

THE SON OF HENRY GEORGE.

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The Menace of Privilege. By Henry George, Jr. New York: The Macmillan Company. Pittsburgh: J. R. Weidn & Co. 421 pages. Price, \$1.50.

MR. GEORGE has chosen an ever-fruitleful topic. He calls his book "a study of the dangers to the republic from the existence of a favored class." No doubt Clisthenes addressed the Greeks in the same vein 500 B. C. No doubt Valerius and Horatius made the same appeal to the Romans 450 B. C.

The favored class, like the poor, is always with us. As a famous orator once put it, "Nature has given one man a thimbleful of brains and another a bushelful." And though our glorious Declaration of Independence declares it to be a self-evident truth that "all men are created equal"—it says nothing about "free," as many misquote it—there never was a more self-evident absurdity.

All men are not created equal; any more than all hills are level with the valleys. There are Kohinoors and rhinestones; there are Rembrandts and chromos; there are symphonies and coon songs.

Mr. George's book is a lengthy argument to prove this self-evident fact. He adduces hundreds of examples to demonstrate that men are not equal, and to show that the more fortunately endowed have and keep the advantage over their hapless brethren.

He goes to great pains to picture the iniquity of this arrangement. As if everybody did not recognize and deplore it! Every father also recognizes and deplores the terrible law of gravitation, when his baby falls and bumps its head. But the law is here, and the best thing we can do is to adapt ourselves to it, as Henry George, Sr., did when he invested in real estate, although he held real estate to be the root of all evil.

But the son of Henry George does not content himself with pointing out these inequalities and obliquities, nor even with suggesting a remedy for the many wrongs that undoubtedly are committed under this natural law. It is wrong that the lion should rend the lamb—wrong according to the selfish code of man, who wants the lamb's wool and flesh for himself; wrong also according to the cowardly code of the lamb, which has neither the strength nor the cunning to rend the lion. The only one supposed to have no rights is the lion, who takes care of himself, watches the rules of the game, and doesn't cry "foul" when he loses. But Mr. George, in his eagerness to make out a case against the lion, falls into some grievous errors:

He assumes that lions are something altogether unprecedented in the animal kingdom.

He assures us that their manes are growing much longer than ever before.

He asserts that they were formerly frugal vegetarians, and have only recently developed a ravenous appetite for lamb chops with mint sauce.

He blames the damage to our forests, the poor quality of wool, the inefficiency

of shepherds, and a hundred other things he has seen for the first time, upon the predatory habits of the King of beasts.

The first paragraph of Mr. George's preface sums up the first eight divisions of his book. He says:

What is the cause of the grave changes that are coming over the American republic—the extraordinary inequality in the distribution of wealth manifested on every hand; the rise of class feeling; the growth of the aristocratic idea; the lapse from morals in business and private relations among the very rich; the growth of elements of physical, mental and moral deterioration among the working masses; the appearance of militant trade-unionism; the perversion of the injunction principle and the use of soldiers in strikes; the corruption of federal, state and municipal politics; the deterring of press, university and pulpit from an open expression; the centralization of government; the advance in foreign aggression?

Mr. George's assertions, plausible and startling on their face, and not without some superficial justification, appear demagogic and paltry to any one acquainted with American history and politics. Consider them seriatim:

(1) There is no "extraordinary" inequality in the distribution of wealth. The rich are much richer, it is true, but the poor are also much richer. Early in the last century, as McMaster's history shows, there were periods when even the wage earners on farms barely escaped hunger. W. J. Ghent, himself a socialist, has pointed out that skilled workmen in New York and Philadelphia were dependent on charity nearly every winter between 1830 and 1850. This explodes the socialistic claim that the poor have grown poorer; it shows that everybody has grown richer in the same proportion.

(2) There is no more class feeling now than there was at the beginning of the republic, perhaps less. Mr. George ought to know the history of Shay's rebellion in 1786, the harangues and man-fes-ones of which sound strangely like Populist and socialist diatribes in our day. Class feeling always has existed just as strongly as today, and always will.

