

Eugenics and Political Theory

It is a commonplace of Moral Philosophers that every increase in our knowledge entails a corresponding increase in our moral responsibility. As St Paul ~~said~~ ^{has} expressed it:—"For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law." It is only by ignorance that our mistakes are excusable; when knowledge has dawned, we must rise up and shoulder our burden, confident that the day will bring us something more than labour. It has been the same from the first; a few hundred years ago it was thought no crime to expose children to the deadliest infection; ~~nowadays~~ we see the danger and impute the fault. In the same way a man might build his house on an ~~unsafe~~ eminence, exposed to thunder storms, and if the lightning strikes the building, killing or maiming himself, or his family, it was looked upon as ~~a work of God~~ a most pitiful and undeserved disaster, whereas now we should be horribly indignant at his criminal carelessness, in not ~~making~~ taking proper precautions to make his house safe.

In a much more profound degree, and on a far larger scale, we are now beginning to discern the true dimensions of our new responsibilities, in the light of the tremendous scientific discoveries of the last century. The magnitude of the discoveries themselves almost overwhelms the imagination. Until the time of Darwin organic creation, ~~was~~ including man, was ^{an endless} ~~a~~ series of riddles. Men wondered at the structure of ~~organic beings~~ animals and plants, at their growth, their movements, their composition, their marvellous adaptations. Naturalists studying ^{living nature} ~~the world~~ as they saw it, were like archaeologists

2

studying the groven letters of some ancient alphabet, the meaning of which they do not know, the very sounds of which ~~are~~ ^{are} still hidden. And then came Darwin, ~~the~~ a man ~~who added brilliant insight could~~ ^{capable of pondering} ~~ponder~~ his ~~great~~ ^{huge} knowledge with brilliant insight, and found the essential key, ~~that~~ ^{which} others had scarcely dreamed of seeking. He showed how animals and plants alike, with all the perfection of their adaptations, and growth and movements, and even man himself with his intellectual and moral attributes, were all the products of a vast, ceaseless agency of change, springing from the fundamental properties of life itself, to which he gave the name of Evolution.

The social and political aspects of the new ideas, were not apparent at once; at the first faith was needed. Darwin could prove nothing directly; he could not show ^{one} ~~you~~ the complete process, whereby one species arises out of another; the full weight of his reasoning could only be appreciated by a few men with extensive biological knowledge. And there was considerable prejudice from the beginning; many objected on religious grounds; still more were highly indignant at the implication that there was "a monkey in the family". And politicians, too, besides being bound to regard popular prejudices, however ill founded, were not likely to be influenced easily by a man who had more interest in barnacles than in votes. And so, while the theory itself slowly spread, and found wider and wider acceptance, first among men of science, and then among all educated people, it was indeed claimed in support of any number of different political theories, and many fallacious arguments were based upon it, but, until Sir Francis Galton commenced publishing his remarkable works, little or nothing had been ~~done~~ realized of the tremendous extensions, which the theory requires in current political and economic theory.

First, then, in order to get at the root of the matter, we must observe what were the ruling conceptions, of the dominant school of political thought, in the middle of the last century. The object of government being the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and any contract or agreement freely entered into between two ~~or more parties~~ ^{parties} being for the benefit of both, it was the economic school ~~which~~ advocated the complete freedom of contract, and the removal of all restrictions on trade. On the ethical side, the individual was to be ~~educated~~ ^{actuated} by what was called "enlightened self interest", that is, morality was to be derived from rational expediency; and on the political side, each man, and logically each woman, should have an equal vote, and should use it solely to further their own highest interests; thus the greatest good should result to the greatest number, and perfect personal freedom is attained. Now, I am not concerned with the lines along which this theory, the theory from which Liberalism takes its name, has been criticised, but it is necessary to point out that in the light of new knowledge, our idea of democracy must be a wider one than ~~obtained~~ ^{any which obtained} during the last century; it is necessary to recognize that by far the greatest number of those who reap the fruits of our actions are the unborn children of future generations, this is a majority which has no voice in our democratic institutions; the children of the future will reap no benefit if our morality is confined to self interest. But the interests which they, individually, have involved are greater than any one of us here, living in this country at the present time. For the old we can do least of all; we can only give them security in their old age, The young we can protect, train and educate, and can ~~give~~ ^{endow with} the opportunities of advancement and development. But the unborn children of the future depend upon us for more than all this; the very innate qualities of their minds, their natural tendencies to health or disease, to wisdom or folly, to good or evil, depend on whether we of this generation lay the foundation of sound stocks or of defective ones. We must learn to look upon ourselves as representing, not ourselves only but the unborn millions who will

follow us. We must place an "enlightened race interest" at the basis of our morality.

