

BOOKS

THE MENACE OF PRIVILEGE.

The Menace of Privilege. A Study of the Dangers to the Republic, from the Existence of a Favored Class. By Henry George, Jr. New York and London: The Macmillans. Price, \$1.50 net. Sold by The Public Publishing Co., Chicago.

Most writers on plutocratic conditions make the fundamental mistake of drawing the line of economic cleavage between rich and poor. Mr. George draws it between the privileged and the unprivileged. This is the true distinction, and until the people themselves learn to make it there is little hope of destroying plutocratic power in any form without reestablishing it in another.

One of the best, in many respects the very best, agency for promoting popular intelligence in that respect is this book of the younger George. It is not academic, not merely philosophical; on the contrary, while as true to rational philosophy as are his father's books, it fully meets the demands of the time for the concrete. Neither is it pessimistic. While candid in describing untoward conditions, and thrilling in its warnings, it holds out hope for the future on the simple condition that privilege be abolished.

Mr. George acknowledges many particular forms of privilege, but he holds them all to be involved in or subsidiary to these four general classes: (1) Natural opportunities privately held under special or general laws; (2) various kinds of taxation and its fruits; (3) franchise grants; and, (4) powers of incorporation and various sorts of immunities in the

courts. His descriptions of American types of princes of privilege, such as the Astors, the Mackays, the Carnegies and the Rockefellers, are revelations more exciting than romance, yet truer than statistics. In their amusements he finds "revels and pastoral vapidities, such as were so favored in the dry-rot days of the French court before engulfment by the Revolution;" and even to the grave they are surrounded by monuments that advertise their fabulous wealth. "One window from the tomb of the railroad prince Lamont—a marvel of richness and beauty—would go far toward meeting the arrears of house-rent for nonpayment of which 20,000 evictions occur on the average each year in the borough of Manhattan."

Yet the author makes no personal reflections. Though he names names and describes personal habits of life, he does not question personal morals. He has "no grievance with riches as riches," but is "tracing out the seats and the workings of special privileges." What he aims at is to show not merely how privilege operates in the hands of those who actually have it, but "how it would operate in the hands of anybody." Though he points to individual men as types, "it is not the man, but the privilege," that he adjures his readers to keep in mind.

Nor is the principle of privilege merely in itself the object of his assaults; it is the effect of privilege, not alone in exalting "the few to superabundant, intoxicating riches," but in sinking the many into hope-killing, brutalizing poverty. For privileges are "in effect nothing less than private laws enabling some to appropriate from others"—a power essentially of appropriation, which robs some into riches and others into poverty. And on the poverty side Mr. George brings into service pictures of want that contrast wofully in their ugliness with his pictures of wealth.

Out of the poverty and dependence produced by privilege comes labor unionism, which in turn has provoked such novelties in modern jurisprudence as "government by injunction" and such reactions as bayonet rule. To these subjects the author devotes several chapters, in which he traces abuses of court and army to the influence of privileged interests.

And so with politics. Looking deeper than most writers on corruption in politics, those who attribute it to the venality and incompetency of the masses, Mr. George traces it to the criminality of the privileged. Among the bits of evidence he introduces on this point are Bourke Cochran's circumstantial and unrefuted charges in Congress that the political victory of 1896 for "honest money" was bought with \$16,000,000 of the tainted money of privilege. Another piece of evi-

dence is the recent solemn statement under oath of J. Pierpont Morgan's partner, Perkins (whose insurance company furnished, through him, part of the \$16,000,000 referred to by Cochran), that insurance companies ought to be authorized to contribute to such campaign funds, "say 25, 50 or 75 cents for each policy holder."

The responsiveness of the newspapers, also, to the influences of privilege is described and illustrated with examples. Even the publications that expose rampant corruption are found to be careful to avoid monopoly or privilege itself. They confine their attacks to particular kinds of transgressing individuals. To attack the privilege upon which these individuals rely to make their transgressions succeed, would disturb a myriad of smaller beneficiaries of privilege. "In this way privilege, by the hurt it can do or the prejudice it inspires, puts limitations upon even those monthlies and weeklies that attack its outposts." And in somewhat similar category are the pulpit and the university.

One of the great reactionary effects of privilege in this country to which the author points is the development of a spirit of conquest abroad, which has intensified centralization and promoted tyranny at home. "We tell ourselves that we are marked for supreme achievements; that our march is forward, without wavering or turning; that we are to carry the sword of peace and the torch of civilization to factious and benighted nations; that we are to lead in the progress of mankind. And so we exchange vigilance for vanity and overweening self-confidence, such as charmed into a poppy-sleep many a people gone before, until the hour and the spirit of saving action had passed forever." The lesson may be read in the history of