

HENRY GEORGE, JR., AND HIS IMPORTANT ROMANCE OF LOVE, BUSINESS AND POLITICS.*

A BOOK-STUDY.

I. FATHER AND SON.

ONE MORNING early in the nineties we called by appointment on Henry George. We had gone to New York to meet a number of prominent contributors to THE ARENA, in order to discuss some forthcoming papers they were preparing. Our first appointment was with Dion Boucicault, one of the most perfect gentlemen and delightful conversationists it has been our fortune to know. But though the then popular actor and playwright was thoroughly charming when discussing the purely intellectual aspect of a question, and was a capital story-teller, there was in his conversation a moral cynicism and an apparent lack of any recognition of the ethical and spiritual obligations that devolve on every child of eternity, that chilled moral enthusiasm and deadened faith and

hope in the heart. On the superficial plane of being and in the discussion of literary, artistic and dramatic subjects in general, he was one of the most delightful companions we have known, sunny, engaging and informing; but the moment he passed to the deeper or graver problems of individual or social life, the sky became overcast.

Leaving Mr. Boucicault, we went to Mr. George's home, and we shall never forget the impression made on us at that first meeting. Here was a man whose high moral idealism dominated all his thought and gave new dignity to life and its great problems. The impressions made by Mr. Boucicault were that we were little more than mere manikins who, while we should observe the niceties of life and be genteel and agreeable, were at best but manikins. Not so the idea conveyed by Henry George. To him life was real and earnest. Man was a great responsible agent on whom devolved grave and high obligations.

*"The Romance of John Bainbridge." By Henry George, Jr. Cloth. Pp. 468. Price, \$1.50. New York: The Macmillan Company.

We were here to find out the great laws that underlay the moral order and to fearlessly and faithfully work for their recognition and operation, to the end that justice should reign,—justice, that great and beautiful word that imperaled the hope of civilization; that included love and brotherhood, and that when recognized and applied, liberty, prosperity, development and the largest possible happiness would be enjoyed as natural corollaries.

At that time we spent over an hour with Mr. George and left enthused and mentally and morally stimulated; and though on subsequent occasions when we met Mr. George these same feelings were always emphasized, that first meeting with the great social philosopher stands out as one of the most enjoyable and helpful experiences of our life. The moral contagion that emanates from the life of the great and noble soul was felt, we think, by all who came to know the man; but nowhere is its influence more marked than in the lives of his two high-minded sons who on the highways of literature and art are moving forward in a manner worthy of their father.

Henry George, Jr., in particular is carrying forward the work of social justice by the use of his strong and vigorous pen, in a way that would give his father the keenest joy were he still with us. As a journalist and author he is achieving fame, but what is far more important, he is carrying forward the propaganda of social justice and fundamental democracy in a forcible and convincing manner. His life of his father was a worthy tribute by a gifted son; and the past year has witnessed the publication of two works that cannot fail to accomplish much good in awakening the easy-going millions to a recognition of the extreme peril of present conditions and in showing precisely how our liberties, rights and possessions are being taken from us, while our government is being debauched and our business life corrupted in such a way that the nation is being steadily transformed from a democratic republic, such as the fathers sought permanently to establish, into a reactionary class-ruled land in which the princes of privilege or the new commercial feudalism is the all-masterful influence in state and in social and business affairs, and in which the priceless natural resources and the inalienable rights of the millions are being filched from them, that the privileged ones may exploit them at will.

The Menace of Privilege published about

a year ago, was unquestionably one of the most important popular works on social conditions that has appeared,—a work that we hold it is the duty of every patriotic citizen in America to thoughtfully peruse. And now this has been followed by a powerful and fascinating love-romance in which the actual workings of the public-service magnates in all our municipalities, in corrupting the people's servants and obtaining the enormously rich public franchises, are uncovered in so vivid and convincing a manner that he who reads this work will no longer be able to plead ignorance on one of the most vital questions of the hour. The pictures here given are faithful to conditions, as scores upon scores of recent exposures testify. This work thus presents a great, living, ominous fact with as much skill as Mr. Klein in "The Lion and the Mouse" has displayed in portraying the work of the same baleful corporation influences in national affairs.

