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PRACTICAL EUGENICS¹

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If a child is well-born, if he springs from sound, sane stock, if he possesses high endowment potential in the germ, then the problem of his unfoldment is well-nigh solved long before it is presented. Such a child is easily protected from adverse influences; and he is delicately and abundantly responsive to the positive influences of education.

But if, on the other hand, the child is marred in the original making, if he springs from a worm-eaten stock, if the foundation plan of his being is distorted and confused in heredity before his unfoldment begins, then the problem of healthy normal development is rendered insoluble before it is presented. Such a child is difficult to protect against adverse influences, and he remains to the end stupidly unresponsive to the delicate growth factors of education.

If we could choose the parents of the next generation, if the choice could be made with such wisdom and received with such good-will that only children of sound, sane parentage should be born, then our most difficult problems of child-training would be solved, most of the evils that pursue humanity would be banished, and the race raised to higher altitudes in its journey toward the kingdom of the Over-man. Luther Burbank, in his garden, finds that by carefully selecting the parentage of his plants for a few generations he can transform them into almost anything that he wills. Thus he takes scraggy worthless stocks, and by carefully selecting the parentage, out of them brings new and wondrous creations, both useful and beautiful.

Since man became man he has always looked forward to an ideal future state on earth, a Eutopia, a millenium, a City of the Sun, a Platonic Republic, where all men should be good and wise and strong. And yet wherever man has builded a civilization in his striving to realize his ideal state, in Egypt, or Greece, or Carthage, or Rome, invariably he has met with defeat. Without exception his state crumbles and fails. There has *always* been some invisible undermining influence, which he failed to see and to prevent.

¹An Address before the Conference on Child Welfare at Clark University, Worcester, July, 1909.

With the rise of the science of biology, we have discovered the secret of their decline, and have discovered the formula for counteracting it in our own case. The undermining influences were at bottom biological in their case; and the formula for counteracting them in our case must likewise be biological. The formula is the simple one used by Luther Burbank in his superb creations; for all life grows on a single stem. As is the parentage so is the next generation. If the next generation is to be higher than this, its average parentage must be higher than our average. This law is fundamental, ineluctable, not to be vetoed or evaded. We may prefer to shut our eyes to the law because of its difficulty of application; we may prefer to trust to an assumed plasticity because it appears more docile to our wish; we may find it more comfortable to fall back upon the faith that good intentions cannot go wrong. These things are more pleasant, if pleasantness is our aim. But if improvement of the human stock is our aim, biological law must be followed regardless of personal wish.

It is easy to see the problem of Eugenics, the newly-arising science which seeks to improve the inborn qualities of our race; it is easy to see the practical advantages to result from an application of its principles; but it is not at all easy to see how it is to be done.

Until recently we have supposed that the differences in hereditary endowment were not great, and that they were but small factors in determining the different destinies of men. And we have assumed a degree of plasticity sufficient to overcome differences of native endowment. Under the circumstances it is perfectly natural that men should have chosen what seems the easier means of levelling up humanity through their plasticity, rather than of levelling up their heredity. It is entirely natural, therefore, that fifty-three papers and addresses in this conference should deal with influences that affect individual plasticity, and only two or three relate directly to human heredity.

At present our doctrines of heredity are not as they were. We are coming to see that heredity is dominant in the characters of men. Human plasticity is not so great as has been assumed. A child cannot be moulded to our will. The design laid in heredity is the only one that can be worked out in actuality. The actual is only a realized copy of the potential. It is true the potential is drawn in rather broad lines thus permitting the necessary degree of adaptation; to this extent the individual is plastic. But recent statistics of heredity show that the possible deviation is not great, except

downward in the direction of breaking and marring. The actual may fall far below the possible but cannot transcend it.

If the parentage of the coming generation in our country is on an average poorer than our present average, then the average endowment of the coming infant-harvest will be below that of the present. To educators and philanthropists this means a poorer raw material on which to work and an increase of the educational difficulties which are at present sufficiently bewildering.

It is not possible in our limited space to present certain necessary statistics. But from general observation we know that families of the better classes are smaller than formerly. Especially is this true among the well-to-do, the professional, the scholarly classes. College graduates of to-day average considerably less than two children per man whereas in the laboring population the average is twice as great. Not half of college women graduates marry; the average fecundity is less than one child per graduate, as against a fecundity three times as great among the women of the laboring classes. These are well-known facts, though their full significance is not generally realized. Those at the top, furnishing a small portion of the parentage, are on the whole the most highly endowed, physically, mentally, and morally. Those of the lower social strata, furnishing the major portion of the parentage, are the lesser endowed, which accounts for their being at the bottom.

