

THE MENACE OF PRIVILEGE.

By Henry George, Jr. The Macmillan Company. Price, cloth, \$1.50. Sewing, 75c.

The keynote of this book is sounded in its title. The word privilege is printed in it with a capital P from beginning to end, and is used to embrace private ownership of land, the protective tariff, and every form of special Government grants by which, in the estimation of the author, the multitude suffer for the benefit of the few. While he upholds his famous father's doctrine regarding the injustice of private ownership of land, and proposes the same remedy—that of taxing it out of existence—this is but one of many subjects discussed, and occupies no very large part of the work.

Privilege, as viewed in this work, is divisible into four general classes: (1) monopolies of natural opportunities, (2) the tariff and other taxes on production and its fruits, (3) highway grants, (4) and incorporation powers and immunities.

There are interesting chapters contrasting present conditions, and the great inequalities in the distribution of wealth, with the state of things in the early days of the Republic. But it appears that even at that remote period there was a tendency to monopoly. Thus John Hancock is said to have tried to make a corner in whale oil, and Alexander Hamilton is mentioned as a master spirit in a franchise grab. Washington, it appears, exhibited a marked tendency to get and hold as much land as possible, and was the wealthiest landed proprietor in the country. But there was then no thought of land monopoly, as America was almost a wilder-

ness, and Mr. George is at pains to show that so long as there was abundance of public land to be had by settlers for the taking there could be no real want in the United States. He traces the gradual increase of monopoly, and of the accumulation of riches in the hands of the few, down to the present day of vast fortunes and of inflated Trusts. He concludes that this unequal distribution of wealth and of opportunities has induced a lowering of both public and private morals, besides dividing the people into two great classes—the privileged and the unprivileged. The basis of his arguments and the nature of his conclusions are best indicated in his own words, taken from one of his concluding chapters:

We have now seen at some length 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 the 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 man-strong business practices, private infidelities, divorce habits and irresponsibility for child-bearing, while the mul-

itude of workers are being reduced to conditions breeding want, sin and crime, from which must come general physical, mental and moral deterioration. Proceeding, we have seen how, rising out of this state of things, the country is being divided into two great militant camps; that of the owners of privileges and that of the resisting working masses; that the latter, organizing Trade Unions for defense, and then realizing the power coming to combination, have in specific cases passed from the defensive to the offensive with circumstances of tyranny

and insolence; that to destroy Trade Unions; Privilege is abusing Court orders and the military functions of Government; that in order to control Government, Privilege is corrupting politics; that in order to influence public opinion, it is reaching out for press, University and pulpit; that in order to extend its conquests and divert the popular mind with dreams of glory, it is directing foreign aggression.

All these results, we have seen to follow a continuing unequal distribution of wealth and this unequal distribu-

tion of wealth to be a fruit of the grants and passive sanctions of Government called privileges.

The remedies Mr. George proposes consist in the abolition of what he regards as the causes of the mischiefs he describes; that is to say, in the abolition of private ownership of land, mines, water, forests and every form of public utility or natural opportunity; also of the tariff and "all other forms of taxation on production and its fruits," as well as of special or general Government grants and every form of immunity in the Courts. He believes in absolute free trade, regarding the tariff simply as a means of enabling certain favored persons and industries to profit at the expense of others, and not at all as a means of protecting American labor against foreign competition. In fact, he declares that among the corporations which have profited most by the tariff, such as the Carnegie Steel Com-

pany, have been found the most bitter opponents of the organization of labor to secure fair wages and reasonable hours of work.

In this regard it is pertinent to say that the book strongly upholds Labor Unionism and the closed shop. Mr. George sees nothing to praise in the so-called "scab," regarding him as a man who meanly profits by the organization of his fellow craftsmen. But he condemns the excesses to which the Unions have been misled and the blackmailing practised by certain organizations in league with contractors.

Upon the railroad question the author sees no prospect for relief from Government regulation in any form, so long as the roads remain in private hands. He thinks that either the people must assume ownership and management or else let private ownership and management alone; that the establishment of Courts and Commissions to regulate transportation must

inevitably lead to railroad control of the elections or appointments, and the more general corruption of politics. His remedy is public ownership, and nothing short of it, he thinks, will be of any avail. In speaking of the power exercised by the railroads in politics, he says:

California and Nevada have long been as completely under the domination of the Pacific railroads as Alabama has been under that of the Louisville and Nashville, Ohio under the group headed by the Lake Shore and Big Four, and Florida under the Plant-Flagler interests.

It is scarcely likely that any Californian will rise up to call Mr. George a liar, so far as this State is concerned.

"The Menace of Privilege" is an uncommonly well-written book, teeming with facts and arguments, all of which are presented in admirable order and in a clear and vivid style which invites and holds the attention of any intelligent reader interested in the great public questions of the day. Even those who disagree most with the author's opinions may find interest, enjoyment and profit in its pages.

W. A. L.