

ROBERT CLANCY

Imogene Coca sings a ditty about a sad little May queen who got lost, and muses, "Did I walk away from the May walk—or did the May walk walk away from me?"

The variation on this that I sometimes muse about is, Did Henry George walk away from the main body of economic thought—or did the economists walk away from Henry George?

Most histories of economic thought, if they bother to mention George at all, say that he was the one who stepped out of line. But George, in *The Science of Political Economy*, avers that it was the economists who got lost.

When I first read in George's *Science* his claim that *Progress and Poverty* was responsible for the breakdown of classical political economy, that economists snubbed George and devised a descriptive "science" of "economics," I was a bit shocked at what I thought was an extravagant claim. Did, indeed, everybody get out of step but Henry? I have since learned that, whether or not George was always right in his polemics, he usually had good reasons for the things he said.

Frequently reviewing in my mind the transformation of economic thought between 1879 and the twentieth century, the pieces *do* fit according to George's thesis. Something *did* happen. George *was* the last man to write a thorough work using the structure of classical political economy. It was *not* a work that could be ignored—it *was* a challenge. But economists *did* ignore it—and shortly thereafter, they *did* change their subject around.

It's a pretty big conclusion to swallow—and it's an awful indictment if there's anything to it.

On the other hand, it is true that George was not in close touch with his economist contemporaries, and could it be that changes were already taking place of which he was not aware? that they were already turning a corner while he was walking on ahead?

Whatever happened, somehow or other economic thought and Henry George will have to get together. Really, each one needs the other. I have my opinion as to which needs which more—however, I'd like to see them get together. But the thing that's got me up a tree—Did I walk away from the May walk? Or did the May walk walk away from me?