II. THE ROMANCE OF JOHN BAINBRIDGE

Considering the book merely as a work of fiction, it is entitled to a very high place among recent American romances. The author is a modern journalist and his experience in this field of labor has schooled him to present salient facts in a strong, clear, concise and telling manner, with a keen appreciation for the dramatic situations in scenes he describes. The action nowhere drags. The characters are flesh and blood men and women, such as are seen in our great metropolis at the present time. The play of interests, the battle of great forces struggling for mastery, are here given with clearness and concision; not as a descriptive essayist or a moralist would present them, but after the manner of the dramatist or novelist. He has so cleverly interwoven the facts into the woof of the romance that while the reader is made to see and take note of them, they in no wise distract the attention or detract from the interest of the story. The novel is first of all a powerful and pleasing love romance, dominated by that same moral idealism that was instinct in the works of Mr. George's great father. But it is far more than this. It presents a grave situation that confronts every municipality and, in even perhaps greater degree, every state and national government; and this is done with the consummate skill of the artist, so that

the appalling and menacing facts are made a part—a thrillingly interesting part—of the story, and by affecting in a vital way the three chief characters of the novel become, as it were, a part of the surging life-blood of the tale.

III. THE NOVEL AS A STORY.

John Bainbridge, the hero of the romance, is the son of a large art-glass manufacturer of New York City. When the young man at eighteen finished his schooling his father insisted on his entering the art works, but the boy declined to do this. An altercation occurred and the youth left for the West with little more than the clothes on his back. For some years he experienced great hardships. He accepted any kind of work and as opportunity offered read law at night. Later, in a growing young city in the State of Washington which was a railway terminal, he entered the law-office of a powerful attorney named Swayne. Here he read law and was admitted to the bar. Swayne had made a great reputation by fighting the rapacious exactions and boundless greed of the railroad companies, and Bainbridge entered heart and soul into the work. He loved the people, he loved the cause of Justice, and he idolized Swayne. But one day his idol was shattered when Swayne informed him that he had accepted a large annual retainer from the railway and henceforth would fight in their interests instead of opposing them. Bainbridge withdrew from the office and took up the people's battle. He soon became one of the most brilliant, influential and universally loved lawyers of the region, enjoying the absolute confidence of the people. At all great meetings connected with public interests he was one of the leading speakers. The railways and privileged interests denounced him as a demagogue with interested motives, as it is their wont to do, but the people trusted him. One day at a meeting his eyes rested on the face of a beautiful girl, whose eyes were riveted on his own. It was only a passing glimpse, but the image of that face lived in his memory and became as is so often the case with idealistic natures, a constant inspiration to noble striving. About this time the railway company came to him, as it had previously come to Swayne, and offered him a princely yearly retainer and large prospective fees if he would enter its service. This offer he promptly and indignantly declined and continued to prose-

cute his work with the same faithfulness and high idealism that marked his early practice. He also took numbers of cases of poor people who had nothing to pay him for his services. Among this number was a lad named Timothy Cavanaugh, who was accused of murder. The circumstantial evidence was strong against the boy. He was friendless and without money. Bainbridge took the case without pay and cleared the lad. But while at the height of his fame he felt a strong yearning to return to his father who was advancing in years, and to be near him during his declining days. He therefore returned to New York, but his father was far from being the feeble old man he had imagined him to be, and he had in no way softened toward the son, who went into the practice of law. He, however, got few paying cases, but was soon overwhelmed with charity work, and the competence he had laid by during his prosperous years in the West rapidly dwindled.

At the time the story opens the hero is visiting his father's works, where he has come to pay a visit to the parent, but he finds the old gentleman absent. While there a beautiful young artist comes with drawings she has made for the magnificent stained-glass window of the great new cathedral which Frederick Fenn, the most powerful public-service magnate of the city, is building. She gives her name as Jessica Long, and on seeing her the young man experiences a sudden start, as it seems to him he has somewhere seen her before. His mind flies back to the great meeting where for a moment he had come under the spell of just such eyes as this young lady possesses, and the memory of the past and his leadership of the people in the other days comes over him with strong and compelling power. He leaves the works and is immediately confronted by a lost child who can speak only Italian. He takes the little one by the hand and the two trudge along in quest of the home of the waif. Soon they meet some Italian women and they take the little wanderer to its home. But to Bainbridge the spectacle of the lost child comes as a type of the condition of the people in this vast metropolis,—the great struggling poor that he meets on every hand. He thinks of New York and her pressing need and a great resolve begins to take shape in his mind:

“Here was the richest city on the hemisphere. It produced abundantly of the things

needed to satisfy human desire; and every new process, every labor-saving invention, tended to increase that abundance. Yet had most of the men, women, and children in that city a sufficiency? Far from it. They were in truth half famished. Little children died like flies in the tenement regions for want of nourishment. He himself had seen much of the sorrow and suffering. Had he not been busy with accident cases, with debt cases, with eviction cases—with the conflicts of the poor and generous and improvident against the rich and powerful and hard?

