first year offered courses in the philosophy of Christianity, the literature and organization of Christianity and Christian sociology. The department flourished, and after five months Gates noted that Herron's work had "taken strong hold on the campus."⁶ In 1894 the college added a graduate program in applied Christianity, and by 1898 the department had doubled its course offerings and added an associate professor to aid Herron in his work.⁷ Outside the classroom, the department sponsored a settlement house in Grinnell to benefit the neigh-

⁴ Herron to Richard T. Ely, April 21, 1893. Ely Papers, State Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin. Ely, the distinguished University of Wisconsin economist, himself successfully weathered a celebrated academic freedom controversy in 1894. Hofstadter and Metzger, pp. 426-427.

⁵ Burlington *Hawkeye*, May 16, 1893.

⁶ Herron to Ely, November 7, 1893; Gates to Ely, January 31, 1894. Ely Papers. The organization of Herron's department was outlined in "The Department of Applied Christianity, 1893-94," n.d. [Summer, 1893], a leaflet in the Herron Collection in the Grinnell College Library.

⁷ *Iowa College Semi-Centennial: President's Report* (Grinnell, 1898), pp. 41-46.

borhood and to "promote the broader means of reform."⁸ Mrs. Rand, who had now moved to Grinnell with her daughter, continued her benefactions underwriting an annual series of guest lectures in applied Christianity.

Despite these developments, Herron's presence on the faculty raised some problems. There was, for example, the matter of his increasingly heavy commitment to the public lecture platform. For days, even weeks, each semester he left Grinnell to carry the gospel of an applied Christianity from New York to San Francisco. His graduate students and, on occasion, President Gates taught his classes during these tours, and Herron's absenteeism apparently excited little or no overt criticism. That he had the support of Gates was obvious; and equally apparent were the feelings of the student body, whose newspaper, the *Scarlet and Black*, followed Herron's platform triumphs with interest and pride. Not surprisingly, however, this dedication to the lecture circuit and the lengthy sojourns in the outside world that accompanied it, caused a different reaction among his faculty colleagues and on the board of trustees. A smoldering undercurrent of anti-Herron sentiment appeared.⁹

At least as serious was Herron's message itself. The radicalism of his position was increasingly apparent as he branded the competitive order an unmitigated evil whose institutional aspects must be accorded no permanence simply because they had functioned well in the past. He denounced the profit system, claiming that it produced chaos and social anarchy, and he ridiculed attempts at piecemeal reform as vain delusions. The only solid answer to the problems of society was a spiritually-infused collectivism. These ideas he advanced often and eloquently. On one trip to St. Louis, he spoke seven-

⁸ *Scarlet and Black* [Iowa College student newspaper], January 23, 1895.

⁹ Charles Noble, *Twenty-Five Years of Grinnell, 1893-1918*. (unpublished typescript in Grinnell College Library, p. 10 and Katharine Macy Noyes (ed.), *Jesse Macy* (Springfield, Illinois, 1933), p. 155. Both Macy and Noble were on the staff and both note the growth of anti-Herron sentiment; subsequent developments indicate a similar reaction among the trustees.

teen times to various groups within a single week, and a report of one of these speeches caught the flavor of his style and message:

For an hour and a half he [Herron] carried the surprised congregation with him throughout the dramatic arraignment of profitmaking barbarism, of Christless Christianity, of anarchic competition. Then he portrayed the life and mission of Jesus, consisting not of dogma, but of economics, not in behalf of the life hereafter, but of this life, a Kingdom of God here and now. Private property could not exist with Christianity; they were in absolute conflict; the experience of all ages proved the wisdom of Jesus, the folly and crime of civilization.¹⁰

A pair of representative incidents pointed up the effects of such oratorical bombshells. In the spring of 1894, Herron delivered the commencement address at the University of Nebraska and in the speech assailed both the competitive order (absolutely inconsistent with the Christian ethic) and the wage system (in point of fact, a slave system). Shocked and appalled by these ideas, the Governor of Nebraska, who followed Herron on the program, arose and denounced the Iowa visitor as a dangerous anarchist. The clash drew headlines across the country.¹¹ Conservatives were further shaken when Nebraska Populists jubilantly endorsed Herron's speech; proclaiming in their newspaper that his ideal was what they too sought and urging the faithful to "scatter Dr. Herron's published works everywhere."¹²

