

CHAPTER VIII

DANGERS OF CRADLE COMPETITION

EUGENICS has been defined as ' the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either mentally or physically While there is no inherent conflict between Socialism and Eugenics the latter is broadly the antithesis of the former In its propaganda, Socialism emphasizes the evil effects of our industrial and economic system It insists upon the necessity of satisfying material needs, upon sanitation hygiene, and education to effect the transformation of society The Socialist insists that healthy humanity is impossible without a radical improvement of the social—and therefore of the economic and industrial—environment The Eugenist points out that heredity is the great determining factor in the lives of men and women Eugenics is the attempt to solve the problem

from the biological and evolutionary point of view You may ring all the changes possible on Nurture or environment the Eugenist may say to the Socialist, but comparatively little can be effected until you control biological and hereditary elements of the problem Eugenics thus aims to seek out the root of our trouble, to study humanity as a kinetic, dynamic evolutionary organism shifting and changing with the successive generations rising and falling cleansing itself of inherent defects, or under adverse and dysgenic influences, sinking into degeneration and deterioration

Eugenics' was first defined by Sir Francis Galton in his *Human Faculty* in 1884, and was subsequently developed into a science and into an educational effort Galton's ideal was the rational breeding of human beings The aim of Eugenics as defined by its founder, is to bring as many influences as can be reasonably employed, to cause the useful classes of the community to contribute *more* than their proportion to the next generation Eugenics thus concerns itself with all influences that improve the inborn qual

ities of a race also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage. It is in short, the attempt to bring reason and intelligence to bear upon *heredity*. But Galton, in spite of the immense value of this approach and his great stimulation to criticism was completely unable to formulate a definite and practical working program. He hoped at length to introduce Eugenics into the national conscience like a new religion. I see no impossibility in Eugenics becoming a religious dogma among mankind but its details must first be worked out sedulously in the study. Over zeal leading to hasty action, would do harm by holding out expectations of a new golden age which will certainly be falsified and cause the science to be discredited. The first and main point is to secure the general intellectual acceptance of Eugenics as a hopeful and most important study. Then, let its principles work into the heart of the nation, who will gradually give practical effect to them in ways that we may not wholly foresee.¹

Galton formulated a general law of inheritance which declared that an individual receives

¹ Galton *Essays in Eugenics* p 43

one half of his inheritance from his two parents, one fourth from his four grandparents, one eighth from his great grandparents one sixteenth from his great great grandparents, and so on by diminishing fractions to his primordial ancestors, the sum of all these fractions added together contributing to the whole of the inherited make up. The trouble with this generalization, from the modern Mendelian point of view, is that it fails to define what "characters" one would get in the one half that came from one's parents, or the one fourth from one's grandparents. The whole of our inheritance is not composed of these indefinitely made up fractional parts. We are interested rather in those more specific traits or characters, mental or physical, which, in the Mendelian view, are structural and functional units, making up a mosaic rather than a blend. The laws of heredity are concerned with the precise behavior, during a series of generations, of these specific unit characters. This behavior, as the study of Genetics shows may be determined in lesser organisms by experiment. Once determined they are subject to prophecy.

The problem of human heredity is now seen

to be infinitely more complex than imagined by Galton and his followers and the optimistic hope of elevating Eugenics to the level of a religion is a futile one. Most of the Eugenists including Professor Karl Pearson and his colleagues of the Eugenics Laboratory of the University of London and of the biometric laboratory in University College have retained the age old point of view of Nature vs Nurture and have attempted to show the predominating influence of Heredity *as opposed to Environment*. This may be true but demonstrated and repeated in investigation after investigation, it nevertheless remains fruitless and unprofitable from the practical point of view.