"That raised the question: Did work make riches? If so, why was not the 'working class' the rich class? Why, in fact, was the 'working class' the poor class? Why were those who did so little work—who had so much idle time—the rich class?"

"Was it because the drones robbed the workers?"

"That was it. It was robbery—huge, gigantic, widespread robbery of the many by the few that was producing the wild, wolfish humanity. The workers were robbed into poverty; into intense competition among themselves for the brute needs; into suffering, vice, and crime."

He determines to make the case of the people his cause. He would be a David.

"A David! Could he, John Bainbridge, be a new David? Would he stand forth before the Army of Want and take up the gage thrown down by the Army of Have? Would he contend with the Goliath of Privilege?"

"Yes, he would; he resolved he would; he deliberately vowed he would."

Just then a leader in one of the Tammany wards, Cavanaugh, the father of the boy Bainbridge in the West had defended, calls upon him and insists upon his accepting a large sum of money for defending the friendless lad who had run away from home and had so aroused his father's displeasure that they were not on speaking terms. Bainbridge refuses to take a cent. He had given his services; the case was settled. Then Cavanaugh asks him if he will not run for alderman in his ward. Bainbridge refuses unless he is left perfectly free to stand for whatever he believes to be right and to fight whatever he believes to be wrong. Cavanaugh agrees and Bainbridge becomes an aldermanic candidate for the purpose of fighting Fenn, who proposes to

secure an immensely valuable franchise.

Fenn is not only the most powerful public-service magnate of the city, but is the most baleful influence in the municipal life of the metropolis. He has systematically bribed the people's servants for years and years, and in this way has obtained public rights or franchises which are netting him untold millions of dollars and which of course of right belong to the people.

At one meeting of the opposition Bainbridge is present, and when the speaker challenges any Tiger candidate to reply and offers twenty minutes of his own time for him to do so in, Bainbridge unhesitatingly accepts the gage. At this meeting Jessica Long Fenn is present. She is the young artist who goes under the name of Jessica Long in her studio, and she is the daughter of the great magnate.

In various ways Jessica and Bainbridge are thrown together from time to time, but the young lawyer does not dream she is related to the great franchise-grabber, and he explains to her how his chief aim in getting into the board of aldermen is to fight Fenn, who is a notorious corruptionist. But though the daughter starts and also defends Fenn from the charges, she urges Bainbridge to do what he believes to be his duty. She becomes the most powerful inspiring influence to the young alderman in his battle to ruin her father.

After the election the fight becomes very savage. Fenn is pronounced by his physician, who is in quest of large fees, to be in a very critical condition of health and threatened with apoplexy; and his daughter, in consternation lest her father should become unduly excited or depressed, clings to him. To Jessica her father is the incarnation of an honorable man and she is sure the young alderman has misjudged him. It is one of the most marked features of the lives of many of our criminal rich of the new commercial feudalism, that in their families they are all that could be asked, and indeed it must be admitted that few of them seem to imagine the kind of criminal lives they are leading. They are auto-hypnotized and seem to little imagine their real character or the extent of their baleful influence on civilization. In their homes they are exemplary husbands and fathers. They attend church regularly. They contribute lavishly and frequently endow colleges and libraries. But when it comes to bribing the people's servants to perjure themselves and break their oaths of office, and in so doing

to pass measures which rob a whole city, state or nation of its own and which also place the millions at the mercy of the rapacity of the few, to be ruthlessly robbed, they go forward as if they were not engaging in treason against their country and crime against society. They do not hesitate to buy officials. They evade and defy the laws. With bribery and various other corrupt means they rob the present and the future generations of the great reservoirs of natural wealth, satisfying their consciences with the pitiful, cowardly, insufficient plea that if they did not do so, others would, and never stopping to think that murderers and housebreakers could justify their courses by the same kind of sophistry. In no respect have the church, the school and the home been so criminally remiss as in their failure to impress the supremely important fact that no amount of juggling with facts, no amount of sophistry like the above, can justify criminal, dishonest, unjust or unfair actions or make the crime or wrong any less heinous. It is through this failure that we to-day are confronted with the appalling spectacle of the nation, state and city being systematically debauched and corrupted at the fount of government by bribery and indirection, on the one hand, and the systematic defiance and evasion of law by the princes of privilege who hold seats of honor in the various great churches whose silence they have bought with tainted gold, on the other.