Lecturing on the west coast in the spring of 1895, Herron again drew sharp and widely-publicized criticism. In San Francisco he shared the speaker's platform with a prominent Oakland clergyman, the Reverend C. O. Brown. Immediately after Herron's lecture, Brown minced few words in branding the visitor a sincere but misguided and dangerous man. He later pursued the attack from his own pulpit, labeling "Herronism" as false, heretical and an invitation to anarchy. Herron's defenders rose to the fray, but the incident, like the one in Lincoln, projected his radicalism on a national screen.¹³

¹⁰ "Dr. Herron in St. Louis," *The Kingdom*, March 24, 1898.

¹¹ Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, June 14, 1894 [clipping in the Herron Collection, Grinnell College]. A complete report appeared in *The Kingdom*, June 29, 1894, and in the *Grinnell Herald* June 19, 1894.

¹² *The Wealth Makers* [Lincoln, Nebraska], June 21, 1894.

¹³ *Arena*, XIV (September, 1895), 110-128.

The gulf widened between Herron and the forces of organized Christianity, a source from which he originally drew much support. His associates and the public generally split into two camps: advocates who ardently endorsed his indictment of the ills of society, and critics who saw in him a dangerous radical hiding under the garb of an academic.

Those who feared that Herron's influence might transform Iowa College into a hotbed of radicalism were hardly reassured by the succession of reform figures who spoke on the campus and who echoed some of the professor's ideas. Commencement speakers during these years included Henry D. Lloyd, critic of unrestrained economic competition and author of the business expose, *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, and the reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio, Samuel M. "Golden Rule" Jones. Mayor Jones, who successfully combined in his career Christian socialist doctrine, municipal politics, and industrial capitalism, told the graduating class of 1899 that the existing social system was so rotten that it would hardly hold together. The Marshalltown [Iowa] *Times Republican*, shaken by this "unadulterated Herronism," scathingly summarized Jones's address, concluding waspishly, "What are we coming to anyway?"¹⁴

Herron added fuel to the controversy as he became increasingly identified with the secular reform currents of his time. He staunchly denied any political aspirations, but nonetheless on two separate occasions Iowa Populists considered him a potential candidate for elective office.¹⁵ They claimed him as one of their number; and he indeed shared some of their ideas, including their suspicion of a plutocracy-dominated competitive order. Further, Herron supported the single-tax movement, extolling Henry George's economic panacea as a desirable first step in the reform of society. To his Grinnell students he asserted that George's land tax was in fact an application of the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁶

¹⁴ June 15, 1899.

¹⁵ In 1893, as a possible candidate for Congress and in 1899, as a possible candidate for Governor of Iowa. *The Congregationalist*, August 9, 1894, LXXIX, 191; *Des Moines Leader*, August 25, 1899; Marshalltown *Times Republican*, August 24, 1899.

¹⁶ *The Kingdom*, May 25, 1894, December 30, 1897; classroom lecture notes, Herron Collection, Hoover Library, Stanford University.

His outside reform interests appeared to crystallize in the spring of 1899, when Herron and other prominent social reformers, including Henry D. Lloyd, Richard T. Ely and William Dean Howells, initiated a "National Social and Political Conference," which met in Buffalo, New York, June 28 to July 4. From this meeting emerged the "National Reform Union," an organization that was to be national in scope and educational in nature, attempting to influence politics without itself becoming a political party.¹⁷ Herron led a Grinnell delegation to the conference, headed the platform committee, and presented its recommendations to the convention.

Moderating forces of middle-class reformism dominated the Buffalo meeting. Herron's platform committee endorsed such palliatives as proportional representation and direct legislation, public ownership of utilities and natural monopolies, an income tax, a land tax, and a popularly controlled medium of exchange. The measures marked a considerable retreat from Herron's ideal of a completely reorganized American society, but even so the conference did little to change his public image. At home, the *Grinnell Herald* deplored the "verbal brickbats" and "extravagantly preposterous statements" scattered through Herron's speeches in Buffalo.¹⁸ And his chairmanship of the platform committee clearly indicated that he had arrived as a figure of importance in national reform circles.

