

A PRIVILEGED CLASS.

The following pessimistic contribution from Mr. J. B. Johnston, of 5754 Washington avenue, Chicago, THE CONSERVATIVE prints with great satisfaction.

It demonstrates thoroughly well the fact that there is a privileged class in this country. There always will be a privileged class, so long as some men have better intellectual ability by inheritance and better development thereof by schooling and discipline, than other men.

Quoting the definition given in the article of Mr. Johnston, this privilege is "a peculiar benefit or advantage;" that is to say, it is "a peculiar benefit and advantage" to be stronger-brained and better developed intellectually than your neighbor—than any other man with whom you come in competition for daily subsistence.

The man who has the best brain and who has developed the same, has "a right and an immunity," not enjoyed by feeble-minded and undeveloped mortals. Education, together with inherited ability, "exempts men from evil and from burden." It provides the means of obtaining subsistence and acquiring great wealth by mental efforts.

Those who have not intellectual gifts and development, are compelled to acquire livelihood and maintenance by manual labor.

In the gold fields of Alaska, the latter class would enjoy privileges and advantages over the former. The capacity for physical effort, manual labor, in opening up new countries, in developing great mining industries and in most of the methods for the material development of the earth, has "an advantage and peculiar benefit" and a strenuous privilege over and above mere mind-culture and brain-strength.

But read Mr. Johnston's article and send THE CONSERVATIVE answers to the same from time to time.

HAVE WE A PRIVILEGED CLASS?

BY J. B. JOHNSTON.

A privilege is "a peculiar benefit or advantage; a right or immunity not enjoyed by others or by all—special enjoyment of a good, or exemption from an evil or burden,"—and the privileges of which we complain are those conferred by government in violation of fundamental principles.

Those who enjoy privileges belong to a privileged class, and our proposition is, that the wishes and interests of this class are paramount in the councils and in the administration of our government.

If there were no privileged classes in this country, there would be no private property in land. There might be private property in everything else, as now, that is, in the products of our land, in things produced, extracted or

derived from land (and there are no other things), but there could be no private property in land itself; for the man who has an estate in land has a privilege, a right or immunity, not enjoyed by others, or by all.

He may inclose it and exclude his fellows from any share in its advantages or possibilities.

He has the power to sell and convey these privileges to another or to others, to them, their heirs, executors, administrators, or assigns, forever, so runs the deed.

He has also the right to buy more land, all he can pay for, and to associate himself with other land holders, for the purpose of increasing the value of his holding, that is the extent to which he may lay tribute upon the community, the amount which he may compel his fellow men to pay for the opportunity to use such portion of the earth; all in violation of the equal rights of his fellow men.

It is no answer to this averment that men and nations have commonly treated land as subject to private ownership and control (although this will not be conceded). The question is, does land ownership create a privileged class?

Nine men, it is said, control (or did last fall control) the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania, and with them the welfare, if not the existence, of 140,000 miners.

Nine men fix the price of this coal for the whole country. Nine men say how much shall be mined, or whether any shall be mined. Among nine men, and the others represented by them, are divided the profits which result from this "right or immunity not enjoyed by others or by all."

Do these men belong to a privileged class or not?

Since this article was begun, there has appeared in the public prints, notice of a similar consolidation of the soft coal interests of Illinois and Western Indiana.

"Before the first of September," it is said, "all of these companies will have been gathered into one organization similar to the United States Steel Corporation. The capitalization will be enormous, probably second only to that of the big steel trust."

The above extract precedes notice of the acquisition of the Ohio and West Virginia fields.

What will be the condition of the miner when the bituminous coal fields of these four states shall be under one management, as contemplated, and who will be chargeable with this condition? Who and what but the alienation by our government of these very lands in favor of private citizens?

This alienation, we contend, is in its nature utterly fraudulent and void. We refuse to recognize the right of any government, on any pretext, or for any

consideration, to deed away in perpetuity the heritage of its people.

To use or to enjoy, yes; but to give away, to sell, or to devastate the inheritance of the absent, the infant and the unborn—Right!

The land grant railroads of this country have received from the government (Land Com'r's Report, March 8, 1888) 49,167,892 acres of land, equal to 76,825 square miles, a portion of the earth's surface greater in extent than the whole state of Nebraska, and with it have received the equivalent of vast sums of money and the sole right to build and operate, for private gain, public highways (so-called) over half a continent. They fix the rates at which, and the terms and conditions on which, they will transport passengers and freight. They can build up one section or locality and tear down and destroy another, as they choose. (In this connection read the recent complaint of the orange growers of Southern California.)

Their motives and policy are embodied in two short and simple rules, viz: "Charge all the traffic will bear," and "The public be damned." And in the face of such indisputable facts as these there are men, and among them the editors of this paper, who deny the existence of privileged class in this country. They might, with equal reason and as good grace, deny the law of gravitation. It is true the roads themselves are not persons, nor classes, but who are back of the roads?

Monstrous as are the facts we have cited, they are only the abuses of a system which is wholly, irredeemably wrong. Let the right of one man to own a piece of land be conceded (size, location and circumstance are immaterial), and the existing order, with all its menace, becomes the legitimate and inevitable result. Our theory and our practice are at variance. In theory men have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. If the domain of nature were open to all men, they would have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. If they had the equivalent for the (temporary) deprivation thereof, they would still have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; but, having neither the right of access nor the equivalent, how can it be said that men, under our institutions, have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They have not. The only heritable rights of men in the earth today are those of the highway and the desert; all others have to be bought from those who, as land owners, can make their own terms. Hence, the relation of landlord and tenant, of employer and employe. The institution of private property in land, with its inevitable accompaniments, underlies not only our judicial system, but our civilization. All that is worth preserving in our