We should not minimize the great outstanding service of Eugenics for critical and diagnostic investigations. It demonstrates, not in terms of glittering generalization but in statistical studies of investigations reduced to measurement and number, that uncontrolled fertility is universally correlated with disease, poverty, overcrowding and the transmission of hereditary taints. Professor Pearson and his associates show us that if fertility be corre

lated with anti social heredity characters, a population will inevitably degenerate

This degeneration has already begun Eugenists demonstrate that two thirds of our manhood of military age are physically too unfit to shoulder a rifle that the feeble minded, the syphilitic the irresponsible and the defective breed unhindered that women are driven into factories and shops on day shift and night shift that children, frail carriers of the torch of life are put to work at an early age that society at large is breeding an ever increasing army of under-sized stunted and dehumanized slaves, that the vicious circle of mental and physical defect, delinquency and beggary is encouraged by the unseeing and unthinking sentimentality of our age, to populate asylum, hospital and prison

All these things the Eugenist sees and points out with a courage entirely admirable But as a positive program of redemption, or thodox Eugenics can offer nothing more constructive than a renewed 'cradle competition' between the fit and the unfit ' It sees that the most responsible and most intelligent members of society are the less

176 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

fertile that the feeble minded are the more fertile Herein lies the unbalance the great biological menace to the future of civilization Are we heading to biological destruction, toward the gradual but certain attack upon the stocks of intelligence and racial health by the sinister forces of the hordes of irresponsibility and imbecility? This is not such a remote danger as the optimistic Eugenist might suppose The mating of the moron with a person of sound stock may as Dr Tredgold points out, gradually disseminate this trait far and wide until it undermines the vigor and efficiency of an entire nation and an entire race This is no idle fancy We must take it into account if we wish to escape the fate that has befallen so many civilizations in the past

It is indeed, more than likely that the presence of this impairment in a mitigated form is responsible for no little of the defective character the diminution of mental and moral fiber at the present day states Dr Tredgold² Such populations, this distinguished authority might have added, form the veritable 'cultures'

² Eugenics Review Vol XIII p 349

not only for contagious physical diseases but for mental instability and irresponsibility also. They are susceptible, exploitable, hysterical, non resistant to external suggestion. Devoid of stamina such folk become mere units in a mob. The habit of crowd making is daily becoming a more serious menace to civilization, writes Everett Dean Martin. Our society is becoming a veritable babel of gibbering crowds.³ It would be only the incorrigible optimist who refused to see the integral relation between this phenomenon and the indiscriminate breeding by which we recruit our large populations.

The danger of recruiting our numbers from the most fertile stocks is further emphasized when we recall that in a democracy like that of the United States every man and woman is permitted a vote in the government and that it is the representatives of this grade of intelligence who may destroy our liberties, and who may thus be the most far reaching peril to the future of civilization.

It is a pathological worship of mere number writes Alleyne Ireland which has

³ Cf. Martin, *The Behavior of Crowds* p. 6

178 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

inspired all the efforts—the primary the direct election of Senators the initiative the recall and the referendum—to cure the evils of mob rule by increasing the size of the mob and extending its powers ⁴

Equality of political power has thus been bestowed upon the lowest elements of our population We must not be surprised therefore at the spectacle of political scandal and graft, of the notorious and universally ridiculed low level of intelligence and flagrant stupidity exhibited by our legislative bodies *The Congressional Record* mirrors our political imbecility

All of these dangers and menaces are acutely realized by the Eugenists it is to them that we are most indebted for the proof that reckless spawning carries with it the seeds of destruction But whereas the Galtonians reveal themselves as unflinching in their investigation and in their exhibition of fact and diagnoses of symptoms, they do not on the other hand show much power in suggesting practical and feasible remedies

⁴ Cf Democracy and the Human Equation. E P Dutton & Co 1921

On its scientific side, Eugenics suggests the reestablishment of the balance between the fertility of the fit and the 'unfit'. The birth rate among the normal and healthier and finer stocks of humanity is to be increased by awakening among the fit the realization of the dangers of a lessened birth rate in proportion to the reckless breeding among the unfit. By education, by persuasion, by appeals to racial ethics and religious motives, the ardent Eugenist hopes to increase the fertility of the fit. Professor Pearson thinks that it is especially necessary to awaken the hardest stocks to this duty. These stocks, he says, are to be found chiefly among the skilled artisan class, the intelligent working class. Here is a fine combination of health and hardy vigor, of sound body and sound mind.

Professor Pearson and his school of biometrics here ignore or at least fail to record one of those significant 'correlations' which form the basis of his method. The publications of the Eugenics Laboratory all tend to show that a high rate of fertility is correlated with extreme poverty, recklessness, deficiency and delinquency, similarly, that among the

180 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

more intelligent this rate of fertility decreases. But the scientific Eugenists fail to recognize that this restraint of fecundity is due to a deliberate foresight and is a conscious effort to elevate standards of living for the family and the children of the responsible—and possibly more selfish—sections of the community. The appeal to enter again into competitive child bearing, for the benefit of the nation or the race or any other abstraction, will fall on deaf ears.