The more highly endowed classes furnish a far smaller proportion of the parentage than is furnished by the stupid, unambitious, poorly-endowed strata at the bottom. Ability is dying out at the top simply because it is not being born. There is a growing proletarianization of our high race, simply because the proletariat furnishes the major portion of the parentage. As is the parentage, so is the next generation.

On the other hand many influences are at work to protect the weaker and poorer social stocks and to enable them to have larger families than in past ages. At the present time our medicine, hygiene, and public sanitation keep alive multitudes of weaklings that formerly were weeded out by hard conditions. Thus to-day we save weak lungs, weak muscles, weak eyes and ears, weak minds and weak wills, weakness in general, and weakness in every particular, and permit it to reproduce itself in heredity, further corrupting the next generation. Our schools and our charities supply crutches to the weak in mind and in morals, nursing them and cherishing them in every possible way, helping them to economic independence, to family life, and thus further to corrupt the streams of heredity which all admit are at present sufficiently turbid.

Thus we see two sinister processes at work: the upper and better strata of society are continually dying away; and poorer ones are being added on at the bottom. There is a continual drying up of the highest, purest tributaries to the stream of heredity, and a rising flood in the muddy, undesirable streams.

Now let us draw back from these present day considerations, and look for an instant at the whole process from such a distance as to see our problem in a wide historical perspective.

During man's prehistoric age, when by bloody struggle he was acquiring the qualities that have raised him so high above the brute, the two processes described above did not exist in any great degree. Continual war meant continual thinning of the ranks. The continued existence of the tribe demanded new recruits, large fecundity. These sprang most numerous from the stronger more virile strains, since these alone under the savage conditions could found homes, protect, and provide. There was some cutting off at the top even under these conditions. The most ambitious, the most pugnacious, were the ones most engaged in the whirlwinds of battle, the ones most neglectful of family life, the ones soonest to fall in the fray before they had colored the stream of heredity. But on the whole it was the best and strongest that brought the most new recruits to adulthood. The cutting off at the top was not great.

On the other hand, the fury of the struggle kept the race well-weeded at the bottom. And the children of weak parentage, even when brought to maturity under the protection of stronger arms, were naturally first to fall in the struggle before they could mingle their weakness with the currents of heredity.

Thus in primal days was the blood of the race kept high and pure, like mountain streams. One may not admire the hard conditions of the savage life of our German forefathers in their Teuton forests; but one must admit the high purity of their blood, their high average sanity, soundness and strength. They were a well-born, well-weeded race.

In the latter Middle Ages we may call them semi-civilized. Humanity had become differentiated into nobility, freemen, and serfs. The distinctions were ostensibly social, but never could have come into being had not men possessed different degrees of native ability. The middle class of freemen were lineally descended from the original savage stock. The best and strongest had specialized themselves upward out of this matrix into the nobility. The weakest had gravitated downward to form the new and formerly non-existent class of serfs and slaves.

In this differentiation we see the mischief beginning. The upper stratum was not only socially but in original blood the best of the race. And yet it is a well-known fact, attested by an abundance of statistical proof, that the aristocracy continually dies out at the top, and continually requires recruits from the middle class below. It was the best of the middle class that was taken up into the aristocracy and pushed on toward extinction in its turn. Thus the upper aristocracy acted like a selective social sponge that continually sucked up the finest of the middle class, and evaporated it off, leaving the turbid undesirable elements. The cutting off of the best endowed at the top was thus a process that reached down to the very bottom of society. For where ability arose even among the serfs it was sucked up into the middle class, and if great enough finally on to the upper class, on its way toward ultimate extinction.

On the other hand, the growing civilization tended to protect the new class of serfs and slaves. Attempts were everywhere made to confine war to the warrior classes, and to protect as much as possible the peaceful pursuits of husbandry, manufactures, and commerce. Thus classes of weaklings that never could have survived in the former age, were preserved and permitted to mingle their blood in the common current to the pollution of the whole.

Thus it appears how simple social differentiation like that of the Middle Ages tended to drain off the purest and best strains of the race and to supply the resulting deficit by adding on weaker, poorer strains at the bottom. The only possible result was some degree of racial deterioration.

But there was a lower limit to the process below which it could not go. Though conditions were easier than in primitive days, yet they were still hard. Although attempts were made to protect non-combatants, yet war fell heavy upon all classes. And further, humanity lived mainly upon the labor of men's hands. They had not yet learned to draw upon Nature's energy as supplied by coal, and wind, and water, and applied by labor-saving machines. Medicine and hygiene had not been developed, so that the race was not well-protected from those ravages of disease that fall especially heavy upon the weak. The race was kept pretty well weeded, though not so thoroughly as in savage times.

It appears that the middle class was the one most able and most willing to bring large families to maturity. The upper class would not, the lower could not. We see here regression in the quality of the parentage. In primitive days it was the best and strongest. In the semi-civilized Middle Ages it had fallen to the middle class. And the quality of the parentage

determines the quality of the next generation. The middle class was good but not so good as the best.

