

A Word With You

1958 IS HERE. And as we peer ahead blinking, mindful of all the portentous things that happened in 1957—the first chill signs of a business recession, Russia's launching of an earth satellite and our own failure, the seething crises in the Near, Middle and Far East, to say nothing of the West—well, we just stand there blinking.

We surely feel that we are living in unprecedented times, that everything is new and that every previous happening and lesson of history is out of date.

But the new things aren't so very different after all. In nearly every era before us, men have thought they were living out the consummation of history, that all previous events were but a pale prelude to the present. From our historical vantage point the whole scene seems more level and repetitious; and we remember Cassius:

... How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown?

Things are supposed to be quite different today from Henry George's day, and sometimes we are constrained to say defensively, "But the general principles are the same." Yet it is surprising to note the similarity even of details. In 1883 George might have been writing for the 1958 travel section of the Times when he wrote (in *Social Problems*): "There is such a rush across the Atlantic that it is difficult to engage a passage for months ahead. . . . 'Everybody is out of town,' they will say. Not quite everybody, though. . . ."

On the larger stage of history, Amaury de Riencourt in his recent

book, *The Coming Caesars*, drew a startling parallel between Greco-Roman civilization and European-American civilization, detail for detail. Not only in history, but we can also find, as Henry George wrote, that "the old allegories yet have a meaning, the old myths are still true." Every generation finds that the prophecies of the past apply to its own age. The Beast of the Apocalypse has been taken as a symbol for every strident nabob from Nero to Khrushchev.

Richard Wagner drew on mythology for the subject-matter of his music dramas, and some of them are quite timely. As in "Das Rheingold," Khrushchev-Wotan and his godly crew enter their Sputnik-Valhalla, while from below are heard the cries and curses of the Polish-Rhine Maidens and the Hungarian-Nibelungs, whom they cheated and abused. In the so-called "free world," as in "Siegfried," the voice of special privilege is still the voice of Fafner the dragon: "*Ich lieg' und besitze—lasst mich schlafen.*" ("I lie and possess—let me sleep.") And in "Die Meistersinger," we of the 20th century can but nod in grim agreement with Hans Sachs' 15th-19th century lament: "*Wahn, wahn, ueberalles wahn*" . . . "Mad, mad, the world is mad!"

—Robert Clancy

Vol. 21, No. 2

Jan., 1958

The Henry George News is published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science 50 E. 69th Street, New York 21, N. Y. Publication Committee: Lancaster M. Greene, Chairman; Otto K. Dorn, William S. O'Connor; Alice Elizabeth Davis, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, November 15, 1943; at the post office of New York, N. Y. under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions, \$2 a year; single copies, 20c.