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THE MENACE OF PRIVILEGE.

By HENRY GEORGE, JR. The Macmillan Co., 12mo, \$1.50.

In "Progress and Poverty" the elder George worked out with great ingenuity the theory that private ownership of land is a public wrong, and that the salvation of society lies in the single tax. In this volume the son expands his father's idea and follows, with some differences, his father's method. Private property in land appears in the son's treatise as one of several forms of privilege to which collectively the author charges the phenomena of inequality in this country. The younger George holds that favored classes have been put in position to exploit their fellows in a variety of ways, and that the effects of this exploitation are as dire upon "the princes of privilege" as upon their victims. "Clear and keep clear the way to nature's bounties and then let individuals alone—that is the supreme canon of civilization," says Mr. George. It is also the lesson of his book.

His own review of its content gives a compact idea of the things he attempts to prove:

We have seen the nature of privilege in the United States and its varied and deadly fruits—that the wonderfully great volume of wealth being produced in this country is being most unequally distributed; that this is due to the exercise of powers of appropriation possessed by some individuals and conferred upon them by special or general grants of government or by government passively sanctioned; that these powers are privileges, and are, in effect, what the word "privileges" in its original sense meant, private laws—laws for the advantage of particular persons; that in consequence of these privileges veritable princes of riches are being raised on one side, while the masses are being held down to an intensifying struggle for a living on the other; that this is producing two distinct classes—the one imbued with feelings of superiority and arrogance, the other of envy and hatred; that as a further consequence public and private morals are suffering, the superabundantly rich falling into monstrous business practices, private infidelities, divorce habits and irresponsibility for child-bearing, while the multitude of workers are being reduced to conditions breeding want, sin and crime, from which must come general physical, mental and moral deterioration.

As the author's own summary indicates, his book is a sweeping indictment of every phase of existing American life. It is something more than that. It is contemporary history, interpreted by the light of a single idea, forced into the rigid mold of one hypothesis. Mr. George refells nearly everything that has happened in the last decade or so, and sees in every development the sinister power of privilege. It appears in the Santo Domingo matter, in the general movement of American expansion, in the phenomena of class and college spirit, in the fact that later economists have superseded Adam Smith at the universities, in the occasional use of troops to restore order in strikes, in the determination of Colorado not to be terrorized by the Western Federation of Miners, in the unwillingness of certain great unions to go out on "sympathy" strikes, in the reluctance of President Roosevelt to proceed against Paul Morton personally in the Santa Fe matter, in the beginnings of a uniform for the White House attendants, and in the fads and fancies of the 400.

It is an ingenious array of facts, in many of which less discerning critics had failed to see any relation, that Mr. George

classifies together and labels with the tag of privilege. Indeed, every man whose daily concern is with the things of his own time, and who has not bothered about a scrapbook, must feel indebted to the author for gathering between the covers of a handy sized volume so much of recent political and sociological history, even if he gives it a twist of his own. The work demonstrates how good a book may be compiled by simply collecting newspaper accounts of the significant events of the day, and magazine enlargements of the same, and then coordinating them by means of a suggestive hypothesis. Practically all of the material in "The Menace of Privilege" could be worked over into another book, for instance, on "The Menace of Imperialism" or "The Decay of Religion."

The elder George would have followed a different method. His reasoning would have been closer, and he would not have struggled so persistently to make everything above ground fit his theory. The necessities of the younger man's position, as he has defined it for himself, require him not only to give the existing system of things the short end in every instance, to extract on occasion a lesson dramatically opposite to the accepted and normal, but even to upset the historical judgments of men like Grote and discern in the fate of Greece only the earmarks of his hobby, and not the inevitable consequences of an exaggerated individualism and township patriotism that prevented the little states of the Hellenic faith from combining against a common foe.

We would not decry the earnestness of the author and the sincere and helpful humanitarianism of his treatise. His indictment contains too much of truth; his theory is ingenious and it, too, contains much of truth. In the limits of this review it would be idle to attempt to indicate what we think is well taken and what ill taken in a book that covers the whole range of American life. The chief criticism we make here is that Mr. George tries to prove too much, and necessarily is occasionally led into absurdities. Even in the inquiring attitude of modern economists toward the phenomena of wealth, of manufacturing and distribution he chooses to see the cloven hoof of privilege. His impatience here is funny and self-revealing: "Why are all these alleged savants pretending to be puzzled over the complex machinery of society? It is all vastly simple. Abolish privilege and have an end of it!"

Loyal to his fellowmen as this book shows Mr. George to be, stirred as he is undoubtedly with sympathy for their sufferings, his treatise yet lacks in too many places the highest loyalty of all—loyalty to the whole truth. He does not approach his field with the humility of the inquiring mind. He is neither fair nor practical in his sweeping arraignment, justifiable as much of it is. In his preface he avouches his scorn of compromise, and declares that "halfway measures will be worse than futile." But no movement toward better things which Mr. George would associate himself would be possible to him if he treated its phenomena and its personalities in the same unfriendly and uncompromising fashion. And Mr. George himself, as dictator created to inaugurate the new regime, which his book is designed to hasten, would find himself giving his cause the benefit of doubts he denies the present order, resorting to expedients he condemns now, decriing the very sort of criticism with which he proves, to his own satisfaction, that the former days were much better than these.