An older view of political duty, and one which, perhaps, has always met with wider acceptance than the above may be called the Nationalist view. Here we set before us the definite ideal of realizing the true destiny of our nation, of developing to the utmost the natural genius of our race, of ~~protecting~~ protecting ourselves from foreign influence and aggression, and of ~~pushing~~ ^{the progress of} pushing forward ~~if~~ that civilization with which our inherited traditions and culture have endowed us. The merits and blessings of the civilization which we enjoy, the security of life and property, the spread of humane sentiment and practice, the growing facilities for the acquisition of knowledge, the increasing ~~care~~ bestowed upon children, the gradual elimination of infectious diseases, the steady purification of our social and commercial life all stand in sharp contrast to the danger, misery and vice endured by those races which still exist in a state of savagery, or upon whom the influences of civilization have ^{been} but recently dawned. We see that our first duty lies in the gradual perfection of our own national culture, that whatever level we may attain will become the standard for the rest of the world, and the eternal bequest of posterity. But above all that we must remain true to our national character, and keep ourselves free from contaminating foreign influence.

Now, in this case again I do not intend to criticize the ideal, except to show how essential the notion of engineering becomes to the realization of the object in view. This view has been so widely held at so many different periods, and by so many different peoples, that to summarize the arguments by which it has been assailed and defended would involve a comprehensive disposition ^{development} upon the origin of political ideas. But it is not inappropriate to call attention to the ~~most~~ ^{recent} results ~~researches~~ of recent researches on the relative importance of heredity and environment in the make up of the adult man or woman. For it is on the ~~good~~ completed character of the grown man and woman of the race that the success of all our institutions of civilization depends. For the wise guidance of the state we require a constant supply of men of great political foresight and personal courage;

the interpretation of our laws taxes the best ability of our judges and barristers, and it is easy to see that if our race could only supply men of ^{slightly} lower mental ability, not only would injustice be constantly done but there would grow up in our legal system such a mass of ambiguity and inconsistency as it would be impossible for legislation to control. As the science of medicine advances so it is found that the best methods of treatment require more and more personal skill in surgery or diagnosis. Men of science in pursuing the secrets of nature find themselves obliged to introduce conceptions of such profundity and complexity that many few, even among specialists, can claim to understand them. The same is true of economics; and in the sphere of morality we cannot help noticing that ~~there is~~ while there is an unlimited demand for men of more and more unquestionable ~~solidity~~ probity, of more spotless integrity, ~~yet~~ ~~not~~ that what might have been useful and valuable institutions have become a disgrace to our civilization through falling into the hands of interested and unscrupulous persons; and that if honest men were to become appreciably rarer, there is scarcely a profession in the country, politics, law, ~~the~~ divinity, ^{teaching,} ~~or~~ medicine which would not be in danger of becoming a ~~mere business~~, not an asset, but a mischievous parasite on the body politic.

And while we realize that each and all the institutions of civilization which we prize so much, owe their value and their effectiveness wholly to the moral and intellectual qualities of the men who control them, we are told by those ~~whose~~ who have made the matter their especial study, that we owe these qualities almost wholly to our hereditary endowment, and that they can be but slightly modified, and that in no essential degree, by training and upbringing. The quality itself is latent, all we can do is to give or withhold the opportunity for its development, we cannot create it in a child in which it is lacking. The change of opinion in this matter has been complete. In the early centuries no much importance was attached to the influence of environment that it was thought that the effects were actually inherited; that if a boy or girl was taught some mathematics, his children would