On campus, Herron faced serious and unresolved difficulties. His dual role of professor and social prophet had for some time troubled the college trustees. After Herron's first year of teaching, the governing group favorably reviewed the work of the department of applied Christianity but indicated some misgivings about its head, noting a little wryly that "many of the [Herron] utterances might have been avoided and no truth sacrificed."¹⁹ At their meeting in June of 1896, the trustees expressed displeasure at the nature of his public utterances, but the professor in no way trimmed his sails. From the faculty itself there emerged a small but vocal group bitterly opposed to Herron and his ideas. Finally, the press

¹⁷ *The Social Forum*, I (September 1899), 128-131.

¹⁸ July 14, 1899.

¹⁹ *Grinnell Herald*, June 15, 1894.

generally and the Grinnell *Herald* in particular joined the critical chorus, blasting "Herronism" at every opportunity.²⁰

The Professor had, in fact, been under open fire from his critics for a good six months before the Buffalo conference. On January 6, 1899, Colonel John Meyer, one of the college trustees attacked Herron and his teachings in a two-page article in the Des Moines *Register*. In the piece (subsequently reprinted and circulated as a broadside entitled "Herronism Exposed"), Meyer alleged that Herron's message was unjust and misleading; that Herron had failed to work with Iowa Congregationalists; that he was away from his classes for long periods; that he received the best salary in the college without earning it, and that his presence on the faculty had cost the college from two hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand dollars in endowments and gifts.²¹

From another quarter, a potential benefactor of Iowa College had written President Gates that neither he nor his friends would give anything to the institution so long as Herron was on the staff. Gates stated that he would oppose this sort of influence by a "plutocracy" so long as he was able.²² Somewhat earlier the president had suggested that he would resign rather than dismiss a faculty member because of newspaper publicity or threats by individuals to withdraw financial support from the college.²³

Tension mounted and the June meeting of the trustees loomed as a showdown between the supporters of Herron and those who wished to see his connection with the college severed. At the center of the controversy, Herron believed that the forces of conservatism had passed their edict on his teaching, and he was convinced that the principle of academic freedom was in dire peril. In an open letter, he threw

²⁰ Scattered clippings in the L. F. Parker scrapbook, Grinnell College Library, document both trustee disenchantment with Herron and the anti-Herron trend in the press. Parker, a history professor on the faculty took an early anti-Herron position.

²¹ *Register* clippings and the broadside are in the Herron Collection, Grinnell College.

²² "College Endowments and Freedom of Teaching," *The Kingdom*, January 5, 1899.

²³ Marshalltown *Times Republican*, December 21, 1898.

down the gauntlet; if he was to leave Iowa College, he said, the trustees would have to put him out.²⁴

In something of an anticlimax, the trustees at the June meeting sidestepped the issue, taking no action on his case. The move to oust Herron had collapsed, apparently because the trustees were still split on the issue and because President Gates had asked for time to work the matter out quietly.²⁵

If a truce prevailed, the matter was hardly closed. Surveying the furor over the position which she had made possible, Mrs. Rand re-opened the controversy with a demand that unless the anti-Herron forces were prepared to offer a substitute endowment, they should withdraw from the controversy.²⁶ And in August, Herron was interviewed in Des Moines, where he had gone to address a state Populist convention; he fully intended, he said, to remain on the staff of Iowa College.²⁷

Nor did the trustees consider the matter settled. Following the June meeting of the board and Mrs. Rand's challenge, trustee Frank Herriott of Des Moines spelled out to some of his fellow board members the issues as he saw them.²⁸ Herriott wrote that the Professor's retention should hinge entirely on his performance as a teacher and as a responsible member of the academic community. The trustee had no sympathy for Herron's ideas (he labeled them "part and parcel of the pestiferous sentimentalism" that seemed to mark much current discussion of society); still, he felt the views were hardly of such a nature as to justify Herron's immediate dismissal. But as a teacher and faculty member, Herron shirked his faculty duties, taught his classes in a slipshod manner requiring neither scholarly nor methodical work from his students, and generally demonstrated a shocking indifference toward his academic role. These counts, Herriott thought, justified summary action.

