

Some Eugenic criticisms of Modern Social Ideals

As a foreword I must say that this paper is not in any sense an exposition of the views of the Cambridge University Eugenics Society; I have not submitted it to the committee, and I doubt if it would have been accepted without reservations. This has the advantage, however, that the paper can be judged and discussed on its own merits, without reference to the great mass of accepted Eugenic opinion.

Secondly, what I am going to criticise are not strictly Social Ideals, nor are they Social Methods; they are somewhat intermediate. Our ideals are not modern at all, and it is only because, over a large region, our ideals are held unanimously, that it is worth discussing them at all. No amount of intellectual consideration can possibly bridge the gulf between divergent motives; it only serves to emphasise an essential difference. So I must be going to criticise the methods; and here the trouble is that I can only quarrel with them in so far as it is admitted that they are successful and effective, at any rate in their immediate object.

For instance, one of the improvements we should all make, if we were called upon to improve the world, would be to endow deaf-mutes with their missing faculties. But if some doctor were to invent quite a perfect method, by means of operations, education and mechanical appliances, of restoring deaf-mutes to their full social efficiency, and to the full enjoyment of their faculties, at a cost to the municipality of a few thousand pounds a head, both the method and the ideal would be unassailable, but we as responsible citizens would not be justified in throwing on posterity an increasing burden, in return for which they would receive only a temporary benefit. We might however be justified if in addition we devised a method of preventing born deaf mutes from propagating their kind; the fact that the proportion of born defectives of all sorts increases, whenever means are found, by education or otherwise to gloss over, and cover up the defect, is one which I shall try to emphasise; and it

gains an added significance when we realise that the natural complete man is a wonderfully adapted machine, and that new sorts of defects occur most readily in stocks which are already in some way defective.

One's first impulse on coming across one of the more shocking examples of misery and vice, the two phenomena to which social effort appears to confine itself, is to turn one's head away, to hide one's eyes, and scream to some obviously proximate agency, to take the ugly thing away. And if you are what is called a sentimentalist you never get over this primitive tendency. Our first concern to-night is to consider facts coolly, and without prejudice. We are in something like the position of a medical student, who has to make himself acquainted, in a perfectly passionless manner, with the unpleasant side - the inside - of humanity. It would not be a bad thing if philanthropists, and we are all philanthropists in spite of ourselves nowadays, were to study, not only the proximate, but the ultimate causes of social evils; and what is still more necessary to ascertain beforehand the proximate, and the ultimate effects of their remedies.

The central fact which concerns the eugenicist is that the qualities of humanity are being continually, and sometimes rapidly, modified by an agency, which we may loosely call the differential birth rate; and that every piece of legislation, every change in our social organisation, leaves its mark upon this agency. Every law is either eugenic or the reverse. It is not a question of interfering or not; the question is, where must we check this interference, how ought we to modify it on eugenic grounds. It will be seen that Nature has treated social reformers in a strangely malicious way; and yet that in the modern tendency to seek further and further back for the true^{root} of an evil, there lies a hope of genuine amelioration.

The case of crime illustrates a few valuable points; the natural way to treat a criminal is to exact vengeance, to have him executed or flogged; the next step is to prevent him, to keep him out of mischief in prison. Then, as ever, arises the educationalist, and the scheme is to catch the criminal, while he is yet a boy, and to educate him in a reformatory. Now I do not know how far

This is successful; many, no doubt, would have settled down to a respectable life under any circumstances; in other cases, such as the definitely feeble minded to whom 30% of our juvenile crime is due, only the most superficial reform can ever be effected. I am only concerned with the successful cases where a boy of innate criminal propensities is made to lead a useful and harmless life. For what is it that really happens; first there is an immediate social benefit which presumably pays the cost of his education; secondly, this case is peculiar in that he probably has a no higher rate of procreation; the difference appears in the class into which he marries; the criminal will only get children by women of as bad stock as his own; the reformatory boy will marry into a class in which criminal tendencies are a great menace to the individual, and a more potent evil to society.

Now it may seem immaterial, if the total amount of criminality is the same, whether it is widely distributed or heavily concentrated in the lowest social stratum; but when we come to consider the actual means by which evil traits may be eliminated, we find that a widely distributed trait may easily survive for hundreds of years longer, even with the most rigorous measures which we can apply. And, secondly, there is an wrong done which should certainly not be overlooked, that is, to the respectable families into which the reformatory boys are supposed to marry; for, if the truth were known there is no possession which a family should guard more jealously, than the absence of hereditary moral defects.

It will be seen, however, here, as throughout this paper, that if the method of prevention, instead of remedy, were carried a step further back, we should be induced to prevent the procreation of criminalist stocks, and no harm would be done.