Now coming down to our own day, we find that our race has made enormous further strides in the same direction. Society is much further differentiated. Instead of one aristocracy of social position, we have now a dozen aristocracies. There is the aristocracy of birth, that of wealth, the many aristocracies of learning, and art, and religion. The middle class, also, has become stratified into upper, middle, and lower. And the sheltered class at the bottom reaches down now several grades lower than during the semi-savage middle ages.

Instead of the one aristocracy slowly draining off one kind of ability, there are now the many aristocracies draining off all kinds of high ability. And not only is this true of the top stratum, but the cutting-off process has begun its sinister ravages in the middle classes. Celibacy is more common in the middle classes than formerly, families are much smaller, and still rapidly dwindling.

Where knowledge increases and living conditions grow easier, families always grow smaller. Our education, our books and periodicals, and the general social ferment of today have set men's minds on fire; and the utilization of nature's energies in industry have freed his hands, even down deep into the middle classes. This has removed the chief distinction between aristocracy and middle class; in other words, upon our middle classes have been conferred the privileges and immunities formerly possessed only by the upper class. Thus there arise in the middle class the same qualities, the same outlook, ambitions, desires, and methods of attaining their desires, even to the necessary infecundity which is an indispensable condition to success in social ambition. Thus the cutting off of the fairest strains of our imperial race is carried deeper and deeper down into our society. And the best are sucked up out of the lower ranks with constantly increasing rapidity.

On the other hand our present surplus of wealth, our economic and geographical freedom, and the increase of our scientific knowledge have thrown barriers of protection about our race, superior to anything even dreamed of in former ages. The result has been the survival of grades of weaklings, mental, physical, and moral, that in former ages never could have survived. This protection has brought weeding to an end. We even protect and cherish the weeds with greater solicitude than the fruitful plants. All statistics show that we pay far more per individual to raise up the defective, the sub-normal, the diseased, the morally incapable, than we

pay to bring up our healthy children. It is harder to raise fruit from weeds, we say, and therefore must we pay more.

For example, let two children be born of poor parentage in the slum environment of our cities, one of them deaf, dumb, and stupid, the other sound, active, and intelligent. Upon the defective we lavish all our care; and when his school-days are over, he is solicitously helped to a position of economic independence, where he can bring up a family endowed with his defects. The sound child, however, born in the same environment, we pass by, and let him get on as he can. If he bears fruit, well; if not, well also. It is the weeds that get special protection. Let one imagine the result if Luther Burbank cherished the weeds of his garden with a more tender solicitude than he bestows upon his fruitful plants.

This cutting off at the top of the best and the adding on at the bottom of the worst and poorest, is at present exhausting the high qualities of our race with a rapidity never before equaled in the history of the world. Whereas the most numerous reproduction during the middle ages was in the social middle class, it has now fallen in our most civilized centers into the proletariat. There is a growing proletarianization of our high race, for the simple reason that here it finds its most numerous parentage. As the seed, so the harvest.

There is of course a lower limit below which the race cannot sink. But there is little comfort in thinking that we must sink a good deal lower yet. Eugenics has set for its practical task the staying of these double and sinister ravages, so as to hold the race on its present high level of inborn endowment, and if possible to lift it to a higher one.

The evils being double, the problem is double. One problem is how to persuade the strong and capable men and women at the top of our society, with brain on fire, to give up their ambitions, their pleasures, and their love of ease; and seriously and consistently for long generations to undertake the parentage and the nurture of more numerous bearers of their heredity. The second problem is to prevent the weaklings at the bottom from mingling their weakness in the human currents. Each problem seeks a way to reverse nature. Each is a problem in the dynamics of social psychology,—a science that is yet in embryo. It is yet in no shape even to name the social forces of which it treats, much less to measure and weigh their stresses and strains with accuracy sufficient to prescribe the requisite social dynamics demanded by eugenics. Eugenics is clear as to its two main problems; but it has no solution to either one of them, and cannot hope for any complete solution until biology, psychology, and sociology are more fully developed.

A few things of minor importance can be done, and are being done at present in increasing degree. These make no pretense to being solutions, but only the first practical contributions to a solution. Although small in their effects as compared with the forces to be combated, they constitute the entering wedge of what may in time grow to be sufficiently powerful. And in any case the results obtained are in themselves eminently worth while. We have space here to enumerate only a few of them.

Let us notice first those that deal with the repression of the unfit.