²⁴ *The Social Gospel*, March 3, 1899. Herron was on the editorial board of this little magazine, published in Commonwealth, Georgia.

²⁵ *Grinnell Herald*, June 20, 1899.

²⁶ *Grinnell Herald*, July 4, 1899.

²⁷ *Iowa State Register*, August 31, 1899.

²⁸ Letter to Dr. J. L. Hill, July 8, 1899, a copy of which is in the Herron collection at Grinnell.

Suddenly Herron himself terminated the controversy. In the early fall of 1899, he changed his mind about remaining on the faculty. His resignation, dated October 13, 1899, and effective at the beginning of the January semester, appeared on the agenda of the trustees' meeting in November. The letter of resignation, an acceptance by the trustees, and a resolution adopted by the faculty appeared simultaneously.²⁹ At the same time, Mrs. Rand removed the conditions originally placed on her \$35,000 endowment.

In his resignation, Herron lauded the trustees for their fair treatment, his faculty colleagues for their ability and cooperation, and President Gates for his leadership. Disclaiming any desire "to be thought a martyr to the cause of free teaching," he resigned, he said, to relieve the college of whatever outside criticism had been leveled at his membership on the faculty.

In its resolution, the faculty commended Herron for his work on the campus, asserted that his presence and influence would always be welcome at Iowa College, and hoped that the resignation would not be taken as an indication that the college had retreated from its efforts "to apply the teaching of Jesus to the solution of social and political problems."

A similar tone of conciliation pervaded the statement drawn by the trustees. They had found Herron "kind and considerate" and with "an excellent spirit," and they commended his department for its significant work. But the crux of the matter appeared buried in the text of their release:

. . . to us it seems clear that the most promising course for promoting the ultimate right is at present to impress on men their present duty rightly to use what wealth shall properly come to them under the present organization of society and in the world in which they now live, rather than to spend much time and force in directly attacking systems that can best be changed but slowly in the interest of a scheme which, if ideal, has never yet been shown to be practical in a highly organized society.

The exchange was free of the charges and counter-charges which under less fortunate circumstances might have accompanied it. Both college and professor emerged from the con-

²⁹ The documents were published in an extra edition of the *Scarlet and Black*, November 4, 1899. They appeared also with comment in the *Grinnell Herald*, November 3 and 6, 1899, the *American Review of Reviews* XX (December 1899) 714-716 and in *The Social Forum*, November and December issues, 1899.

troversy, their statures enhanced by their balanced and generous statements. One commentator noted that a "finer and more Christian utterance" than Herron's letter would be hard to find, and the Grinnell *Herald* echoed similar sentiments.³⁰

The trustees and Iowa College had ridden out the storm. A combination of luck and administrative forbearance had saved the trustees the unpleasant task of firing the professor, an eventuality which, in view of his intransigence, seemed only a question of time. Had he been dismissed, the case might have been a lively one; the ingredients were volatile enough to have produced a strong reaction. The matter solved itself, leaving unimpaired both the general principle of academic freedom and the right of an individual faculty member to voice sincere if unpopular and undeniably radical opinions. For this, much credit must go to the patient President Gates and to the sincere, if disturbed, trustees. But if their course of action was vindicated, it was aided immeasurably by outside circumstances over which they had little control. After all, Herron did change his mind; the resignation was a voluntary one.

This suggests a concluding, if speculative note. What had caused Herron to change his mind and what were his real feelings in the case? Given the complex web of circumstances and personal motivation, there are a few things that seem clear. By this time a professorship offered Herron little in audience, prestige or income when compared to his ventures outside the college. No longer was he an obscure young minister; he was a successful author and lecturer, a figure of national prominence in reform circles. He left the Burlington church to carry his ideas to a larger audience; and he could willingly leave the campus, confident that his message would henceforth gain a still wider hearing.

