

# Henry George's Prophetic Views

by URQUHART ADAMS

ONCE again we have confirmation of George's view that the decline and fall of ancient civilizations was due to the inequalities that developed from land monopoly. Professor Edward Chiera, now dead, gave an account of the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia, in *They Wrote on Clay* (1933). This was revealed in ancient books of the Babylonians, which were inscribed on clay tablets, and so have endured for centuries in the dry atmosphere of that part of the world. Professor Chiera was a specialist in Assyriology at the University of Chicago.

One chapter of the book is concerned with the development of land monopoly on a large scale at the height of the Babylonian power. Laws were passed forbidding small landowners to sell, because the authorities wanted them to keep their land in order to be able to produce wealth and pay taxes. So the big land speculators found a clever way around the law. A poor peasant, desperate for money, would apply to a landowner who would take him to court to fill out adoption documents. For a sum of money the peasant would legally adopt the rich landowner, who would then become his legal son and heir. Naturally on the peasant's death his benefactor would inherit his estate and add it to his own holdings.

The swindle was easily arranged be-

cause, as Professor Chiera points out, the judges were members of the same social class as the rich landowners and were not disposed to check very carefully on their activities. The peasant got some money — not very much, because he knew, as did everybody else, that the whole deal was out of order. Of course once the adoption papers were signed, the sooner the peasant met with a fatal accident, the better it suited his new found "son and heir." There must have been many fatal accidents in those days.

That was four or five thousand years ago. Not long thereafter the Assyrians, a nomadic, free people, destroyed the Babylonian civilization, only to replace it with equally unjust institutions.

Records of those ancient times are strangely revealing. In the last chapter the professor looks ahead to the time when our own civilization will destroy itself, and he speculates that the archeologists of the future will puzzle over the very few records that we will leave behind us, since our documents, written on perishable paper, will not last long. Henry George also foresaw the possibility that our civilization could disappear leaving very few traces. What is strange is that George, writing eighty-five years ago, before archeology attained the dignity of a recognized science, reached almost the same conclusions as the learned professor.



**Benjamin F. Smith of Grand Rapids, Michigan, an engineer who keeps stirring things up locally, is in the news again, but for a different reason. He found a state law on the books requiring that certain records be open to the public, and when this inspection was denied, Mr. Smith threatened court action. The prosecutor is trying to think of an appropriate answer. The misdemeanor is punishable by imprisonment in the county jail for up to a year or a fine of up to \$500!**