find it easier, when their time come to learn; that if a man becomes a blacksmith and develops enormous shoulder muscles, that these muscles will ~~not~~ naturally grow large on his childer. This has now been all definitely disproved. As a rule the mistakes arose by putting the cart before the horse; the man often became a blacksmith because he was strong, he did not become strong because he was a blacksmith. So ~~when~~ ^{as} Weismann's theory of the non-inheritance of acquired characters slowly gained acceptance, it began to be asked "how far ~~strong~~ we speak of acquired characters at all?" Are they not all innate? A great deal of evidence has since been collected to bear upon this point; it is however almost all indirect since every individual is the product of the two influences inextricably tangled. Francis Galton did however discover one source of direct evidence; in rather rare cases, a pair of twins are formed from the same ovum, and these have exactly the same hereditary endowment, and are always of the same sex. These children are always remarkably alike from their earliest infancy, up to advanced age. They exhibit the same mental and moral peculiarities, express similar opinions, and die, except for accident, at about the same age.

When we put these considerations together we see that those who want the advance of our civilization, and the development of our national culture, as of the highest importance, must be led to realize that all the great structures of our institutions, laws, customs and traditions are built upon a foundation of human intelligence, without which they could never, for a moment, stand; to see that if we are to decline in our ~~total~~ hereditary qualities, our civilization must itself decay, until it is abolished, and rightly abolished, by some more virile nation. And yet it is from a section which hold views ~~not~~ which must be classified with the above, that eugenics has received some opposition, small in volume indeed, but considerable in intensity. It is to my mind extraordinary that a section comprising the bulk of the Socialist Party, whose political convictions spring almost wholly from a passionate desire to abolish ^{poverty} ~~poverty~~ and vice, should be the only people to oppose what is actually the only means by which their ideal can be fulfilled.

For when we find that in a year of great trade prosperity, the workhouses were never fuller, we should begin to suspect that we are not dealing only with an economic problem. And when we observe that in spite of the provision of meals for school children, the proportion of those who require special treatment continues to increase, quite as steadily as before, we must suspect that other causes are at work. But when it is ascertained that feeble-mindedness is responsible for some 30% of juvenile crime, and an incalculable amount of prostitution, when we see girls withdrawn by their parents at the age of 16 from the institutions where they are protected, going to join a mother or a sister in a life of shame and vice, when we hear of the home women giving birth in the workhouse, to a succession of twelve or more feeble-minded illegitimate children, when, in addition, we have traced out for us charts of pedigrees of families, comprising, often, seven or eight hundred individuals, showing the descent of feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, alcoholism, and tuberculosis, all closely associated in these rapidly increasing families, then, I think, we must feel, that we have at last got to the root cause of the distressing failure, that has attended so much social endeavour.

It is now nearly four years since the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded made the above facts clear in their Report. Little girls of thirteen or fourteen, who were then safe under the care of the local authorities, have grown up, have passed the age limit, and have been thrown out upon the world, often into the vilest circumstances which our great cities provide; senseless women have lived out four more years of their life of shame, a misery to themselves and a temptation to others; thousands of feeble-minded babies have been born, to lift out their lives of helpless uselessness, at the expense of an already overburdened community; hundreds of local authorities have petitioned the Government for the Bill, for any Bill, for any part of the Bill, which would give them the powers ~~they~~ ~~so long~~ which are so cruelly needed. We all know the result; ~~the~~ ~~Bill~~ ~~was~~ it would have jeopardised the Government, or it would have undisturbed the Christmas vacation, or it would have caused a delay of a few days to one of the big party meetings. The Bill was abandoned. Perhaps we shall have to wait another four years, or have another Royal Commission, and then we shall know how many thousand more ~~children~~

weak headed children have been sold to the streets.

The feeble minded are not the only case in which restrictive eugenics may be thought desirable but it is one on which considerable emphasis is laid, partly because of the apparent evils of the present system, partly because eugenic reform would entail no other measures save those which are desirable simply for the sake of the feeble-minded persons themselves. Taking a broad view we should remember that all legislation is, in general, either eugenic or the reverse. That measures designed purely for economic, or even for constitutional reasons, and especially for the sake of the modern movement towards the abolition of poverty, often have a marked effect one way, or the other; and that this residual and unintentional reaction is in reality the most important point as far as the nation as a whole is concerned. There is no question for instance that the increase in pauperism during the last eighty years is due to the high birth rate of pauper families, and that this increase will continue until these same members of these families have on the whole fewer children than other people. We must recognise that the methods of Nature, though brutal or beneficent; and we should indeed stultify our ideals if in abolishing the brutality, we accepted the greater evils which Nature's brutal methods are designed to avoid.