Furthermore, the Buffalo meeting had indicated that he was ready to move decisively into the larger arena of politically oriented (if still non-partisan) reform. Herron surely realized

³⁰ New York *Independent*, November 16, 1899; Grinnell *Herald*, November 3, 1899.

that only up to a point could he continue to mix political reformism with teaching; further, he became convinced that to reform society, exhortation and criticism were not enough and that overt political activity was necessary. Just before his resignation he rejected Populist overtures to run for the governorship of Iowa, but he was still the featured speaker at their convention in Des Moines. Finally, in September and October of 1899, he jumped into a full-blown political campaign for the first time in his career. Mayor S. M. Jones of Toledo was seeking the governorship of Ohio at the head of a third-party ticket; Herron spent the better part of six weeks campaigning with and for his fellow reformer in Ohio.³¹

A personal crisis in Herron's life may also have helped to precipitate the resignation. From the days at Burlington, the Rands, mother and daughter, were close friends of the Herron family and among the professor's greatest admirers. The Herrons named their third child after Carrie Rand, whose appointment to the college staff as an instructor in women's physical education coincided with her mother's bequest establishing Herron's department. The professor and Carrie Rand shared office space at the college, and increasingly the Rands accompanied Herron on his speaking tours. As the professor spent more and more time with the Rands, he spent less and less with his own family, and the eventual result was a divorce in March, 1901, when Herron left his family to wed Carrie Rand.

The divorce came well over a year after his resignation from the faculty, and there is no evidence that this domestic crisis overtly entered the controversy over his tenure on the faculty. Still, the wife of President Gates recalled that "personal factors" came to separate her husband and Herron.³² These she failed to specify, but it seems probable that Gates was aware of Herron's growing estrangement from his family and its causes. The president had been one of Herron's chief defenders on the academic scene, but the Herron-Rand situation interjected a new factor of explosive potential in the

³¹ *Scarlet and Black*, October 11, October 18, 1899.

³² Isabel Smith Gates, *The Life of George Augustus Gates* (Boston, 1914), p. 15.

closely-knit denominational college community. Gates was unlikely to remain for long a buffer between Herron and his critics, and Herron must have sensed this.

Finally, Herron's quixotic personality and his subsequent correspondence suggest another factor. Despite his resignation statement that he had no desire to become a martyr in the cause of academic freedom, it seems likely that he welcomed, even courted, the role. When the trustees refused to fire him outright, his only choice was to resign if he wished to dramatize his own role as the hunted critic of a corrupt society. He stated as much in a letter to Henry D. Lloyd, terming his action "a great voluntary sacrifice in order [to] disclose to the people the crisis in higher education—the overthrow of spiritual and intellectual liberty by bold, brute money." He had to resign to "get the full moral value of disinterestedness."³³ The endowment which Mrs. Rand released to the college, Herron saw in a similar light; her action, he thought, served to "dramatize the issue between money and liberty," and he considered her thirty-five thousand dollars "well spent."³⁴

Certainly the resignation allowed him the luxury of a moral stance wholly in keeping with his self-image. That his "martyrdom" was something of a calculated role seems evident from the plans he outlined for his future. "As to myself, I am now free to give myself wholly to the social movement. Mrs. Rand has supplemented the income which I have from my books and lectures, so that I am now free to give myself wholly to the people and their cause . . . responsible to no body of trustees—accountable only to the truth."³⁵

In retrospect, it is hard to miss the ironic overtones of the entire episode. Despite Herron's own view of the situation when he resigned, his voluntary action robbed his case of any significance it might have had as an infringement on academic freedom. He had courted and probably deserved the

³³ December 18, 1899. Lloyd Papers, State Historical Society Library, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁴ Herron to Lloyd, November 15, 1899. Lloyd Papers.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

dismissal which the trustees failed to impose. The college had granted him a latitude of action that was, by any standards, amazingly wide. Herron insisted upon his role as that of a disinterested critic and observer; but his objectivity was rapidly dissolving, and within a few months he threw his support to the Social Democratic Party and only a little later to its successor, the Socialist Party of America. His divorce and re-marriage scandalized the college and the community, but these came after the matter of his professorship was settled and played at most only an indirect part in the controversy. In short, although the Grinnell case had in generous measure the necessary ingredients for an academic freedom case, they failed to crystallize into anything of the sort.



George S. Herron

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.