Now Jessica, seeing nothing but what is honorable and fine in her father and fearing depression and excitement will cause his death, submits unwillingly to assist her father in such a way as to betray her high-minded lover.

From this point on the interest in the work becomes very great. Important events follow in rapid succession and the hour approaches for the great battle of giants. Powerful and corrupt Fenn, with his many hirelings and tools is pitted against Bainbridge. The chapter telling how the franchise was won by one vote and only rendered possible by the betrayal of her lover by Jessica, and in which the daughter discovers that Bainbridge's charges are just and true and that her father has been the giver of bribes, constitutes one of the most thrilling and dramatic passages of the book. Nor does the interest flag after this incident. The great banker, Arlington, the cold-blooded associate of Fenn, sues for Jessica's hand. The daughter on finding her father to be a criminal, a briber, leaves her

home, and her denunciation awakens the soul of Frederick Fenn, who sets to work to make restitution. The scene of the story from now on is laid in New York and in the early home of Fenn in Vermont. Events follow rapidly, until we reach the natural climax of the romance.

While the three chief personalities are Bainbridge, Jessica and Fenn, there are many excellently drawn characters. This is notably true in the case of Cavanaugh the elder; Alderman Van Ness who represents the kid-glove section of the city,—a rich young man who under the moral stimulus of Bainbridge's influence becomes a sturdy reformer; Alderman Fitzgerald; Judge Brascom, and Victor Arlington.

IV. ITS VALUE AS A GRAPHIC PICTURE OF THE BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC-SERVICE CORPORATIONS.

Considered merely as a strong and wholesomely realistic romance of love and life in the great metropolis, the work is one of the best novels of the year; but it has another and to the social reformer and the friends of democratic institutions an even greater value. Here we have one of the most faithful concrete examples of how the public-service companies debauch government by bribery, direct and indirect; by intimidation; by "fixing" the bosses and gaining a number of faithful lackeys among the representatives of both parties. Here we see how year by year the great and inexhaustible gold-mines, in the shape of franchises of natural monopolies or public utilities, the benefits of which should go to all the people, are being turned over to the rapacious few, who out of their stolen plunder are acquiring untold millions of wealth at the expense of the people. The revelations that from time to time have come to light in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, Denver and various other cities show that Mr. George has in no wise overdrawn the picture. He has merely with fidelity to the facts drawn a typical picture that might be historically accurate, and in spirit is as true as history.

V. DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NOVEL.

Aside from the excellencies we have dwelt upon, we cannot close this review without noticing what to us is a dominant character

istic of the story, and that is the moral idealism which pervades it. The lives of Bainbridge and of Jessica are instinct with the loftiest idealism, and the author shows very clearly, without any attempt to impress the fact in words, that the hope of the Republic and of our civilization lies here and only here. Without a return to lofty moral ideals on the part of our young men and women—ideals that should be a veritable pillar of light before them at all times—America cannot escape the doom of all civilizations that have turned from the star to embrace the clod.

More than this, the book impresses the fact that the victories—the great immortal victories in the cause of progress and civic righteousness, are won by the one, two or three men who are willing to consecrate all to the cause. This whole-souled, steadfast consecration to the cause of justice is the supreme demand which our great nation makes upon her sons and daughters to-day. No man

liveth unto himself, and even the most obscure person can by consecration and unyielding fidelity, under the spell of moral idealism, do much to awaken the conscience of the nation and lead the people back to the highway of just government. And the necessity for this unswerving loyalty to the vision of justice, to the demands of democracy, was never clearer than to-day, when the city, state and nation are being seduced by corrupt wealth from the old ideals of justice, freedom and fraternity. We are in the midst of as titanic a battle as was ever waged by a great people. On the one hand is reactionary, sordid, materialistic commercialism; on the other, moral idealism, calling on every man and woman to range on the side of fundamental democracy, of justice, honesty and progress.

Dealing as this novel does with the questions which are pressing for immediate solution, makes it one of the really important romances for all reformers and patriots to read.