(3) The growth of the aristocratic idea is an idle bugaboo. The fact is that our government was aristocratic at its inception; the very word "republic" was distasteful to Washington, who in 1793 called Jefferson's attention to it in the draft of a state paper, with a comment which implied that it had no business there. Our government was an aristocracy from the first, and has become a democracy by degrees, until it is now more democratic than ever, not always to its advantage, from the viewpoint of the philosophical historian.

(4) The lapse from morals is no new thing, the spread of a sensational press has merely made it more conspicuous. Human nature remains the same at all times, though sometimes temptation and opportunity are greater. It is worthy of note, however, that there has been no example of immorality in our times so conspicuous as that of Aaron Burr in the good old days.

(5) Physical, mental and moral deterioration among the working masses is another feeble invention. The workman of today is better fed, better clothed, better housed, better read and better churched than ever before. If there is such deterioration as Mr. George claims, its cause cannot lie in economic depression. In 1780 carpenters were paid 52 cents a day, and the purchasing power of the dollar was much less then, be-

fore the great increase of production by improved machinery.

(6) The appearance of militant trade-unionism is only a recurrent phenomenon of renewed prosperity. During the hard times of 1837-40 unionism declined. The rise of unions and the prevalence of strikes are symptoms of prosperity, rather than otherwise.

(7) The use of injunction and militia is no new thing. In 1806 some striking Philadelphia shoemakers were fined for conspiracy, and their effort to secure a raise of wages was declared "unlawful, even though unaccompanied by force, threats or intimidation." Mr. George knows that American lawmakers and judges have accorded ever greater privileges to labor; he should know also that the military is used only to suppress disorder and safeguard property.

(8) The corruption of politics is no new thing. Wasn't Washington charged with grafting? How about the Tweed ring in the days before '71? Readers of Col. McClure's Old-Time Notes will know that Pennsylvania's legislature was rottener in early than in more recent times. And so conservative a historian as Fiske admits that there was probably truth in the charge of the Boston Gazette that "Bribery and Corruption" were used to pass the constitution in the Massachusetts convention. There will always be bribery and corruption in every democracy, as there will be favoritism and oppression in every monarchy.

(9) Press, pulpit and university are more outspoken and fair today than ever before. Franklin's Autobiography tells how the Colonial newspapers were censored; Jefferson practically subsidized Freneau's journal, though Washington complained of Freneau's "outrages on public decency." The clergy and the universities, being conservative elements, have usually been found on the side of the existing order, declaring that "whatever is is right."

(10) The centralization of government began in 1787; "foreign aggression," as Mr. George calls "imperialism," began in 1801 when Commodore Dale sailed into the Mediterranean.

Enough has been said to show the utter falsity of Mr. George's allegation that "Such things did not exist at the foundation of the republic."

His book is only another of the innumerable screeds trying to show that the country is going to the dogs. These screeds also have been with us from the first, but the country is still far from the howlows.

Henry George, Sr., preached the same jeremiad 25 years ago. Marx and Proudhon preached it 50 years ago. Cola di Rienzi and Jack Cade preached it 500 years ago. They are all now prophets "thrust unhonored forth" by the disappointment of history.

The closing pages of Mr. George's book, where he suggests "The Remedy," might naturally be expected to bring forth something new. His father's land theory, though not new, was novel and ingenious.

The son's proposals make up in breadth for what they lack in depth. He would abolish the private ownership of all natural opportunities. He would abolish tariff and other taxation on production and its fruits. He would abolish all corporate rights. He would re-establish "the natural order," describing it in a vague way from which can be deduced only that it is not Socialism, but something very like anarchism.

The book, unlike "Progress and Poverty," brings out no new facts, advances no new ideas, adds nothing to our understanding of social and economic problems, advocates no rational remedy for

evils that have existed immemorially. It serves only to emphasize the fact that such books are always prone to exaggerate and misrepresent the ills of society, while they ignore and suppress facts that are favorable. They seek to promote discontent, decry all existing institutions, and offer only utopian visions in exchange. Even the best of them, if put into practice, would stop progress and annihilate "the long result of time." Men, unfortunately, were not created equal; and it is madness trying to make them so.



HENRY GEORGE, JR.,
Author of "The Menace of Privilege."