Pearson has done invaluable work in pointing out the fallacies and the false conclusions of the ordinary statisticians. But when he attempts to show by the methods of biometrics that not only the first child but also the second are especially liable to suffer from transmissible pathological defects such as insanity, criminality and tuberculosis, he fails to recognize that this tendency is counterbalanced by the high mortality rate among later children. If first and second children reveal a greater percentage of hereditary defect, it is because the later born children are less liable to survive the conditions produced by a large family.

In passing, we should here recognize the difficulties presented by the idea of fit and unfit. Who is to decide this question? The grosser the more obvious the undeniably feeble minded should, indeed not only be discouraged but prevented from propagating their kind. But among the writings of the representative Eugenists one cannot ignore the distinct middle class bias that prevails. As that penetrating critic, F W Stella Browne, has said in another connection, The Eugenics Education Society has among its numbers many most open minded and truly progressive individuals but the official policy it has pursued for years has been inspired by class bias and sex bias. The society laments with increasing vehemence the multiplication of the less fortunate classes at a more rapid rate than the possessors of leisure and opportunity (I do not think it relevant here to discuss whether the innate superiority of endowment in the governing class really is so overwhelming as to justify the Eugenics Education Society's peculiar use of the terms fit and unfit!) Yet it has persistently refused to give any help toward extending the knowledge of contra-

ceptives to the exploited classes. Similarly, though the *Eugenics Review* the organ of the society frequently laments the selfishness of the refusal of maternity by healthy and educated women of the professional classes I have yet to learn that it has made any official pronouncement on the English illegitimacy laws or any organized effort toward defending the unmarried mother'

This peculiarly Victorian reticence may be inherited from the founder of Eugenics Galton declared that the 'Bohemian' element in the Anglo Saxon race is destined to perish, and the sooner it goes the happier for mankind. The trouble with any effort of trying to divide humanity into the fit and the 'unfit, is that we do not want, as H G Wells recently pointed out⁵ to breed for uniformity but for variety. We want statesmen and poets and musicians and philosophers and strong men and delicate men and brave men. The qualities of one would be the weaknesses of the other'. We want most of all genius.

Proscription on Galtonian lines would tend to eliminate many of the great geniuses of the

⁵ Cf. *The Salvaging of Civilization*.

world who were not only 'Bohemian,' but actually and pathologically abnormal—men like Rousseau Dostoevsky, Chopin, Poe, Schumann, Nietzsche, Comte, Guy de Maupassant, —and how many others? But such considerations should not lead us into error of concluding that such men were geniuses merely because they were pathological specimens and that the only way to produce a genius is to breed disease and defect. It only emphasizes the dangers of external standards of fit and unfit.

These limitations are more strikingly shown in the types of so called eugenic legislation passed or proposed by certain enthusiasts. Regulation, compulsion and prohibitions affected and enacted by political bodies are the surest methods of driving the whole problem under ground. As Havelock Ellis has pointed out, the absurdity and even hopelessness of effecting Eugenic improvement by placing on the statute books prohibitions of legal matrimony to certain classes of people reveal the weakness of those Eugenists who minimize or undervalue the importance of environment as a determining factor. They affirm that heredity is everything and environment nothing, yet

forget that it is precisely those who are most universally subject to bad environment who procreate most copiously most recklessly and most disastrously. Such marriage laws are based for the most part on the infantile assumption that procreation is absolutely dependent upon the marriage ceremony, an assumption usually coupled with the complementary one that the only purpose in marriage is procreation. Yet it is a fact so obvious that it is hardly worth stating that the most fertile classes who indulge in the most dysgenic type of procreating—the feeble minded—are almost totally unaffected by marriage laws and marriage ceremonies.

