

# Henry George in History

THE AMERICAN IDEA OF MISSION, by Edward McNall Burns. New Brunswick, New Jersey; Rutgers University Press, 362 pages. \$9.

DREAMERS OF THE AMERICAN DREAM, by Stewart H. Holbrook, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York. 369 pages. \$5.75.

Reviewed by MARSHALL CRANE

PROBABLY all of us have been struck at one time or another—perhaps amused—by the position which our country has held for many years in the geographical mythologies of other lands. Many a family or clan has pooled its resources to send a favored son to the Land of Gold, secure in the knowledge that, after a few years, he would return, with a cigar in his mouth and money in his pocket, to enrich his kinfolks and to take his proper place in the ancestral social and economic systems. Millions, less fortunate, have still managed to thumb their way across the sea somehow, and while many have been disappointed in their search for Elysium, the greater part have become Americans. Generation after generation of optimists has been absorbed, and each in turn has contributed its little piece to the patchwork quilt of what Americans think their country is, and why.

Americans may well be proud of this great fabric of opinion, but they may find it a little confusing too. There are at least two principal ways in which it may be studied. It may be examined piece by piece in the most minute detail, or it may be viewed as

a whole like an impressionist painting. Dr. Edward McNall Burns, of Rutgers University, the author of a very interesting book on our national ideology, has used both techniques, but it would seem that he favors the second. To him the element most worthy of notice is a more or less commonly accepted belief in a *national mission*, begotten through the years in the minds of many men—some of them wise men—which he regards as having been a major factor in the shaping of our national character.

Not all of his readers are going to agree with the professor in this. More than a few will object entirely to the concept of a national character. Many others who are willing to grant the existence of something of the sort will be sure that it can never be the product of passing modes of thought, even when or if it is the thought of our all too few mental giants. To them a national character is the way a large group of people, taken in the aggregate, react to their environment. They regard it as the result of many and various circumstances, physical, political, economic and intellectual. Even the weather may affect it. Few indeed will fail to notice what a fine, workmanlike job Professor Burns has done in assembling the evidence for his thesis, and how well he has presented it. His book is primarily a contribution to the literature of American history. To those who read, write, teach, or lecture—even to those who think!—it should be invaluable as a reference book. Its field is much broader than one might suppose from its title, and the material is skillfully and conveniently arranged.

Stewart H. Holbrook is a profes-

sional historian, a real pro. He knows how and where to look for his material, and he has learned to recognize it when he finds it. During the past twenty years he has written a dozen or more books of American history and biography. If all of these have been anywhere near as good as the seven which I have read, his score has been much better than average.

*Dreamers of the American Dream* is a collection of stories of the reformers and would-be reformers who have tried, during the last half dozen generations, to make life in this country more like what they thought it ought to be. You will recognize the names of perhaps two thirds of these dreamers—there are nearly a hundred of them—but you will be surprised at how little you actually know of all but a few.

Many of them were very strange characters indeed. Maybe a quarter of

them could have enlisted my support, if I had been around in their day. Certainly not more. But I think that you will finish reading of them with a feeling that even the screwiest dreamed a dream which you have often dreamed yourself—that wonderful dream of a society without injustice, crime, poverty and disease, and without the suffering which inevitably accompanies them, which men of good will have dreamed since the beginning of human communities.

Even though the author includes Henry George in his list of "magnificent failures," and though I could not accept a good deal of his other political philosophy either, at the end of his book I had a feeling that I had been conversing with a friend, with one whose real, final aims were not very different from my own, however much we might disagree as to the best method of achieving them.



## LET'S PROFIT BY WHAT EVERY GEORGIST KNOWS

Georgists and their newspapers are always chock-full of good advice that would put the economy of any country on sound and prosperous lines, giving those countries ample revenues with which to accomplish great things. But let's start this charitable advice stuff at home, so WE can make or get fortunes and then put them to proper use. What Georgist wouldn't like the funds to support him while he put full time into his enthusiasm?

Until such time as our objective, public use of ground dues in lieu of taxes, is attained, the soundest investment must be in land purchase. All George's writing reeks with this.

But many of our journals and the conversation of our dyed-in-the-wool supporters would give the impression that, for us, profiting from land holding is not nice. I seriously question this view. As George shows, would-be land users must compete in proffering ground rent, either to private owners as today, or to the public treasury, as we would like it. Therefore, while today's conditions obtain, there is no stigma attaching to private retention of the ground dues. Their non-collection by the community is a matter for the corporate, rather than individual, conscience.

If a Georgist invests in land and receives ground dues with intent to use them for benefit of the community through our Georgist work, he is truly putting the ground dues to their proper use. At the same time he is multiplying his personal effectiveness for good within his community. Thus personal fortune can align with public good.

—W. H. Pitt (Melbourne)