1. Marriage laws of all states impose mild restrictions upon the marriage of the graver classes of defectives. A recent law of the state of Washington is the most searching that has come to my notice. It requires a medical certificate on the part of both contracting parties, given by a qualified physician after due examination, certifying that they are sound and well in both body and mind, and free from serious taints in their heredity. No marriage license can be granted, nor ceremony performed without the production of such certificates. Severe penalties are imposed upon both civil and ecclesiastical officials for violation of this provision. Persons thus shut out from marriage are those affected with tuberculosis, alcoholism, epilepsy, insanity, deaf-mutism, blindness, and other serious diseases and defects which affect posterity. To the extent the law can be enforced it must prove salutary.

Here at the gateway of marriage are most of the barriers being set to prevent the multiplication of defectives. The restrictions are entirely too mild as yet. But they are doubtless as great as are warranted by public opinion. This brings us to a second task.

2. Public opinion must be educated in matters of heredity and in the rise and fall of racial strength. When men come to recognize the gravity of the situation, then and not till then, will they be willing to countenance grave remedies. Practical eugenics must therefore widen and deepen our knowledge of heredity and racial changes, and with its knowledge leaven the lump of public opinion. The latter, crystallizing into law and custom, will raise the barriers against the unfit and thus shut out racial pollution at the bottom. The movement is clearly in that direction. Practical eugenics must hasten it, and give it definite form.

3. Other proposals are the segregation of the unfit; and the sterilization of criminals and defectives of every sort. These proposals are more drastic and more certain in their effects than marriage legislation. They have been adopted in some

slight degree in connection with certain prison and hospital inmates. But in general, public opinion is far behind the needs of the situation, and requires much education.

4. A fourth proposal, which remains only a proposal, is the abolition of public charities, public school systems and all other public agencies which go out of their way to preserve the weak and incapable. Practical eugenics looks upon this proposal as rational only in ages past, and now completely impossible. It would be a return to nature's original method of racial purification; and civilization cannot turn its face backward. Humanity is like a river,—pure at the sources, but turbid below. It cannot turn backward to its sources to attain purity; it must and it will continue forward. Other means must be found not inconsistent with continued advance.

Now turning to the other side of our topic, What can be done to stay the growing infecundity of the better endowed? Here one must confess that one can name little that rightly falls under the term "practical eugenics." It is difficult to find anything consciously done for this purpose, that is having any practical effect. One reads of many proposals, but most of them appear to rest upon a wide innocence of the dynamics of social psychology.

One reads in this connection of placing a heavy tax upon bachelors and maids above a certain age; of offering a bonus to the parents of good blood for each child, the greater the number of children in the family, the larger the bonus; of a socialistic conferring of special social and economic privileges upon the highly endowed so as to give them a better chance; of the granting of certificates of high endowment to the highly endowed after strict personal examination, and the encouragement of marriage of highly endowed with highly endowed; of restricting the salaries of single men to a level much below that of married men for equal work; and many other similar proposals, mostly economic.

But the evil is only partly economic. Those most able are just the ones most unwilling. All things else being equal, the poor and the ignorant are more fecund than the wealthy and the wise. To confer economic ease alone does just the opposite from what is desired.

Mr. Galton proposes a eugenic religion, a wide religion of humanity which looks not merely to individual salvation, but to the ultimate good of all future human kind. Could such a religion be infused into men, there can be no doubt of its tremendous potency for good.

But the difficulties to such a religion appear very great. It requires a degree of altruism never yet possessed by any religion. The roots of so great altruism do not lie in human

nature. And besides, such a religion demands a degree of foresight that looks very far into the future; and human foresight is not great. Only the intellect is far-seeing; and human conduct is controlled ultimately not by intellect but by feeling. Intellect is the pilot; feeling determines the port of sailing, and does the firing. And feeling is not far-seeing. It lives in the present anticipating only the immediate future. For this reason human conduct looks but little forward to the good of future generations.

The weakness of most of the plans presented for the cure of humanity's ills lies just in the false assumption that man is mostly a rational creature; when really his motives can be controlled only by controlling his feelings. And this field of social dynamics is not yet developed.

On that side of eugenics, therefore, which looks to restoring the fecundity of the imperial natures at the top of humanity's current, we are compelled to confess a paucity of knowledge and a dearth of practical contribution.

To conclude: I have here tried to present a simple perspective view of our subject. The difficulties to be met are seen to be gigantic. Our ignorance of means is no less colossal. And the present need of both knowledge and action is urgent and imperative.

I feel that the view here presented is the thoughtful judgment of present-day science, and not that of the alarmist crying calamity. The two undermining influences described are undisputed. Their necessary biological effects are likewise undisputed by students of heredity. All legitimate evidence favors the statement, and none contradicts, that our civilization is digging the pit into which it must fall if these two powerful undermining processes are not checked. If they ever are checked the newly arising science of eugenics, now so feeble and diminutive, must grow with tremendous speed during this present century, in its knowledge, and in its application to practical conditions. No other science is presented with so grave a problem, and none other is so little prepared for its task.