As for the sterilization of habitual criminals, not merely must we know more of heredity and genetics in general, but also acquire more certainty of the justice of our laws and the honesty of their administration before we can make rulings of fitness or unfitness merely upon the basis of a respect for law. On this point the eminent William Bateson writes⁶ ‘Criminals are often feeble minded, but as

⁶ Common Sense in Racial Problems By W Bateson M A A F R S

regards those that are not, the fact that a man is for the purposes of Society classified as a criminal, tells me little as to his value, still less as to the possible value of his offspring. It is a fault inherent in criminal jurisprudence, based on non biological data, that the law must needs take the nature of the offenses rather than that of the offenders as the basis of classification. A change in the right direction has begun but the problem is difficult and progress will be very slow. We all know of persons convicted perhaps even habitually, whom the world could ill spare. Therefore I hesitate to proscribe the criminal. Proscription is a weapon with a very nasty recoil. Might not some with equal cogency proscribe army contractors and their accomplices the newspaper patriots? The crimes of the prison population are petty offenses by comparison, and the significance we attach to them is a survival of other days. Felonies may be great events, locally but they do not induce catastrophes. The proclivities of the war-makers are infinitely more dangerous than those of the aberrant beings whom from time to time the law may dub as criminal. Con-

sistent and portentous selfishness, combined with dulness of imagination is probably just as transmissible as want of self control, though destitute of the amiable qualities not rarely associated with the genetic composition of persons of unstable mind

In this connection, we should note another type of respectable criminality noted by Havelock Ellis. If those persons who raise the cry of race suicide in face of the decline of the birth rate really had the knowledge and the intelligence to realize the manifold evils which they are invoking they would deserve to be treated as criminals

Our debt to the science of Eugenics is great in that it directs our attention to the biological nature of humanity. Yet there is too great a tendency among the thinkers of this school, to restrict their ideas of sex to its expression as a purely procreative function. Compulsory legislation which would make the inevitably futile attempt to prohibit one of the most beneficent and necessary of human expressions or regulate it into the channels of preconceived philosophies, would reduce us

to the unpleasant days predicted by William Blake, when

Priests in black gowns will be walking their rounds
And binding with briars our joys and desires

Eugenics is chiefly valuable in its negative aspects. It is negative Eugenics that has studied the histories of such families as the Jukeses and the Kallikaks, that has pointed out the network of imbecility and feeble mindedness that has been sedulously spread through all strata of society. On its so called positive or constructive side, it fails to awaken any permanent interest. Constructive" Eugenics aims to arouse the enthusiasm or the interest of the people in the welfare of the world fifteen or twenty generations in the future. On its negative side it shows us that we are paying for and even submitting to the dictates of an ever increasing unceasingly spawning class of human beings who never should have been born at all—that the wealth of individuals and of states is being diverted from the development and the progress of human expression and civilization.

188 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

While it is necessary to point out the importance of heredity as a determining factor in human life, it is fatal to elevate it to the position of an absolute. As with environment, the concept of heredity derives its value and its meaning only in so far as it is embodied and made concrete in generations of living organisms. Environment and heredity are not antagonistic. Our problem is not that of Nature vs Nurture but rather of Nature \times Nurture, of heredity multiplied by environment, if we may express it thus. The Eugenist who overlooks the importance of environment as a determining factor in human life is as short sighted as the Socialist who neglects the biological nature of man. We cannot disentangle these two forces except in theory. 'To the child in the womb, said Samuel Butler, the mother is environment. She is of course, likewise heredity.' The age old discussion of Nature vs Nurture has been threshed out time after time, usually fruitlessly, because of a failure to recognize the indivisibility of these biological factors. The opposition or antagonism between them

is an artificial and academic one, having no basis in the living organism

The great principle of Birth Control offers the means whereby the individual may adapt himself to and even control the forces of environment and heredity Entirely apart from its Malthusian aspect or that of the population question Birth Control must be recognized, as the Neo Malthusians pointed out long ago, not merely as the key of the social position, and the only possible and practical method of human generation, but as the very pivot of civilization Birth Control which has been criticized as negative and destructive, is really the greatest and most truly eugenic method, and its adoption as part of the program of Eugenics would immediately give a concrete and realistic power to that science As a matter of fact, Birth Control has been accepted by the most clear thinking and far seeing of the Eugenists themselves as the most constructive and necessary of the means to racial health⁷

⁷ Among these are Dean W R Inge Professor J Arthur Thomson, Dr Havelock Ellis Professor Wilham Bateson Major Leonard Darwin and Miss Norah March