Luckily we do not in any case have to make this painful choice between brutality and folly; it is recognised that if the State interferes to save a life, if the State gives support and security to an individual who would perish without such aid, then the least that can be asked in return is that the rights of the race should be respected, and that healthy stocks should not be contaminated by the propagation of an undesirable strain. And if the interests of the race demand that a man shall have no children, it is difficult to see what hardship is involved in demanding of him what millions give voluntarily.

~~have been sold weak headed children have been sold to the streets. I have not touched on the financial aspect of the Bill; although the expense of the children born since the Report is more than the expense involved in putting the Bill into force. I have not dealt with the far more important question of the corresponding increase in epilepsy, tuberculosis and other diseases associated with feeble-mindedness. I have not even mentioned the vast amount of hereditary pauperism, involved in the big pauper families, ~~and also those who usually breed quite true to simple pauperism, but also throw a ~~fair~~ large proportion of feeble-minded children. The Feeble-minded Bill would not affect this pauperism, but besides being urgently needed for the sake of the care and control of the individuals, would solve the problem of the increase of Fully-mindedness. But I think I have said enough to show the position held by Eugenics in Political Theory, and the immediate issues involved in its application to the problem of the feeble-minded.~~~~

A far more serious problem than any which is involved in the high rate of propagation of ~~desirable strains~~ undesirable strains, is involved in the low birth rate of those classes in which the great bulk of high ability ultimately finds itself. ~~This is~~ To investigate the cause and cure of this phenomenon is a labour worthy of the highest stationerhip, and one of the most profitable which could occupy the attention our politicians of all parties. What we want to see is the gradual increase in every class of those types of high mental ability, of noble morality, of rich health and high spirits who are the perpetual delight of their friends, and the foundation of all that is good in the nation. There is no reason why men and women should not enjoy, as a matter of course, the abundant health, and surplus energy which is characteristic of the ~~other~~ ^{wild} animals. There is no reason why we should not have better brains, clearer eyes and larger hearts, than any race which has hitherto existed. Humanity has always wished and hoped for these things, however unreasonably, however hopelessly the longing has been there, running through all the ages, inspiring our poetry and our Religion. But now, for the first time, the way lies clear. We now know how these things may be attained, not for ourselves but for our descendants. And this knowledge has come to us at a time when our race is actually falling back, actually dropping away from the ideal that all the ages have dreamed of. Think what a tragedy it would be, a tragedy of which the world has never seen the like, if, before we can put our new knowledge in practice, before we can manufacture the machinery of progress, ~~and~~ if, the ~~domains~~ ~~is~~ done, if there remain no longer heads clear enough, for hearts hold enough to face the new responsibility (and even with the simple and the muddleheaded people may be too strong for us); or, if as has happened once before to a great civilisation, which called itself eternal in the time of its decadence, if our great civilisation were to collapse from internal causes, and there be plenty of signs of internal instability, and our newly won knowledge were lost, as were the sciences of Babylon and Carthage.

~~bold enough to face the~~ new responsibility.

moral and physical degeneracy at present in progress have gone too far, if there remain no longer heads clear enough or hearts bold enough to face the new responsibility.

Let us be perfectly clear on the main point. Only by a frank recognition of facts ~~can we hope~~ have we any right to hope that our social efforts will lead to good, and not to evil results. Only by an inflexible determination to place the interests of the race first, in all political questions, can we be saved from the unspeakable crime of allowing our own selfishness or apathy to endow posterity with wretched bodies, feeble brains ^{or defective} ~~and~~ morals. On the other hand, for those who realise the importance of the present time, as a turning point in the history of the human race, no ~~task~~ ^{task} can be more splendid than to set on foot a movement, which will give to the world ever more and more thousands of the noblest men and women of which our race is capable.