

# A Cuban War That Was

A WAR of unspeakable hardships, privations and suffering, drew Americans to Cuba in 1898 in a slaughter that was sickening to sight and smell, but which has become almost a comic incident as it recedes into the past.

Charles Johnson Post, an eminent writer and artist, son of Louis Post who was a close friend and supporter of Henry George, survived that Spanish-American War and wrote about it in *The Little War of Private Post*.<sup>\*</sup> His paintings of the dreadful carnage are prized possessions in the collections at Smithsonian Institution and Corcoran Gallery in Washington, in the Naval Museum in Maryland, and Roosevelt House in New York. *Life Magazine*, in a separately published *History of the United States*, has reproduced a number of these paintings, as has *American Heritage* in a series for young people.

These nostalgic memories of Mr. Post, an unforgettable figure and irrepressible wit, were stirred by a recent story sent in by an HGN reader, about Captain William O'Neill, a Cavalry member of the First Volunteers, in the bloody Cuban war.

O'Neill was born in St. Louis, and he was a Henry Georgist. William Marion Reedy, a St. Louis editor and publisher, occasionally reported on Henry George's views which were creating a stir about that time, but our informant does not mention the origin of O'Neill's firm Henry George convictions. He was called a "typesetter, editor, lawyer," and (later) mayor of Prescott, Arizona; and he was very handsome. As mayor of the little town of Prescott, he showed individuality by abolishing licenses and imposts on business, increasing taxes on land values and even permitting women to vote on municipal questions.

He was a roving, restless man, however, and left his mayorial duties to others to go adventuring in the Klondike when the gold fever began. Then the war broke out and at once he resigned as mayor and joined Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders.

William Owen O'Neill, the gentleman ex-mayor, now a bold captain, became "Bucky" for short in the shared inglorious encounter, and he boasted that no Spanish bullet could take his life. He led the charge that day at San Juan, digging fierce spurs into the terrified steed. A sniper's bullet caught him at the crest of the hill.

*Munsey's Magazine*, now yellow with age, recorded that his death was as gallant as his life, and "no braver, nobler man ever fell in battle."

Jack Williams, former Phoenix mayor and director of Station KOY wrote in his *Phoenix Gazette* column that Bucky O'Neill is not forgotten. We are indebted to a Phoenix lawyer and HGN reader, Thomas J. Croaff, Jr., for the clipping.

Many friends of Charles Johnson Post and of his wife and daughter, would be quick to affirm that Private Post also is not forgotten. He has left a unique legacy in his writings and paintings — a record of indescribable wartime suffering. But those who knew him recall too his convictions of the importance of George's fiscal policy and his insistence on its practical presentation. He was a journalist, a labor expert, and a member of the board of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation.

Mrs. Post has generously presented the Henry George School with pastel portraits made by her husband of two well known Georgists, Frederic E. Howe and Francis Neilson.

<sup>\*</sup>Little, Brown & Co., publisher. Paperback edition by Signet Books.