A case which is of far more obvious importance than the last is that of health; to the individual it is everything worth having; to the nation it is the first condition of civic efficiency; it is the predominant factor in human happiness; it is no mean constituent of physical beauty. Why then should the

mean a loss to the nation instead of a gain.

most intelligent animal be the most unhealthy. The answer lies in the condition of wild life. Ill health nearly always means death. But though the conditions of civilised existence deny us the full delights of wild health, yet we should be sound enough for our purpose if there were no medical profession. It sounds ungrateful to say so since so many doctors are eugenists; but, at any rate, I can base my accusation, on the highly complimentary fact, that doctors do keep sick people alive. Naturally the eugenicist has no quarrel with this; the pity is that physical defects, and liability to diseases, are hereditary and are being transmitted in increasing quantities. And the activities of the medical profession are still increasing. The conscientious Christian Scientist escapes, if at all, with great difficulty; and if the Christian Scientists remain true to their faith for a few hundred years we shall behold the remarkable spectacle of the whole body of that Church becoming perfectly healthy, simply by the elimination of their defectives.

An interesting example may be borrowed from Obstetrics; in a paper submitted to the Eugenics Congress this year, Dr. Agnes Blüksen, a German lady practitioner, gives figures illustrating the dictum of Dr. Wilhelm Shallmayer - "The more successfully obstetrics develops, the more necessary will it become for future generations".

The facts are sufficiently striking; the number of operations for 100 confinements has steadily increased, doubling itself in twenty years; the death rate for 100 instrumental births has decreased, showing greater obstetrical skill; but the death rate for births in general has steadily increased since the period 1885-1889 when the hereditary effects begin to appear. In concluding her paper Dr. Bluksen remarks "The present day obstetrician considers only the effect of the moment. He announces it with pride, when he has delivered, by a Caesarian section, a crippled imbecile of a living child. He discusses in word and writing whether a mother, in case the birth of a living child can only be brought about by means of an operation threatening her own life, is justified in refusing that operation, and altogether forgets that in such a case the child generally means a loss to the nation instead of a gain.

We must seek to waken the "race conscience" of the obstetrician. He must no longer blindly seek to produce for the mother a living child, but must ask himself, in individual cases, whether he can take the responsibility as regards the race.

Only when a different, a Eugenic, spirit influences Obstetrics, will it become a blessing and not a curse to the race."

When we receive a warning of this kind from the medical profession on a comparatively simple subject like childbirth, we are not likely to have much confidence in facile schemes for the abolition of consumption. There are many theories about tuberculosis, but I do not want to start controversy on the subject; some people say that the utmost medical care never avails to reduce the evil; official figures assure us that some 90,000 persons die a year from the disease, while the number would be doubled if medical aid were withdrawn. Certainly, in about half the cases the disease appears to be the only marked defect of an otherwise healthy stock, while in the other half it is associated with epilepsy, feeble-mindedness and so with all the other ills of epileptic families. What we may say is that numbers of people are saved by medical treatment from a lingering disease which if left to itself would incapacitate and finally kill them.

On these grounds it is proposed to build sanatoria sufficient to hold all the alleged cases of tuberculosis in the country. Under these circumstances it does not need much acumen to anticipate that the sanatoria accommodation may be safely doubled once in every generation; that the race will lose its present immunity from these diseases as completely as those savage races who perish at mere contact with civilization; and that this will be accompanied by a corresponding increase of feeble minded or alcoholic defectives.

Out of one vast evil I should like to select one more example by way of illustration. I recently became aware of the existence of institutions known as care committees; their duty appears to be to assist the medical treatment of board school children by *ascertaining* those who have defective teeth, or weak eyes, and to collect the names of those who are scrofulous, and those who are

Verminous; in fact, to see that the children of careless, dirty, dissolute and apathetic parents, are, as nearly as may be, as well looked after, as well clothed and fed, washed and taught as those whose parents are loving, kind and solicitous. It seems very just too, from the childrens' point of view. But I fancy we must hesitate before commending the labours of the care committees unless we realise that this quality of solicitous affection, which we admire so in parents, and which the care committee so lavishly expends, owes its very existence to the fact that the children of loving parents fare better than those of dirty careless creatures devoid of natural affection. Remove the differential benefit, and parental love ceases to be of survival value and consequently atrophies. It may of course be disputed whether we would rather have as is natural, the majority of the parents showing considerable affection, and a few children neglected, or no parental love and all the children well cared for by philanthropic spinsters. If it is necessary to do the work of neglectful parents, it would be cheaper in the long run to put the equivalent cost by, for the future use of those whose parents fulfill their duties.

Now in all these examples it will evidently occur to one, that the real evil lies not in the fact that the boys are reformed, the babies born alive, the consumptive's cured, or the children washed; but in the fact that these strains, which if left to themselves would revert to a low level of savagery, should be allowed to multiply and permeate every class in the nation. If, it may be suggested, all those who fall below some rough standard of ineptitude were to be prevented, or even forbidden to become parents, no harm would be done. Social reform might become less popular, but it would certainly be less disastrous.

Finally may I call the attention of those who fancy that they have a duty to perform to society, and most of us have some such hazy suspicion, to the fact that hitherto what has been left unnoticed requires quite as much attention as what has been done. True social reform consists not in abortive attempts to abolish vice and misery, but in an all round effort to improve every type, the highest as well as the lowest. And it is here that an enlightened public opinion could exert far more influence directly, than ever it could through the school boards and the asylums. As a preliminary study I would suggest, the effects of Social Reform taxation upon the birth rate of the middle classes.