

BOOK REVIEWS.

A NOVEL BY HENRY GEORGE, JR.*

This work discloses Mr. Henry George, Jr., in an entirely new role. We have often thought that if the father had turned his attention to novel writing he might have given us something notable in fiction. Perhaps, too, he could have written a great poem—either achievement seems not to have been impossible to the man capable of writing "Progress and Poverty." Imagination he possessed, and humor, too. Constructive ability was not lacking, and sublimity and pathos. As novelist or poet he would have begun his task with a far higher equipment than many of our most successful novelists. But he chose a different instrument for conveying his message—and it is far better that he did so.

This novel of the son, "The Romance of John Bainbridge," reveals ingenuity in the development of the plot, a pleasant little love story runs through it like a thread, and it maintains its interest throughout. It is a decidedly engrossing story. The book is dedicated to Mrs. George. May we hazard the guess that in inscribing this work to his wife the author discharges the debt he owes for some unmistakably feminine touches which, unless we greatly err, were not of Mr. George's creation?

It is an economic story. It is a novel with a purpose—but the purpose is not writ too large. It deals with privilege—privilege in streets. The lesson is not obtrusive, and for such reason is more effective. The characters are fairly drawn, and stand out with sufficient distinctness. But above all it is a story that will be read. The career of John Bainbridge will be followed with interest by the reader, and his example ought to be a splendid civic lesson.

If we were asked to indicate defect we should say it consists in the occasional infelicitous word. But these are infrequent. Now and then there is a quotable passage, which arrests the attention:

"Dr. Goff gave one of those contented little mirthless laughs that your consciously wise man gives when he wants to be sociable with the less wise." (P. 231.)

"Arlington was genuinely making every effort within his nature to unbend and adapt himself to Jessica. And it often happens that when we incline our wills in a good direction, Heaven inclines our hearts in that direction, also." (Page 234.)

"Father, the fact that the railroads are in private hands explains why the wrong men are in public office." (Page 53.)

*W. G.
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And this picture of the mind of the street railroad magnate is perhaps a not unfair description of his type:

"But Fenn did not regard himself as a tyrant or a monster. He realized his wider vision, his deeper thought, his surpassing command of ramifying details. With this knowledge he had the will. Why then should he not rule? Why should not the rule belong to the strong? Was not that the inexorable natural law? If opposition was overborne, if individuals were trampled underfoot, was he to be called to account? Nature's elements did the same; social progress did as much. Nature in her broader aspects was simply a clash of forces, and human development but the suffering of the mass for the production of the super or over-man. Napoleon in his foolish, theatrical way had not inaptly phrased it, 'The sword to him who can wield it.'" (Page 90).

There is little attempt at "fine writing"—which is well. But there are, here and there, passages which recall the elder George, and might indeed have been written by him. Of such is the following which with perhaps a trifling pruning of its wealth of adjectives stands as an eloquent passage:

"Except that it would not accommodate an extensive retinue, the house might well have been the palace of a proud and powerful monarch. As a matter of fact it was the "town house" of a plain citizen of the republic who had come up out of obscurity and grown to dazzling superabundance through the acquisition and manipulation of public franchise privileges. True, the acquisition, the retention, and the extension of these privileges had occurred through more or less foul politics, but the building and its contents carried no more suggestion of that to the close-at-hand beholder than do stones of the Parthenon, matchless even in their ruins, tell of the unrequited toil of the thousands who, at the direction of Phidias, reared them; or the mountainous pyramids in Egypt's waste of sands reecho the agonizing cries of enslaved tribes and nations who, at the hiss and sting of whips, with incredible labor fetched huge masses of stone immense distances and raised them into those imperishable monuments of arrogant pride." (Page 107.)

We congratulate Mr. George on his work. He has written a story which deserves to be read, and has shown a somewhat surprising mastery of a kind of composition in which no one suspected him efficient.

J. D. M.

The Romance of John Bainbridge

An effective and able novel, in which many will trace interest critical incidents based on facts in the career of the author.